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Don't write off a second gunman

David Belin's piece, "The second gunman: a hasty, erroneous finding on the Hill," in your Sunday *Comment* section (May 6) is right out of Lewis Carroll. Like the Red Queen, he apparently believes in verdict before evidence.

I find it difficult to understand how Mr. Belin could be so certain of his facts if he had not reviewed the evidence on which the House Select Committee on Assassinations based its judgment. And he could not have so reviewed it by then, or since then, for it will not be finally published until the latter part of next month. An unbiased verdict on the work of the committee, therefore, is not yet possible.

It is useful to review the irresponsibility of Belin's piece. He suggests that the acoustical experts hired by the committee are "so-called" or "purported" experts. Had he reviewed the committee's record, he would have found that the expertise of our acoustical witnesses had been repeatedly accepted in court, including in the Kent State prosecutions and the analysis of the Watergate tapes.

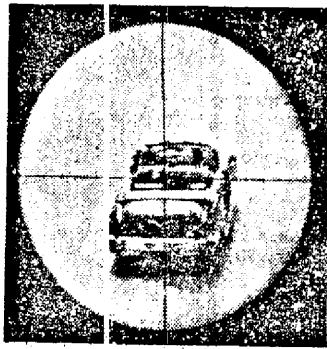
Belin suggests that only one gunman was "seen" at the time of President Kennedy's assassination. Here he misleads his readers with a half truth. A variety of witnesses "heard" the sound of shots from the grassy knoll, including a Dallas policeman and a Secret Service agent in the motorcade.

In addition, a young couple on the knoll dropped to the ground at the time of the third shot from behind them, since they knew they were in the second gunman's line of fire. Other witnesses saw traces of smoke rise from the wooded area where the acoustical experts say the third shot was fired from behind a wooden fence.

The Warren Commission was unwilling to credit this testimony in 1964 since it could not then be corroborated. The acoustical evidence developed by the committee in 1978 provides that corroboration; it now calls for a new evaluation of the 1964 evidence.

Belin complains that he was not permitted to testify before the committee in public session. Several points need to be made. Belin was given an opportunity to appear in executive session or by deposition. If he had chosen to do so, he could have made his deposition public. Other Warren Commission counsel, including the general counsel and his principal assistant, saw nothing wrong with this procedure.

In addition, all members of the commission and the general coun-



Re-enactment photo

because it felt that he offered little. He had already written a book which he had forwarded to the committee and the staff (I read it). He had nothing new to say. He did not play a particularly key role in the work of the Warren Commission. In addition, his testimony about the basic facts of the Kennedy assassination was second hand. The committee preferred to get its facts first hand.

Belin offers a theory as to why the committee went wrong; he blames it on the staff and says that the committee's work was conducted in secret. I have been associated with the work of congressional committees for almost 20 years. No committee that I have ever worked with was more democratic, knowledgeable, or more in control of its own processes than the Select Committee on Assassinations. Belin labels able men like Stokes and Levine of Ohio, Preyer of North Carolina, Dodd and McKinney of Connecticut, Fithian of Indiana, Sawyer of Michigan and Fauntroy of the District of Columbia, who labored hard on both cases.

Indeed, the committee was more democratic, knowledgeable and more in control of its processes than was the Warren Commission. I make that judgment based on a two-year study of the Warren Commission and personal experience with the Select Committee. Belin's suggestions to the contrary cannot be similarly rooted in fact since he has not made any study of the processes of the Select Committee. His theory is like so much of what he complains about on the part of Warren Commission critics; it is not based on fact.

Belin's secrecy comment is ironic. The Warren Commission held one day of public hearings. Belin, who was executive director of the Rockefeller Commission, was not able to persuade it to do much better. In fact, the Select Committee held almost 40 days of public hearings on the evidence gathered in its two-year investigation of the Kennedy