

We were caught acting like fools when the nation needed our best



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MEMO about a Dallas citizen

BY T GEORGE HARRIS LOOK SENIOR EDITOR

Can a corporate executive dare take a stand on community controversy? J. M. Shea, Jr., wrote a thoughtful *Look* article on Dallas after the assassination. The harsh reaction brought on his resignation.

A CONSCIENCE is not a gadget built for comfort, but an internal time bomb. It ticks away the days, ready at a decisive moment to blow your life apart by turning you against your self-interest or setting you apart from your neighbors.

Ask a man who knows. Until recently, J. M. Shea, Jr., 41, was a successful, high-pay oil executive in Dallas. As the senior vice-president and a director of American Petrofina Company of Texas, he bossed Fina's refinery operations and gas and oil sales throughout its market (Midwest, Southwest). Working six or seven days a week, having a ball at it, he was recognized in the trade as something of a genius, an innovator with a profit touch. Under his hand, Fina's 500-station net, often just pumps at country stores, expanded to 3,300 stations—two thirds of them owned by independent distributors who made money on Shea's marketing ideas. The company's annual reports paid tribute to his work as the key to its fast growth in a competitive industry. Shea would become Fina's chief executive in a year or so, insiders thought, and the dedicated men under him were ready to roll.

"Everybody knew he was a whirlwind," says a former friend. "He was the best thing Fina had going for it."

Then, last November 22, came the assassination of President Kennedy. Jack Shea, like many Americans, found in the national tragedy a call to deeper dedication, a cause for impatience with the mundane, the mean and the silly.

He berated himself for having been so wrapped up in business that he failed to be much of a citizen. He had stood silent, with most Dallas moderates, while the city became the victim of fanatic minorities. If moderation could not have prevented the

President's assassination by a Marxist, Shea believed, it certainly would have dampened the raucous prelude and the angry aftermath. The business leadership, trapped between the outside press attack and local resentment of it, helplessly hoped to forget the whole thing. Shea knew that it was time for somebody in Dallas to face the situation honestly, whatever the risk, and to look through the present confusion toward the future.

You may remember his *Memo From a Dallas Citizen*, which this magazine published in its March 24 issue. Hundreds of you, sensitive to the quality of the man behind the words, wrote or called to thank him in very personal terms. "You have performed a noble service to your city and the nation," wrote James A. Farley. Ministers, priests and businessmen, mostly from Dallas, sent him long letters. Some attacked ("Communist!"), but many of you sought to comfort him in an ordeal that, by his own analysis, might soon be his civic reward.

You were right. You may have seen the outcome in the *New York Times* business section, *Advertising Age*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Fortune* or Associated Press wire reports. Jack Shea had to quit his job. His career in the oil industry, said a competitor, is "finished. Forget him."

How did it happen? "When I resigned," Shea said after weeks of silent thought, "the impression got around that American Petrofina asked for my resignation because it disagreed with what I wrote. This is not what happened, and it obscures the basic decision that most company men have to make, at one moment or, more likely, on the installment plan.

"About a month after the article, and hours after the *Dallas Morning News* took me to its editorial-page woodshed a second time, I was sud-

denly confronted with a company demand: I must agree never to comment publicly without formally clearing each word in advance and in writing. The issue was not *what* I said, but whether I could say anything at all. It would have been interesting to know if any furor would have developed had the article been just a puff for Dallas. I doubt somehow that the business establishment here would have put pressure on Petrofina. Be that as it may, the company demand made it simple for me. I suggested we might as well discuss my resignation.

"Why? It would have been easy enough to keep busy, as I had for seven years, in a good job. After President Kennedy's death, I had done what I had to do, in *Look* and in one public meeting in Dallas. One man's opinions are not all that important to anybody but himself. Besides, I had received too much undeserved praise, along with the criticism, for a simple statement. A good friend offered to drain the swimming pool lest somebody ask me to walk upon the water.

"Still, you don't sign away your citizenship for pay. The company policy reached beyond business into personal belief. I would have been promising never to exercise the right and responsibility of a citizen.

"Feelings run strong here, especially when the city's image is involved. Though I knew this long before the assassination, I could not be dishonest, when *LOOK* gave me the opportunity to speak, just because somebody might disapprove. The outcome has not been a surprise. It has been a disappointment."

Shea had hewed to a single principle all the way through. In deciding to write the article, he carefully drew the line between his corporate life

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and his personal beliefs. He did not allow LOOK to mention Fina, nor did he ask other company officers to approve his views. After publication, Fina defended itself against the first attacks by pointing out that Shea had acted entirely on his own. He had not violated a stated, if unenforced, policy against "publicity involving the company" without clearing through other officers.

