

could not possibly have fired more than once every 2.3 sec.

Ultimately, the conspiracy theorists claimed that the doctors' entire autopsy report had been tailor-made to bolster the commission's single-bullet theory. The doubters argued that 1) the wound was probably lower on Kennedy's back, and 2) the first bullet had actually lodged in his body. They insisted that only the X rays and photographs could offer incontrovertible proof of how Kennedy was really wounded. In fact, an X ray does not indicate a bullet's path through soft flesh.

Corroborating Evidence. If the commission had really set out to present a fake autopsy, nothing would have been more logical than to retouch the photographs to support synthetic medical reports. The photos were examined last week by two of the autopsy doctors (the third is on duty in Viet Nam); they agreed that the evidence fully corroborates their testimony before the Warren Commission.

Even though the X rays and photographs are now in the archives, the controversy will undoubtedly continue. One enigma is how the Kennedys—who consistently denied to the press that they had possession of the films—ever got hold of them; presumably, the Secret Service handed them over at the request of the then-Attorney General, Robert Kennedy. In any case, the family has stipulated that the pictures be sequestered from public inspection during the lives of J.F.K.'s immediate family, including those of his children, who are now eight and five years old.

HISTORICAL NOTES

Into the Archives

At the request of the Justice Department, 65 carefully guarded X rays, color slides and black-and-white negatives of pictures taken during an exhaustive autopsy on the body of John Kennedy at Bethesda Naval Hospital were turned over to the National Archives last week by the Kennedy family.

At the time that the Warren Commission was making its inquiry into the assassination, the X rays and photographs were available to investigators, but none felt it necessary to inspect them after hearing the minutely detailed testimony of the three autopsy surgeons. The doctors themselves had never seen the photographs either, though they had worked from the X rays during the post-mortem surgery.

Unwitting Support. Thus the commission unwittingly lent support to those who would later insist that Lee Harvey Oswald must have had an accomplice. Their suspicions were based primarily on the commission's controversial "single-bullet theory." This is its conclusion that a bullet hit the back of Kennedy's neck and emerged through his lower throat before it struck Texas Governor John Connally in the back, smashed across a rib, shattered his right wrist, and punctured his left thigh. Commission members accepted this explanation after they saw a tourist's film of the assassination, which indicated that the interval between Kennedy's reaction to being hit and Connally's first visible reaction to his wounds was—at the most—1.8 sec. Because of the time it took to operate the bolt action on his rifle, Oswald

The Mythmakers

For many who believe that there was a conspiracy to assassinate John Kennedy in Dallas, the most mesmerizing argument of all is that an extraordinary number of people involved in the case—however remotely—have since lost their lives under mysterious circumstances. As of last week, the toll had, in fact, reached 14. To conspiracy theorists, the clear implication is that the victims knew too much and were systematically liquidated.

Chief mythologist and drummer for this theory is Penn Jones Jr., 52, the diminutive (5 ft. 2½ in.) editor of a Texas weekly newspaper, the Midlothian Mirror (circ. 765). In 1965, Jones began a seemingly inexhaustible Mirror series intended, as he put it, to "bring into some intelligible whole all the events surrounding the assassination."

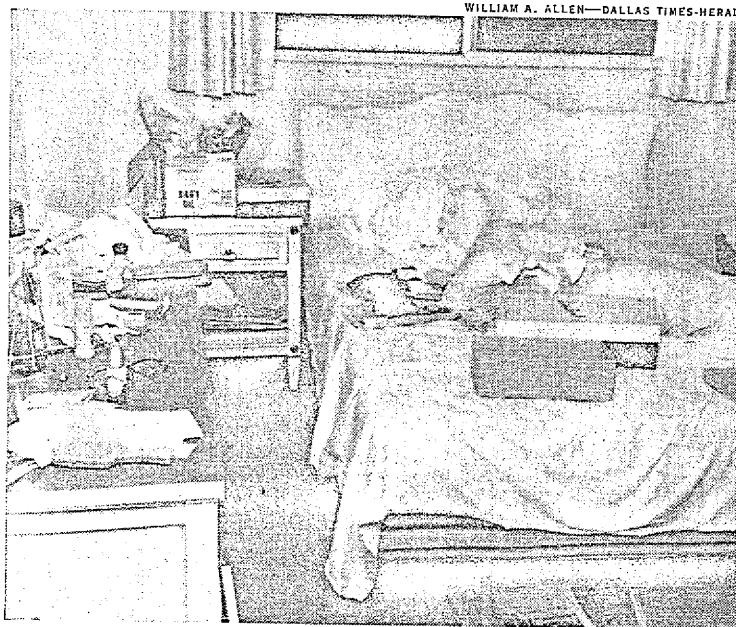
This month, San Francisco's slick *Ramparts* magazine, a onetime Catholic quarterly turned New Left monthly, also carried several of the Jones reports, along with the outcome of what the magazine breathlessly describes as an eight-month probe by "a team of *Ramparts* editors, aided by researchers and trained investigators," who "traveled to Dallas a dozen times and interviewed nearly 100 people throughout the country knowledgeable about the assassina-

