

Report on Visit to National Archives
Washington, D.C., to View the
Zapruder Color Slides, 22 July 1965

In accordance with arrangements made in advance by telephone, I arrived at the National Archives at 9 am on Thursday 22 July 1965 and went to the office of Mr. Rhoads, room 8E. A Mr. Johnson was waiting in the anteroom with a folder containing six or eight small boxes of slides, and suggested that we might go directly to the theater where the slides would be projected on a screen for viewing. Mr. Rhoads sent word out, however, that he wished to see me first. After about ten minutes, Mr. Rhoads came out to greet me; he was very courteous and somewhat apologetic because no material other than the slides was yet available. He reiterated that the records to be made available to scholars and other members of the public would be ready only in September and he offered to keep me informed, if I was interested, as he had undertaken to do in the case of a few other researchers who had contacted the Archives.

Mr. Johnson then conducted me to the theater, where a young man named, I believe, Mr. Swanson was to serve as projectionist. Mr. Swanson was very cooperative and patient and remained with me until the end of the day. Mr. Johnson came in and "observed" several times during the day but did not remain continuously. When Mr. Swanson went to lunch, I was permitted to remain in the theater by myself and to look at the slides using a magnifying glass which I had brought with me. The arrangements were improvised and not really very convenient; it was difficult to make notes because of the dim lighting necessitated by the projection of the slides on a screen, and because of the lack of a flat surface on which to write. The set of slides begin with frame 171 and end with frame 343. Frames 208 through 211 are missing.

When we reached frame 207 (marked "spliced" as is frame 212) I asked Mr. Johnson, who happened to be in the theater at the time, and Mr. Swanson why the next four frames were missing. They seemed not to be aware that these frames were missing nor could they give any explanation. I therefore telephoned to Mr. Rhoads to ask him for a clarification. He said that he had not known that the frames were missing and he offered to look up the testimony in search of a reason for their absence. I told Mr. Rhoads that I was familiar with that testimony and that the absence of the four frames was neither acknowledged nor explained. I suggested, therefore, that a telephone call should be made to Mr. Lyndal Shaneyfelt of the FBI, who might be located in the building next to the National Archives--the Department of Justice--as he had been the chief witness on the Zapruder film. Mr. Rhoads readily agreed that a clarification might be requested of Mr. Shaneyfelt and offered at once to provide the telephone number; however, he did not wish to make the call himself, as he felt that I was more familiar with the material.

I placed the call to Mr. Shaneyfelt, who answered the extension himself. I explained that I was viewing the Zapruder color slides at the Archives and asked him to clarify the reasons for the absence of frames 208 through 211.

Mr. Shaneyfelt explained that the original Zapruder film was copied when it was first processed; the frames were numbered from the copy; LIFE made up the color slides as a courtesy (but never made available the original film, which Mr. Shaneyfelt said jocularly was locked in a vault in New York) but frames 208 through 211 were missing, presumably because the original film was broken or damaged.

I pointed out to Mr. Shaneyfelt that there was a frame 210 (Warren Report page 102), for which his explanation failed to account. At this point he became vague and said, more or less, that he would have to look that up, or something equivalent. He added that those frames 208-211 were included in the copy of the Zapruder film and had been viewed as a motion picture, by the Commission and the investigators. I also asked Mr. Shaneyfelt to clarify why differing "adjustments" had been made for the added ten inches in the reenactment car (see his testimony in 5H 151), i.e., frame 161 converted to 166, and 207 to 210. He replied that that was due to "the variation in the angle to the sixth-floor window."

I am today sending a letter to Mr. Shaneyfelt summarizing my understanding of his statements on the telephone yesterday, with the request that he correct any inaccuracy in my interpretation and indicating that if I do not hear from him I will assume that I have understood him correctly. The summary I am sending him includes the erroneous explanation, attributed to him in the hope that he will now proceed to give the real explanation, that

"frame 210 was processed from the copy of the Zapruder film utilized in the investigation conducted by the Warren Commission, which copy does include the four missing frames 208-211."