Many larger corporations draw the same line between a man's duty on the job and his duty as a citizen. Some pioneer firms now give it an important affirmative emphasis. IBM, GE and RCA, concerned about the businessman's role, urge wage earners and executives alike to take a hand in community affairs and politics, so long as they do not pretend to speak for the company. We might disagree with what you say, these firms resolve, but we'll defend on payday your right to say it.

It takes a strong management to hold this position against bitter attack, especially when other businessmen join in. A company feels vulnerable to customers, shareholders, suppliers, newspapers and the friendly banker. In the business world's web of confidence, you never know when a "public-relations problem," as some call it, can later tangle you up. Fina was a fly in the web.

Though Fina is 61 percent Belgian-owned, much of its stock is held by Texans. One of them, independent oilman Toddie Lee Wynne, Sr., called Fina president Harry A. Jackson to ask, in his diamond-bit drawl, if Jackson had known about the article in advance. Given an anxious no, Mr. Wynne hung up. "I wasn't after Shea's hide," he told me later. "It was, I felt, a management responsibility, to handle as they saw fit."

Organized fanatics hit with a turn-in-you-Fina-credit-card campaign. Shea sought to keep the fire on himself, not Fina. Breaking silence, he talked to a record crowd at the Democratic Women of Dallas County. Riled ladies, impressed by this soft-spoken businessman, wanted to counterattack by mass applications for Fina cards. No, this is not a company matter, Shea answered, so don't take a hand in the card game. (Even after he left Fina, he discouraged card cancellations by angry admirers.) In the weeks between the LOOK article and Shea's resignation, Fina sales actually rose, as indicated by refinery orders from a large Dallas distributor. But some stations lost. One attendant had a bad day when a customer roared up, left his card shredded upon the pavement.

SWEATING over the cards, calls and letters, Fina's management nervously reversed itself. Shea was told he had in fact involved the company, and was treated like an unfortunately pregnant daughter. Would he go away for a year, say, on a company scholarship to the Harvard Graduate School of Business? Though intrigued, Shea knew better than to play charades,

and he could not accept the required agreement to censorship.

The organization man usually goes the other way. "I draw all my income from this company," says the operations boss of a competing oil firm. "I consider that part of my compensation covers the things I give up. It's part of my obligation not to do anything that might hurt the company. Anyway, that's how I justify expecting the same thing from the people who work for me. We have a sort of unwritten agreement that they clear with me." True to his philosophy, he asked not to be identified.

One Dallas corporation chief goes a step further: "Shea's an adult, and he has to take the consequences of his actions. Nobody put him in jail for free speech, and the Constitution doesn't protect your job. As an officer, you can't separate yourself from your company, and the company has a right to protect itself if you embarrass it. Shea gave his company reason to doubt his judgment in situations he would confront some other time."

In the corporate world, where a reputation for sound decision is your rabbit's foot, to doubt a man's judgment is to rouse deep uncertainty about his executive ability.

His deep voice trembling with emotion, the man who doubted Shea's judgment was not just laying out a glib defense of Dallas. As a community leader, he had taken on tough civic jobs, but he usually managed to keep his name—and his company's name—out of controversy. His method of operation points up one habit of businessmen: Stay out of print, except on things that don't matter enough to provoke controversy. Many are ready to act as responsible citizens, but not to take the consequences if the public finds out what they do. Such caution leaves the public dialogue to politicians and pundits, and hangs a bull's-eye on the rugged individualist who takes a lonely stand above the business underground.

One man's determination can reshape custom. Jack Shea's clear stand on principle, for views many businessmen outside Dallas would share, but not voice, puts the businessman's conscience problem in sharp focus. Harvard's Graduate School of Business, the West Point for U.S. corporate officers, is now applying its famous case-study technique to Shea's resignation. B-School experts took up the research after their comprehensive literature failed to produce a single case that tested, without a cloud of side issues, the basic principle of a businessman's rights and duties as a citizen.

Any such study must, however, take account of the passions that erupted in the wake of the assassination. We have to go back again, you and I, to November 22.

Because I had lived in Dallas—I met my wife there—I was the LOOK editor who spent two dreary weeks searching night and day for a tie between assassin Lee Harvey Oswald and the Communist apparatus, which

in Texas had fortunately been infiltrated for years by at least one diligent patriot. I wasted only a couple of hours in the press mob at police headquarters, but crossed tracks often with patient professionals from security agencies. Many Dallas people helped, but nothing tied together.

Oswald's character came clearer. Here was a neurotic failure who spouted Karl Marx and Leon Trotsky like a robot. He also drank down James Bond secret-agent thrillers about SMERSH, novelist Ian Fleming's version of Russia's killer apparatus. That's a weird mixture. I was not surprised a few weeks ago to learn how Oswald once tried, though apparently he failed, to persuade one U.S. enemy that he would make a dandy SMERSH agent. That such a nut wanted to shoot both a Democratic President and ex-Gen. Edwin Walker should not amaze even conspiracy-minded European journalists.

