

Lost His Job, Shot, Bombed, Discredited

Cop in Dealey Plaza Who Saw Oswald Drive Away With a Man in a Rambler

Had the testimony of a Dallas law enforcement officer — as well as backup statements by other witnesses — been accepted, a conspiracy in the assassination of President John Kennedy might have been proved beyond doubt.

Instead, the unvarying eyewitness testimony of Sheriff's Deputy Roger Craig was discredited and twisted around by Warren Commission probers.

And because Craig's testimony didn't jibe with what the commission wanted the official lone-assassin version to be, he has been threatened with death and constantly harassed, the former lawman and his friend believe.

Craig, now 37, was named "officer of the year" in the Dallas County Sheriff's Department in 1960, but on Independence Day, 1967, after never wavering from his statements of what happened in Dealey Plaza the day Kennedy was shot, he was fired.

Since then, he has been shot, wounded when his auto was bombed, heard threats made against himself and his family and has lost job after job.

He's now living in an undisclosed location.

The key points that place Craig in the midst of the controversy surrounding the Kennedy assassination are these:

● **HE SAYS HE SAW** a man running out of the Texas School Book Depository and get inside a Rambler station wagon driven by a man who appeared to be of Latin descent and driving away 15 minutes after the shot was fired.

● **LATER THAT DAY**, at the Dallas police station, he identified Lee Harvey Oswald as the man he saw running from the depository building. The Warren Commission claims Oswald took buses and a cab in his odyssey that led him to the Texas Theater in Oak Cliff where he was arrested. Had Craig's testimony been accepted, it would indicate at least a second person being involved — thus, a conspiracy.

● **MRS. RUTH PAINE**, with which Oswald's Russian wife, Marina, lived in the Dallas suburb of Irving, drove a Rambler station wagon similar to the one Craig saw Oswald enter.

● **CRAIG SAID HE** first gave this information to a man standing on the

depository steps who identified himself as a Secret Service agent. The former deputy five years later, during New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison's abortive investigation of the Kennedy assassination, would identify the "Secret Service agent" as Edgar Eugene Bradley, a California right-wing minister Garrison indicted for conspiracy to kill the President.

Craig was one of the deputies assigned to Dealey Plaza to "represent the Sheriff's Department" but not to participate in the security for the President's visit, Craig recalls in his manuscript "When They Kill a President," his own account of his experiences.

He recalls the bitterness against Kennedy by the law enforcement officers in the city in which JFK's popularity was at a low ebb.

When Craig remarked to another officer that the President's motorcade was late reaching Dealey Plaza, the other lawman replied:

"Maybe somebody will shoot the son-of-a-bitch."

He said when the motorcade arrived, and he heard the shots, he began questioning people.

"Several people indicated to me that they thought the shots came from the area of the grassy knoll or behind the picket fence (to the front and right of Kennedy)," said Craig. The Warren Commission contends the only shots were fired by Oswald from the sixth floor of the depository building behind Kennedy.

ABOUT 15 MINUTES after the shots were fired, he contends, he heard a shrill whistle from the north side of Elm Street.

"I turned and saw a white male in his twenties running down the grassy knoll from the direction of the Texas School Book Depository Building. A light green Rambler station wagon was coming slowly west on Elm Street.

"The driver of the station wagon was a husky looking Latin, with dark wavy hair, wearing a tan wind breaker type jacket. He was looking up at the man running toward him," Craig recalls.

The driver pulled up to the curb, picked up the running man, and drove west on Elm Street.

Craig realized these were the only people not running to the scene — curious about what had happened.

The officer ran to Elm and Houston, asked for an investigator, and a man standing on the depository steps said, "I'm with the Secret Service." Craig gave the man the information and he wrote it in a pad.

IT WAS MORE THAN four years later that Craig saw the "Secret Service man's" picture on television. He claimed it was Edgar Eugene Bradley — Garrison had charged him in the assassination probe. Craig telephoned Garrison and thus became a part of the New Orleans investigation.

After Oswald's arrest, Craig heard his description broadcast. Craig thought of the man running from the depository. He called Capt. Will Fritz, homicide chief, and was asked to go to the police station and look at Oswald.

Craig said he looked at Oswald and identified him.

According to Craig, Fritz told Oswald:

"This man saw you leave."

Oswald replied: "I told you people I did."

Fritz said: "What about the car?"

Oswald: "That station wagon belongs to Mrs. Paine — don't try to drag her into this."

Oswald sat back in his chair and said disgustedly: "Everybody will know who I am now."

This encounter would not be remembered by Fritz later in testimony before the Warren Commission.

ROGER CRAIG, working for Sheriff's Office, spotted Oswald. Had Warren Commission listened to him, a conspiracy would have been established.



Craig never actually testified before the commission itself. His statement was taken by junior commission lawyer David W. Belin, who now happens to be the Gerald Ford-appointed executive director of the Nelson Rockefeller Commission investigating domestic espionage by the CIA. Craig contends Belin changed 14 different points in his testimony that appeared in the Warren Commission volumes.

DALLAS COUNTY SHERIFF Bill Decker, now dead, wouldn't let Craig talk to national newsmen who tried to interview him about his account during the coming years.

And later, when Craig was assigned to a desk job in the county jail, Decker expressed annoyance because the deputy was talking to Oswald assassin Jack Ruby's sister Eva Grant, who was concerned about her brother's health.

Finally, after Ruby's death penalty conviction was overturned and a new trial set in Wichita Falls, the Wichita County sheriff came to take charge of the prisoner. The sheriff refused to accept him because he was ill. It was then that Ruby was taken to Parkland Hospital — where Kennedy died — and died a few days later of cancer.

Some Warren Commission critics still claim that conspirators injected Ruby with cancer cells to cause his death before he could reveal anything about a conspiracy. Ruby himself repeatedly hinted at a conspiracy — in one case to TATTLER correspondent James Kerr in an audio-taped interview, other times in handwritten letters smuggled out of the Dallas jail.

CRAIG, ON NOV. 1, 1967, was working for a bail bond service in

Dallas. He said he was asked to meet a client at a location.

He said he went there, had coffee with the client at a waffle house, and when he walked out "...a shot rang out behind me and the hair just above my left ear parted.

"I felt a pressure and sharp pain on the left side of my head. I bolted for my car ... I drove home as fast as possible."

When publicity about the attempt on Craig's life got out, he lost his job. It was just the start of a long chain of personal hardships that would follow the assassination witness.

Once when driving to work, a car pulled along beside him, the driver stuck a revolver out the window, but before he could fire another car pulled up and he withdrew the pistol.

SHORTLY BEFORE the New Orleans trial, Craig received a telephone call asking if he was going to New Orleans.

When Craig said yes, the caller replied:

"Get a one-way ticket."

Another voice called again:

"Remember you have a family."

Despite the threats, Craig gave his testimony at Shaw's trial.

HIS PERSONAL hardships continued, but Craig may have figured the threats were a part of the past.

He was wrong: In October 1970, he started his car in Dallas and the engine exploded and burst into flames. He suffered five puncture wounds in the chest and a vein was severed.

Craig recovered.

And some Warren Commission critics still believe he is a fugitive from those involved in a conspiracy to kill the President.—J.M.