I will now summarize my notes on the individual frames viewed by projection of the slides and/or examination of the slides with a magnifying glass, dealing with those frames which seemed to me to be significant.

1880 to 207 Brennan is seen sitting on the wall, wearing a helmet or hard-top hat, and looking over his left shoulder at the motorcade. During these frames the Depository clearly is not in his field of vision. At 207, however, Brennan begins to look in front of him—presumably at the Depository—but it is not possible to judge whether he is looking straight ahead or looking up.

189-193 Mrs. Kennedy is looking to her right but in 194 her position becomes unclear. In these frames the President and the Governor are also looking to the right, and Kellerman perhaps as well.

195-197 In 195 one has the faint impression that Greer is looking to the right; in 197 it appears that Greer definitely is turned and looking to the right. These three frames are very blurred.

198 The President's left hand has appeared just above the top of the sign, held horizontally with fingers pointing to the right, at the center of his chest. Above the left hand there is a large vertical segment of his white shirt, on the left side. Mrs. Kennedy seems now to be turned to the left and looking in that direction. Note: this frame may be misnumbered, as the changes in the positions of the occupants compared with frame 197 seem too marked to have occurred in 1/18th of a second.

199 Mrs. Kennedy is turned and looking to her left. The President's right hand seems slightly lower. We now see the center segment of his white shirt and the tie in the middle as a vertical line. There is a black area above and behind the white cuff of the right hand, which is difficult to interpret; the black area seems too angular and high to be the right shoulder. The President and the Governor are both looking to their right.

200 The Governor is looking to his right, presenting almost the left profile to the camera. Mrs. Kennedy's position is hard to interpret: she may still be looking to her left or she may have turned her head to her right. The President is looking to his right; his right cuff is now seen under his chin.

201 The Governor presents his left profile to the camera, with his white collar visible above the top of the sign at a shallow angle. Mrs. Kennedy's position is ambiguous, as in 200. I got a faint impression that the President was hunching; he presents his full face to the camera, he is looking ahead and slightly to the right. A Secret Service agent in the back seat of the follow-up car has raised himself somewhat and seems to be looking at the Presidential car or slightly to his left. The motorcycle officer alongside of the President is looking to his right.

202 The President is very blurred. The Governor presents his full face to the camera. Mrs. Kennedy's position remains ambiguous. The President's left shoulder seems somewhat lower than the right shoulder; his right hand is still raised but the shape of the cuff has changed, suggesting that he has lowered his right arm and extended it towards the front. The Governor seems a little slumped and leaning back slightly.

203 The President is facing the camera almost full face but turned very slightly to his right; his right cuff is visible just under the chin and to the right of it. The Governor is blurred but seems to present his left profile to the camera. Mrs. Kennedy seems to be looking to her left but her left shoulder as seen inside the metal framework in front of the jump seats suggests that she is turning to her right. Her head is slightly higher than in 200, suggesting that she has come forward a bit in course of turning.

204 The motorcycle officer alongside the President is looking sharply to his left. The Governor is seen almost in left profile. The President presents his full face to the camera; his right cuff is now right above the top of the sign, to the right of and under his chin. Mrs. Kennedy has definitely turned to her right, perhaps even sharply, judging from the change in her left shoulder framed inside the metal framework. The Governor's face has a tautness; the back of the sign cuts him off at the mouth level.

205 The Governor presents his left profile almost squarely to the camera, from the nose upward; I believe he is turning to look behind him. Mrs. Kennedy's hat is now much larger and I believe she is bending towards the President. The President's right cuff is now slightly above the neck as if moving to clutch. The motorcyclist at the right is now looking to his right. The agent on the front right running-board of the follow-up car seems to be turning his head to look to his right.

206 The President's face is very blurred; he seems to be clutching or choking. Mrs. Kennedy is looking at him and leaning towards him (her nose and eyes are visible). The Governor is visible above the eyes only, 2/3rd of his head (left side) is seen; he seems to be turning to a straight position after looking over his right shoulder. The agent on the right front running board is looking forward and to his right.