WHAT BECAME harder to explain, as people of various views told about it, was the weird tension injected into the community by right-wing radicalism, which shaped events long before the assassination. Here were otherwise respectable Americans so bitter and wild-eyed that the city had feared for the President's safety, and had later been unable to cope sensibly with the fact of tragedy. People told of wondering, in the frenzied hours before Oswald's capture, which of their friends had proved the courage of his convictions. One well-to-do young lady rushed into an office, and cried out to friends, "I just know Uncle Jim did it."

The demeaning sentiments of extremism prevented Big D from being big enough to share the nation's grief without fretting first about itself. "I felt relief that Kennedy was dead," a geologist told me, "but I'm sorry it happened here."

This was not the Dallas I had known. I called bankers in Chicago and Los Angeles to ask whom I should see in the Dallas banks; in most areas, the banks are repositories of calm judgment. Then I met oil executive Jack Shea. He was with Howard Gossage, San Francisco advertising-agency owner. The two, I knew, had invented "Pink Air" advertising, which humorously touted colored air as Fina's substitute for the expensive additives merchandised by major companies. A success with its candor, the "Pink Air" pitch had become the oil industry's most widely discussed campaign. Shea's business credentials were solid, grew more so when I checked into his whole career. (Gossage was to resign the Fina account, his largest, within an hour after Shea's departure. "One of the privileges of this business," he said, "is to decide whose money you accept.")

Shea told me in eye-opening detail what he had seen and heard. He had put some of it in a letter to the *News* editor, but knew that it would not be published. I explained that LOOK often runs articles by local citizens. If anybody were going to write about the mood of business-minded Dallas, I felt it ought to be a Dallas businessman—one who would care only for the truth, not the public relations, of what he had to say.

Shea locked himself up to work

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"I wasn't after Shea's hide," a shareholder said. "It was a management responsibility."



The Shea children, Mike, 15, Pat, 13, and Kathy, 11, talked over each decision their parents made in the crisis.

Quiet truth burns as brimstone

facts about his fellow Roman Catholics in the Bircher ranks; or the angry incidents that plagued the city.

Jack Shea quietly burned a hole into the Dallas conscience. A less reasonable, or less reasoning, statement would not have gone so deep. One prominent businessman, in rage, ripped the magazine into shredded paper. We can be big about unfair criticism, brush off or ignore sensationalism, but the truth burns as brimstone. Among nearly 2,000 letters and calls, not one turned up a factual error or presented Shea with a serious criticism on substance. The harshest critics called him "pious," and sneered at his Catholicism because he had, as he mentioned, eaten a steak at the luncheon for Kennedy on Assassination Friday. (The Bishop of Dallas had granted Catholics special dispensation for the occasion.)

several days on a manuscript. I took it back to New York to think it over. Events in Dallas did not turn round. After the hounding of a preacher and a teacher who spoke out, I proposed to LOOK's editor that he publish Shea's *Memo*. Dallas felt itself unfairly tried by the press, but it kept on roughing up the witnesses.

Shea, once an Eisenhower Republican and no flaming liberal, cut through the standard clichés used against Dallas. He brushed aside the stock case against "oligarchy." "The Dallas leaders, the bankers and businessmen who set up the Citizens Council, are an intelligent and dedicated group," he wrote in his *Memo*. "...But they view their leadership in a narrow sense. When the hate throwers came along, they simply stood back and let the stones fly."

He did not buy the tall tales about Texans toting guns everywhere. He rejected the notion that the city could be held guilty of the assassination. "I think Dallas feels shame, not guilt," he wrote. "Many people here are ashamed to have been caught acting like fools—as they had been doing for many months—at the moment when the nation, and their President, needed the best they could give in thought, action and coherent criticism." But he did not back away from the harsh

The local attack hit less at what Shea said than at his right to speak. Robert Cullum, head of Tom Thumb Super Markets and hospitable president of the Dallas Chamber of Commerce, did not bother to read Shea before taking to the podium to blast him as a mere newcomer, "a seven-year wonder." In booming Dallas, which draws 700 new families a month, one in five has not been there long enough, it seems, to count.

Shea's critics turned to other forms of self-expression. While he was away on business, his wife Molly and three children woke one morning to find a load of concrete chunks in the swimming pool. His Saturday golf foursome at Brook Hollow found another fourth. His name vanished from his locker door. "It's like being cashiered from the British Army," Shea grinned wryly, "and having your shoulder buttons ripped off." He is still a member, but on a rare visit to the club, old "friends" cut him cold.

