

A troubled assassination story

NIGHTMARE IN DALLAS
By Beverly Oliver with Coke Buchanan
(Siberburg Publishers, \$18.95)

By Gary Mack

Hours after the Kennedy assassination, officials asked the public for any information that might help investigators. Beverly Oliver stayed home and kept quiet, even though she said she saw a second gunman on the grassy knoll, filmed the assassination from within a few feet, had been introduced to alleged assassin Lae Harvey Oswald by Jack

Ruby, and was friends with a Ruby employee who she later said mysteriously disappeared.

If her story is true, Beverly Oliver is the most significant missing link in the 31-year-old mystery that never goes away. Her stories are chronicled with writer Coke Buchanan in their new book *Nightmare in Dallas*.

Detailing Ms. Oliver's life from amateur stripper at 14, through marriage to a Texas Mafia figure and on to evangelism, *Nightmare in Dallas* covers

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BOOKS

Those inconvenient, documented facts have a way of spoiling a good story

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primarily the '60s and '70s. Throughout the account, page after page of Kennedy speech excerpts precede slither assassination stories contradicted by the accepted historical record. Although Ms. Oliver had access to assassination researchers for 24 years, significant problems with her stories remain.

Wearing a brown overcoat and scarf, or "babushka," Ms. Oliver claims to have used an experimental Super 8mm Yashica movie camera given her by boyfriend Larry Taylor Ronco, a product representative for Kodak in Dallas. The Super 8 format was a way to produce large pictures from standard home movie film. Conceived by Kodak engineers in 1962, Super 8 debuted early in 1965. By Yashica's own documentation, their first model came on the market exactly two years after the November 1963 assassination.

What about the grassy knoll gunman? In a 1988 British television documentary, Ms. Oliver picked a spot north of the corner of the pick-et fence on the famous "grassy knoll" and said the shots came from "around that large tree ... there

was a figure there and there was smoke there." But in her book this assassin has been moved, without explanation, more than 50 feet to the west. Which version, if either, is correct?

Even though she admits having told no one except family about seeing or filming the assassination, Ms. Oliver says two men greeted her at work the following Monday night. Flushing official-looking IDs, they asked her for her film. She immediately pulled the camera from her makeup bag and gave it to them. One of the men said the film would be developed and returned to her within a few days, but she failed to ask for a receipt and never saw it again.

In fact, she never filed a complaint, wrote a letter or talked to the news media about her "snolen" film. After questioning by Congress Select Committee on Assassinations in 1977, investigators chose to not even recount her story.

Ms. Oliver, age 17 in 1963, worked as a singer at the Colony Club, next door to Ruby's Carousel Club. In this book, she recalls talking with Ruby there less than two weeks prior to the assassination when he gra-

dually introduced her to his friend "Lae Oswald of the CIA." According to Ms. Oliver, also present was her friend Janet Conforto, better known as Jada, the hottest stripper Ruby ever hired. But Jada had quit Ruby nearly two weeks before the introduction supposedly occurred, and Oswald's documented whereabouts preclude such a meeting.

According to Ms. Oliver, Jada revealed the Ruby-Oswald connection to a reporter the day after Ruby killed the accused assassin, then she mysteriously disappeared. A few days later, Ruby's assistant

manager, Andy Armstrong, supposedly offered to sell Jada's expensive costumes to Ms. Oliver because she wouldn't be needing them.

But the historical record contradicts the book. Jada heard of the Oswald shooting on the radio while driving home to New Orleans, immediately called a *Dallas Times Herald* reporter with her Ruby recollections, then headed back to Big D for publicity. She appeared on network television that evening in an interview with Paul Good. WFAA-TV kept a videotape of it and the Warren Commission published a transcript. No known Jada interview suggests any Ruby-Oswald relationship.

Within 10 days Jada was taking it off in the Big Apple, where FBI agents James Rogers and Edmund Flanagan interviewed her and, in their report published by the Warren Commission, wrote "she had no knowledge of any association between Ruby and Lae Harvey Oswald

(and) had never seen Oswald in the Carousel Club, or at any place." In recent interviews, her son confirmed Jada's information and said she died in a motorcycle/bus accident in the late '70s. As for Jada's wardrobe, the FBI report says, nearly three weeks before the assassination "she went to the club and picked up her gowns."

There are many more inconsistencies in which known facts dispute Beverly Oliver's claims, but there really was a Babushka Lady at the assassination scene. Recently, in an oral history recorded at the Sixth Floor Museum, retired Kodak executive Jack Harrison recalled that one of the first pictures processed by Kodak the day of the assassination was a badly out-of-focus color slide made by a woman in a location consistent with the Babushka Lady. She was a brunette in her late 30s.

Investigators pushed the technicians to clear up the picture, but

1963 technology couldn't help. When told her slide was useless, she left, perhaps without anyone taking down her name. Today, computer technology might sharpen that slide to near perfect clarity. Where is it, and who was the real Babushka Lady?

Gary Mack is the archivist at the Sixth Floor Museum in Dallas, but the opinions he expresses in this review are his own.