207 The agent now looks sharply to his right and the agent behind him begins looking to his right also. The frame is very blurred; but I had the impression of an orientation to the right in the follow-up car.

212 Mrs. Kennedy is definitely facing right and looking at the President. Hair at the top of his head shows above the back of the sign, at the center of the sign. Spraying streaks going from left to right have appeared on the back of the sign. The agents on the left side of the follow-up car are not clear; the agents on the right are not visible.

213 Mrs. Kennedy is facing sharply to her right. The motorcyclists at the left of the car are looking to their right.

215 As car begins to emerge from behind the sign, Greer seems to be looking to his right sharply.

218 Greer and Kellerman have become visible, Greer looking to his right and Kellerman not clear.

220 Mrs. Kennedy is emerging from behind the sign; she is facing very sharply to her right. Greer is facing toward his right.

221 The Governor is emerging, facing the front and straight ahead.

222 The Governor is facing the camera almost full face, and is seen against the pink of Mrs. Kennedy's costume. His shoulders are almost a straight line parallel to the bottom of the frame and he appears to be turning to his right.

223 The Governor is facing the camera and continues to turn to his right. Mrs. Kennedy is leaning forward and towards the President.

225 The President is emerging from behind the sign, his right hand near his neck. His mouth is open; a grimace of pain (?).

226 The President's left hand is coming up under his right hand. The Governor is still facing the camera but less can be seen of his left shoulder and he may be turning to the front.

227 The frame is very blurred. The President's right hand is higher and the left hand is moving up to join the right. The Governor's shoulder (right) slopes somewhat. In this frame the Governor appears to be in a position to be struck by a bullet per the hypothesis of the Warren Commission; but the President has been reacting a long time now.

228 The Governor presents the right side of his face to the camera. The President's hands are up, his head has lowered, and his shoulders are hunched. Clinton Hill on the front left running board seems to be looking at the President.

229 The Governor presents the right side of his face to the camera. His right hand is seen near the middle of his chest at the shoulder level. His right cuff is seen just above the side of the car over the door handle. His right hand appears to be touching or held against the metal side panel inside frame, about one-third of the way up to the point where the side panel joins the horizontal metal bar.

230 The Governor's left shoulder is up sharply; he leans toward his right. His cuff is still seen above the door handle but a smaller area is visible. His right hand is still near the metal of the side panel but seems to be held against the chest, just under the necktie knot, with fingers or fist pointing towards the left shoulder. There is glass 2/5ths of the way from the bottom of the side panel.

231 The Governor's hand appears larger and more distinct, slightly more to the right of his tie knot than in 230. A small section of white cuff still shows above the door handle. The Palm is against the chest and the fingers go upwards, with the top of the hand slightly below the top of the glass in the side panel. However, when viewed under magnifying glass, the perspective changes and it can be seen that the Governor's hand interrupts and covers the bottom of the metal on his side of the side panel; he has moved his hand away from his body and toward the side of the car, with palm facing body.

The projectionist agreed with me that the hand obliterates the bottom of the metal frame of the side panel. The Governor seems to have facial change resembling smile or grimace of pain. He is now sharply to the right of the President and is presenting the right side of his face to the camera.

232 The Governor has now moved his hand slightly away from the side panel, and the metal is now visible as an unbroken vertical line. The hand is still quite high, although near the right nipple at the wrist. The position of the hand is such that a bullet exiting from the chest would penetrate the inside of the wrist and exit at the sharp round wristbone which is in a line with the small finger of the hand. His left shoulder is up, the right shoulder slopes somewhat. He is looking toward his left and presenting his right profile to the camera. The President is very hunched, leaning forward, with shoulders at the level of the eyes, and the left fist under the right fist, at the neck.

Clinton Hill is now looking slightly to his right; the motorcyclist at the inside position left of the car is looking forward and to the right.