He was soon isolated, and heard little of the gossip raging through the

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PHOTOQUIZ ANSWERS

(See page 73.) 1—Capt. Eddie Rick-enbacker. 2—Marshal Ferdinand Foch. 3—Gen. Erich Ludendorff. 4—Gen. Billy Mitchell. 5—Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg. 6—Adm. Sir John Jellicoe. 7—Marshal Henri Philippe Pétain. 8—Field Marshal Lord Kitchener. 9—Marshal Joseph Joffre. 10—Sgt. Alvin C. York.

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social circuit against him, his business and Molly. Among the printable inventions: One oilman boasted sure knowledge that "Shea was on the skids at Fina and had nothing to lose anyway." A colleague announced that he suffered from "publicity paranoia." Conscience has to be explained away. Some knew for sure that he did the article to pick up "\$20,000 blood money." That one, I knew, also stood the truth on its head. Shea had not once suggested that he ought to be paid for what he saw as a duty. When *Memo* went to press, LOOK sent him a token \$600 check, on the ground that not even a wealthy man should work for nothing. He simply kept the check uncashed, and plans to endorse it, along with a matching one of his own, to a fitting Kennedy memorial.

After Shea's resignation, I spent two weeks with businessmen and many other Dallas citizens going over ground now painful to them, and to me. The dip-dyed zealots, especially the matrons who form the right front, still consider any criticism of Dallas to be absolute proof of Communist conspiracy. Jack Kennedy brought it all on them by coming down and spilling blood on the city's streets. "Why did he have to come here," a well-born lady demanded of me, "when *nobody* wanted him?" In the Far Right literature pouring through the mails, anonymously of course, Jack Shea is formally listed with Castro, Khrushchev and those who aid communism.

Among more gentle folk, Shea's name still strains hospitality. A leading lawyer whipped a copy of the article out of his desk, loped through a monologue of fluent cussing at the many passages he had meticulously underscored in blue ink. His last roundup: "Nobody but a dog vomits in his own nest. And 'vomits' isn't the word we use in Texas."

But among the thoughtful men who lead the city, the months have

not been wasted. They see the danger, more clearly than most people, of silent consent to fanaticism. The right wing echoes the words of free enterprise, but destroys in its converts the constructive spirit that leads the businessman to serve his community. The ultra movement never made much headway among the chiefs of big business, but in the South and Southwest, it took over the healthy regional protest against the East's financial and political power. Now, the movement appeals less to after-luncheon speakers and ambitious climbers. Swinging the other way, one bold Kiwanian recently read Shea's article to his club. The business types who gleefully put Bruce Alger into Congress have come to resent his boyish showboating. "He's just an aginner," one declared. General Walker may yet be allowed to retire in privacy.

Few Dallas businessmen are proud of what was done to Shea. Some who urged Fina to boot Shea, even circulated mimeographed forms for credit-card returns, don't brag about it now. At least not out loud. Perhaps I am naive after seventeen years of reporting, but I believe the top leaders when they deny that they joined the economic lynching bee. Every group has its Jack Rubys, though seldom at the top. "I disagree with what Shea did," says Mayor Erik Jonsson, awesomely able chief of the giant Texas Instruments, Inc., "but I defend his right to do it." Another businessman broods over the thought that others may have acted "because of something I said."

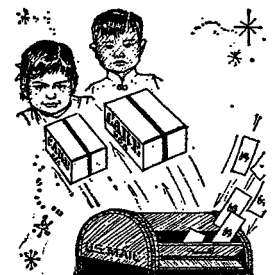
Dallas is changing, in part because it is coming to grips with the same issues Shea raised. "We've had a pretty good inward look at ourselves," says Mayor Jonsson. "Without the fingers pointed at us, we wouldn't have looked in quite the same light." The city-county blue-ribbon commission has decided not to try to bury the assassination under a "modest marker," but, instead, to work with the Kennedy family on a memorial plaza at the new courthouse. The leadership seriously considers adding nonbusiness citizens to its decision-making group. Subjects once forbidden can be talked about. The newspapers, led by the *Times-Herald*, have gingerly started to cover such image-scratching events as civil-rights demonstrations. The *News* editorial page, while still a breakfast of cactus, fights for the Dallas Association for Mental Health against the rightists and, to the amazement of veteran readers, has even published a reader's letter praising Jack Shea.

Several liberal-minded businessmen, though afraid that they will be hit like Shea one day, have resolved to take chances anyway. They may help insure businessmen realize that to insure their own freedom, they have to defend the freedom of others with whom they earnestly disagree. If so, Dallas will owe a debt, not likely to be paid, to a man whose conscience was not built for comfort.

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