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**WEST HOLLYWOOD, Calif.** — Everyone has personal memories of that dramatic November day in 1963 when the president of the United States was gunned down in Dallas. The stars of the new film on that subject are no different.

Sissy Spacek reminisces about the sense of duty she felt as a 7th grader in Quitman, Tex. (90 miles east of Dallas), to reply to a scathing anti-Kennedy letter written by prominent local businessmen and published in the Dallas Morning News.

"I wrote a letter to the editor," she recalled here last week. "It said, 'how could you have printed this?'"

The thought of it still haunts her. It was the very week, it turned out, that John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas.

"It's a raw wound in the national psyche," says Zachary Sklar, who edited Jim Garrison's book, "On the Trail of the Assassins," and co-wrote Oliver Stone's new film, "JFK."

Spacek agrees. "This is an issue that hasn't died for 30 years," she said.

Oliver Stone stirs it up once again with his feature film repudiation of the Warren Commission Report. Using New Orleans Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison's prosecution of alleged assassination conspirators as an access point, Stone explores a lot of disputed information about the events of that traumatic weekend in Dallas.

#### EXPLORES 'DEEP BACKGROUND'

"The Clay Shaw trial gets me through the looking glass," Stone said. From there, the writer-director re-creates the scene in Dealey Plaza from conflicting points of view, takes a more critically appraising look at "the lone assassin," Lee Harvey Oswald, and explores what Stone calls "deep background" or "the why" — in other words, his pet conspiracy theory.

Kevin Costner, who portrays Garrison, was among the film's stars who gathered here to talk about their experiences making the movie.

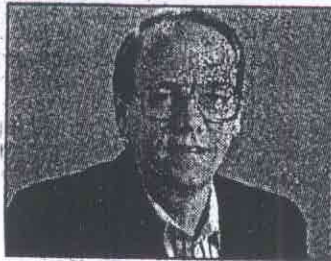
Costner plays Garrison as an idealized, larger-than-life investigator, one who nobly pursues questions that remain unanswered to this day.

"I realized early on we weren't making a biography," Costner told me. "If we were making a biography, maybe I don't do this movie."

"It's not a fair cut of the man. There are a lot more sides to him that aren't as flattering."

This Garrison also has access to information that

## DOUGLAS ARMSTRONG



ON MOVIES

wouldn't become available to investigators until years later. Plus he has a surreptitious encounter with a "deep throat" character (Donald Sutherland), who tells him that Kennedy's intention to pull out advisers from Vietnam got him killed.

"I hope it starts arguments," says Tommy Lee Jones, the actor who portrays New Orleans businessman Clay Shaw, the only man ever to stand trial for conspiring to murder Kennedy.

#### SCOFFS AT COMMISSION REPORT

Although Jones does not necessarily endorse Stone's specific coup d'etat conspiracy theory of the assassination, he has a low opinion of the Warren Commission's findings.

"It's an outrage," he says, "that we're asked to believe that that kid did that job of shooting and that that one bullet made seven wounds and didn't get any scratches on it."

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Jones also believes the truth can be known, and that it's important to uncover it.

"If people can conspire to kill the president, and that conspiracy can be covered up," he says, "that means that your vote can be stolen. And it means that democracy is vitally threatened — 25 years ago or yesterday or tomorrow."

To prepare for their roles, some of the actors met with such surviving principals in the case as Oswald's wife, Marina, and with far less prominent individuals.

"I got a meeting with some people from the underbelly of New Orleans and Texas who were around that day," Costner said. "It was scary."

"I talked to hit men. I talked to people who were very close to these events. Not the hit men of the situation. But I talked to a number of people that put the hair on the back of my neck straight up."

"But Oliver elected not to put the information in."

Uncorroborated stories recruited by a celebrity actor were probably the last thing Stone would have included. He was already under attack in the press for playing it loose with history.

## STONE 'HONESTLY COMMITTED'

Stung by these suggestions that "JFK" takes liberties with the facts, Stone's co-writer on the film, Zachary Sklar, told me the writer-director was "honestly committed to coming as close to what he thinks

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is the truth as he can."

"There are limits to what we know," Sklar said. "I think Oliver has gone to great lengths to do a lot of research. I've done research. A lot of people have contributed."

"I don't think Oliver has claimed he is offering 'the truth' or 'the answer' or even 'why.' What he's offering is his interpretation, his informed speculation about who may have killed Kennedy and why they may have killed Kennedy."

The film employs a number of dramatic devices to shape the factual material, which may cause historians to wince. Some characters are composites of two, three, even four people. Speculation, innuendo

and conjecture in re-enactments exist side-by-side with newsreel footage from the time.

"What you have is a mix of documentary information within a dramatic format," Sklar explained.

"The goal of it is to provoke people to think about these issues. I don't think it claims to do more than that."

The most enigmatic character, of course, is Oswald. For that role, Stone selected chameleon actor Gary Oldman ("Sid and Nancy," "Prick up Your Ears," "Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead").

"In a film like this, as an actor, you become your own detective," Oldman said. "And I went out and met people who had known him in Dallas and New Orleans. I talked with his wife. I met his kids."

"I felt I got to the guy backstage, the man in the wings. So I got a completely different picture of him — intelligent, articulate. You forget that he was very young. He was impressionable. He was experi-

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menting with everything.

"He loved Ian Fleming novels. He loved James Bond."

## JUST FOLLOWING ORDERS?

Oldman thinks that Oswald was a foot soldier on the periphery of things, following commands from men like former FBI agent Guy Bannister.

"People ask what's it like playing the most hated man in America," Oldman said. "But Oliver gave me the challenge to play the most enigmatic, the most mysterious character perhaps in the history of the world."

Oldman took it as an opportunity to do more than just mimic Oswald's speech pattern and copy his walk as seen in the famous public appearances after his arrest. He sought to shape a ghostly personality.

"It was really up to me, I suppose to take an angle on it, build up a person," Oldman said. "I had to walk a very delicate line with this."

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