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THE FIRST SHOT IN THE JOHN F. KENNEDY ASSASSINATION WAS NOT THE MISSED SHOT

by
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→ NOTE = THIS IS WHAT I SPOKE ON AT "COPA" - (WASH. D.C) - OCT. 1994

A crucial point in the assassination of President Kennedy for both proponents of conspiracy and non-conspiracy advocates is when was the first shot fired, the precise nature of its trajectory and the resultant of that shot.

This abstract offers the argument that the overwhelming evidence points to the necessary conclusion that the first shot fired was not a missed shot and that it did seriously injure the President although not fatally. For those claiming that the first shot did, indeed, hit the President from behind and inflicted wounds on Governor Connally (the "Magic Bullet" theory), the evidence provided herein demonstrates that this conclusion is also necessarily false. While this abstract does not concern itself with the exact number of shots nor the trajectories the unavoidable corollary leads us to the second conclusion: more than three shots were fired, ergo: conspiracy!

Often overlooked by conspiracy and non-conspiracy theorists is the first day testimonies of witnesses closest to the scene. For example, Charles Brehm was quoted by prize-winning journalist, Merriman Smith, as saying: "He (JFK) was waving and the first shot hit him (my emphasis) and that awful look crossed his face." Brehm repeated his observations in an audiotape interview the same day declaring: "... The first shot rang out and I was positive when I saw the look on his face and saw him grab his chest and saw the reaction of his wife, that he had been shot. And just at that time, which was probably a few seconds later, the second shot rang out ..."

Brehm, like many other witnesses closest to the scene, was never called to appear before the Warren Commission.

Phil Willis, who was in Dealey Plaza together with his wife and daughters, snapped more than two dozen photos that day the most important of which is the one of the Presidential limousine (known as Willis #5). As author Harold Weisberg so brilliantly proves in "Whitewash" this photo was taken equivalent in time with Zapruder's film at frame number 202. Weisberg claims this photo alone invalidates the Warren Commission's conclusion of "lone assassin" because the Commission held that Oswald could not have fired a shot between frame 160 and 210 because a tree obstructed his view from the 6th floor of the Texas Schoolbook Depository. Willis testified before the Warren Commission that he took this photo in response to hearing the first shot which made him snap the shutter of his camera.

Ex-Wall Street lawyer and author, Gerald Posner, in his book, "Case Closed", claims that the first shot occurred at "near (Zapruder) frame 160" (by Oswald) and that it missed. Posner uses as "evidence" for his claim "a nick made on a concrete curb" which injured by-stander James Tague from a chip of that concrete. Tague's version of this event (described more fully later in this abstract) utterly destroy's Posner's "finding".

Willis told author Richard Trask in his book on the assassination photographers, "Pictures of the Pain", that he "knew... that the bullet had hit."

Willis' daughter, Linda, standing near her father that day, observed virtually the same behavior of Kennedy noted by both Brehm and Mr. Willis. Harold Weisberg, in "Case Open"; recalls for us her Warren Commission testimony: "When the first one hit, well, the President turned from waving to the people, and he grabbed his throat... I couldn't tell where the second shot went." (my emphasis).

As Weinberg points out Linda was, in effect, stating that it was the second shot that missed! And she was, according to the Warren Commission's own estimate, only 20 feet away! She, again, repeated her recollection: "I couldn't tell where the shot (after the first) came from."

Mary Moorman, who was even closer than any of the Willis family, took several Polaroid photos that day one of which is virtually equivalent in time to Zapruder frame 313 (the fatal head shot). She stated in an ABC interview on 11/22/63: "... It must have been the first one that shot him (my emphasis), 'cause that was the time I took the picture ..." Moorman, too, like Brehm was never asked to appear before the Warren Commission.

Another close eye-witness, Marilyn Sitzman, Zapruder's secretary, who held him while he took his famous footage, recalled in a 1966 interview "nothing unusual until the first sound (my emphasis) which I thought was a firecracker, mainly because of the reaction of President Kennedy. He put his hands up as to guard his face and leaned towards to the left" (my emphasis): (Note that this provides a strong indication of the first shot coming from behind her.)

Not to be overlooked is Zapruder himself. Richard Trask in his "Pictures of the Pain" provides us with what are, perhaps, the two earliest interviews of Zapruder within less than hours of the event. These are extremely significant because they are his most immediate, vivid and sharpest memories not yet tainted by powerful influences later forcing him to reinforce the government's "lone assassin" version.

Trask cites an unknown Dallas Times Herald reporter who must have spoken with Zapruder just prior to the announcement of Kennedy's death. His notes read: "... heard 3 shots - after first one Pres slumped over grabbed stomach (reporter's misspellings) ... two more shots."

Not long after this Zapruder told a live TV audience (WFAA) "I heard a shot, and he slumped to the side like this (my emphasis): It is obvious here that Zapruder must've indicated the direction of the slump). Then I heard another shot or two ..."

In his testimony before the Warren Commission Zapruder provided further evidence of the "slump". Under questioning by Liebeler while examining the separate frames of Zapruder's film there is this comment by Zapruder as they are studying frame #249:"

Zapruder: "No. 249 - I just wonder if it was the moment that he went back with (my emphasis) that I don't remember." Note here that #249 is well before #313 (the fatal head shot) so Zapruder is obviously not referring to the backward movement after #313. Clearly, Zapruder's memory is of Kennedy's movement "back" even if Zapruder cannot point out the specific frame this event occurred. With no real help from Liebeler it is perfectly understandable why Zapruder would seem confused. Interestingly enough, as Weisberg has noted, when Liebeler was questioning Zapruder he (Liebeler) very quickly jumped from discussing frame 185 and moved immediately to frame 207.

These are the very frames that are the most critical in determining when and where the shots came from!! The basis for this abstract is to show why these frames were ignored.

Additional evidence that the first shot had to have been fired after Zapruder frame number 186 and before frame 202 can be gleaned from statements elicited by amateur photographer Hugh Betzner, Jr., who took three pictures on 11/22/63 as he stood on Elm Street. The House Select Committee established that the third photo was taken at the equivalent of Zapruder frame 186. Although not called as a witness before the Warren Commission there is a report in the Warren Commission volumes (Vol. 19, p.467). Betzner (after taking his third and final photo): "I heard a loud noise. I thought that this noise was either a firecracker or a car had backfired."

Finally, there is confirmatory evidence for the first shot hitting Kennedy in James Tague's Warren Commission testimony which he has not altered despite crude attempts by writers such as Gerald Posner who completely misrepresent him.

Weisberg interviewed Tague for his book, Case Open, and reminds us that Tague had said under oath that he believed "it was the second shot that missed and caused his slight injury." As Tague told the Warren Commission: "I believe it was the second shot, so I heard the third shot afterwards."

CONCLUSION: As this abstract demonstrates from interviews and statements from 8 witnesses and from both motion picture and still photos it can be stated that the first shot definitely hit the President, did not fatally injure him and the evidence provided here is compelling proof that the first shot never missed and came from a direction other than from behind the Presidential limousine. Finally, the first shot was fired sometime between the equivalent frames of Zapruder 186 and 202.