tion." Oddly enough, a majority of the people most closely involved in the incidents reported in the *Ramparts* article never heard of the magazine or its "team." Thus it is not so odd that the *Ramparts*-Jones non-history is riddled with factual errors and perverse conclusions. Items:

▶ Earlene Roberts, 60, the fuzzy-minded housekeeper who ran the Dallas rooming house where Lee Harvey Oswald lived—and proved a helpful witness before the Warren Commission—died last January. *Ramparts* says that she had been subjected to "intensive police harassment," adds with sinister implication of foul play that "no autopsy was performed." In fact, Mrs. Roberts had severe heart disease, throat ulcers and cataracts. The cause of death, "acute

killed Eddy and served 20 months in prison for manslaughter.

▶ On the Sunday night that Jack Ruby shot Oswald, six men met in Ruby's apartment. Editor Jones reported that three of the men at that "significant meeting" have "died strangely." With typical hint-and-run reporting, he wrote that Dallas Times-Herald Reporter Jim Koethe was later "killed by a karate chop" in his apartment, that Long Beach (Calif.) Independent Reporter Bill Hunter was shot to death in a California police station, and that Dallas Attorney Tom Howard died of a heart attack after which "no autopsy was performed." All three are indeed dead, but it takes a powerful imagination to detect any connection. Reporter Koethe was a beer-drinking bully who liked to hang out



WILLIAM A. ALLEN—DALLAS TIMES-HERALD

JACK RUBY'S BEDROOM AFTER HIS ARREST & POLICE SEARCH
A case of hint and run.

myocardial infarction," was determined after an autopsy by a doctor at Parkland Hospital.

▶ William Whaley, 51, the cab driver who picked up Oswald after he fled the book depository building, was killed in a head-on car crash in December 1965. *Ramparts* views his death with suspicion because Whaley had never had an accident before and was the first Dallas cab driver to die on duty since 1937. In fact, Whaley was killed because an 83-year-old man (who also died) was driving north in a southbound lane.

▶ Eddy Benavides, 29, identified as the look-alike brother of Domingo Benavides, a witness in Oswald's slaying of Patrolman J. D. Tippit, was shot to death in a Dallas tavern in February 1965. *Ramparts* reports that Dallas police classed it as death by "pistol shot, wrote up a cursory report and marked the case 'unsolved.'" The magazine also suggests that "Domingo was the intended victim." In fact, there is a full police report on the shooting (it was a shotgun, not a pistol). Moreover, one Radford Lee Hill, 41, confessed that he

with thugs; he had been strangled, not "karate chopped," and police suggested that homosexuality may have been a motive. Hunter was shot accidentally by an exhibitionistic detective he had known closely for years while the cop was clowning foolishly with a revolver in the station pressroom. As for Tom Howard, according to others who were there, he was not even at Ruby's apartment that night.

▶ Hearst Gossip Columnist Dorothy Kilgallen died in her Manhattan house in November 1965. Because she was the only journalist ever allowed a private interview with Jack Ruby after his arrest, Penn Jones naturally decided that hers could be added to "that list of strange deaths." Even *Ramparts* editors could not swallow that one, conceded that "no serious person really believes" Kilgallen's death—from alcohol and barbiturates—was part of the plot.

Nor, for that matter, can a serious person really believe that the rest of the *Ramparts*-Jones saga is anything but a macabre and mischievous exercise in mythmaking.