233 The President has bent his head down and to the left; his right fist covers the lower face. The Governor is facing front, presenting his right face to the camera. His left shoulder is up and his right shoulder is down (not sharply). The right hand is still moving from the metal frame of the side panel toward his body but is high, the top nearly at the necktie knot; the hand looks clenched. Clinton Hill is looking more to his right.

234 The frame is blurred. The Governor's hand is visible above the door handle and appears larger and changed in shape. He may have opened his fingers; if so, they are pointing left, horizontally. The cuff has disappeared.

235 The metal frame of the side panel is now absolutely distinct. The Governor is turning towards his right, presenting about 3/5ths of his face to the camera. His left shoulder is up very sharply, at about the level of his nose. The right hand seems smaller and lower. Clinton Hill now looks more sharply to his right. The left rear inside motorcyclist now looks straight at the camera. Spectators on the grass left side of car have stopped applauding and seem to be looking toward Houston Street.

236 Kellerman presents his full face to the camera, he is looking ahead and to his right. The Governor's left shoulder is sharply elevated and his right shoulder points downward. In my judgment, there is no glass in the middle windshield at any time but there is glass in the side panel and a side window is up partway next to Mrs. Connally, at times creating the illusion that there is a glass shield in front of the jump seats.

237 Clinton Hill and the left rear inside motorcyclist are looking forward and to the right.

238 The Governor's right shoulder points downward; his hand has moved to the top of the side of the car; his right arm seems to have dropped down inertly (I interpreted the hand as the right hand but the projectionist believed it was the left)/. He looks as if he is about to push out of the door at the side. His face is pained. The hand is near or at the nipple and seems to be clenched.

245 The Governor's mouth is open; he presents his left profile and a little more of his face to the camera. Mrs. Kennedy is raising her right hand towards the President's left arm. Governor seems to be agonized, his mouth suggests a shriek, he holds chest. Both left motorcyclists and Clinton Hill are now looking forward and to the right. Kellerman presents almost full face to the camera and appears to be looking forward and to the right.

250 The Governor looks like he is falling over; his mouth is still open. The motorcyclists are looking sharply to their right.

255 The President has lowered his right hand, uncovering his profile and part of the necktie knot.

272 Governor presents left profile to camera, his right arm has risen to the level of his necktie knot at the wrist, the hand drooping limply downward. Other spots of light may be his left hand and/or his left cuff.

285 The President is falling over slowly to his left, against Mrs. Kennedy; the Governor is also much lower in the car. Applauding spectators are seen behind Mrs. Kennedy.

300 The Governor has collapsed against his wife, face to camera. The President's head points sharply downward and to the left, with his wife's right arm behind his head.

305 Mrs. Kennedy has moved her right arm and elbow to position where resting against the back of the seat....310 but her arm still appears in position to intercept a bullet from behind aimed at back of President's head...312 her arm has slid down seat back somewhat, she bends over as if shielding the President's face.

313 Familiar as this frame is, I became dizzy and ill. There is a spray from the explosion in front of and above the President's right ear, with a thick strand spraying up and to the left side, slightly forward of the explosion.

340 The Governor and his wife have disappeared completely. Clinton Hill has his hand on the back handhold and is starting to mount the car.

343 Mrs. Kennedy has her mouth open as if screaming; the President has fallen all the way over to his left; at her knees are blood-red roses.

Conclusions

(a) I conclude from Mrs. Kennedy's sharp turn to her right in frames 203-204 that a shot has hit the President earlier than those frames and while the car was not visible from the sixth-floor window because of the tree.

(b) I am unable to judge when the Governor was shot. I would think that he was hit in about frame 227, by a pristine bullet which penetrated his back, wrist (then out of sight) and leg; except for the position and movement of his hand in subsequent frames. Once the hand becomes visible, it is never in position to take a shot that produced the known wounds.

(3) I believe the President was shot in the head in frame 313 from the right rear (grassy knoll), because that was my strong impression as a Gestalt.

Sylvia Meagher
23 July 1965