

Questions still echo through time

Story by Seth Kantor
American-Statesman Staff

WASHINGTON — When former Texas Gov. John Connally describes getting shot in President John F. Kennedy's limousine in Dallas 25 years ago, he slaps his hands together sharply. "It was like somebody had walked up behind me and hit me with a closed fist in the back."

That's the same reaction the White House had in 1966 when Connally said the Warren Commission was all wrong about which bullet had struck him.

After Connally made his comments at a Nov. 23, 1966, press conference, John P. Roche, special consultant to President Johnson, sent an angry memorandum to the Oval Office. Roche was upset that Connally was airing disbelief about a crucial finding the Warren Commission had made two years earlier.

Twenty-five years ago next week, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas. *Austin American-Statesman* reporter Seth Kantor was covering the president's motorcade then. In this four-part series, he looks at the event, the investigations, the people who will never forget and the lasting aftermath of a presidency cut short.

■ Events in Dallas live on in memory — and in infamy A9

When Johnson read the memo he got angry, too. After all, the Warren Commission's case that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone assassin rested on which bullet had hit Connally.

The commission said the first of three shots struck both Kennedy and Connally, the second missed and the third was the fatal shot to the president's head. Any other explana-

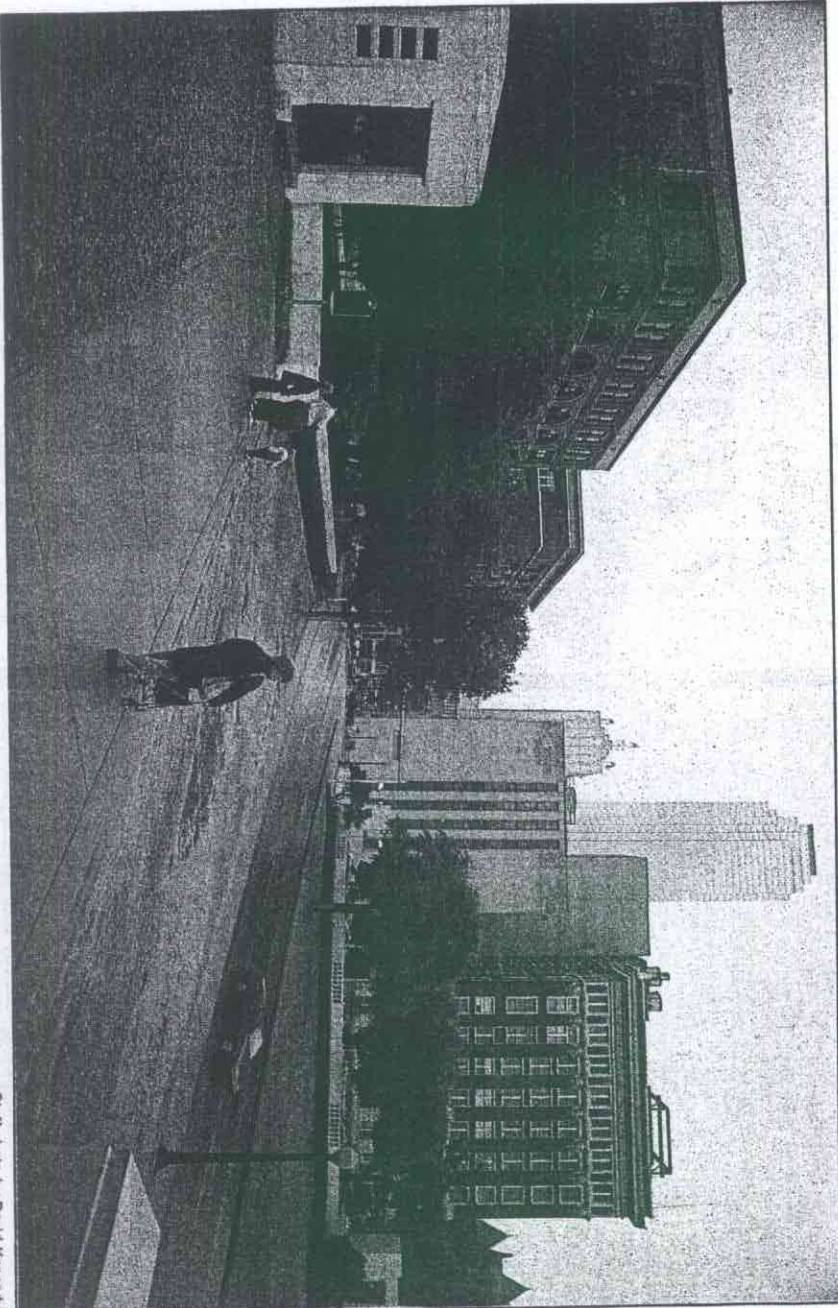
tion of which shot hit which man was impossible, given the limitations of Oswald's bolt-action rifle. It would have meant a second gunman had to have been firing at the same time.

Johnson had publicly supported the Warren Report as the official U.S. government position on the assassination. But FBI documents and other sources say that a few months after Connally's press conference, Johnson privately began to voice suspicions that Kennedy's assassination had been the product of a foreign conspiracy that involved some members of the CIA.

Johnson established the Warren Commission two weeks after Kennedy and Connally were hit by sniper gunfire Nov. 22, 1963. The commission, headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren, was told to investigate the shootings and bring the truth to the American people.

The Warren Report, issued 10
See Connally, A8

KENNEDY: 25 years later



Tourists on the grassy knoll in Dealey Plaza look toward the street where President John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

Staff photo by David Kennedy

Oilers lose a close one to Seahawks; Vikings sail

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Statesman

Weather

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months later, said Oswald was the lone assassin and had used a cheap rifle, shooting from the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository. For this to be true, Kennedy and Connally must have been hit by the same bullet, the commission concluded.

The commission studied frame-by-frame measurements made from movie film taken at the assassination scene by amateur photographer Abraham Zapruder. Those measurements proved that Oswald's Italian-made weapon could not have fired repeat shots fast enough to have hit the president and governor separately.

In other words, by knowing how fast the film advanced through the camera — 18.3 frames per second — commission lawyers were able to determine that the president's limousine was moving away from the Texas School Book Depository at 11.2 miles an hour.

FBI tests showed Oswald's weapon could not be fired accurately any faster than every 2.25 seconds, or the equivalent of 40 frames of film. But Zapruder's film showed that, at most, only 30 frames had passed between the time Kennedy was first hit and Connally was wounded.

It was impossible to determine exactly when the first shot struck Kennedy or when Connally was hit because a road sign obscured the limousine's passengers from the movie camera for a precious 19 frames of critical film.

The Warren Commission ruled out a second gunman and conceived the so-called single-bullet theory, that a single shot from Oswald's rifle had pierced both men.

The commission said that bullet was discovered on the stretcher that had borne Connally at Parkland Hospital. The bullet, which commission critics call the "magic bullet," was in almost undamaged condition.

"I am convinced beyond any doubt that I was not struck by the first bullet," Connally said in his 1966 news conference.

— "I know that I heard the first shot, that I turned to see what happened, and that I was struck by the second shot. The third shot struck the president and not me," he said.

Connally's account remains unchanged. He recently told the *American Statesman* that "I didn't hear that second shot. I felt the blow. Then I saw I was drenched with blood. I knew I'd been hit. I said, 'My God, they're

going to kill us all.'

"Then Nellie (Mrs. Connally) pulled me into her lap. I heard another shot; what I thought was a rifle shot. (He slammed his hands together again.) I heard the impact of it, which was very loud, a very distinct impact.

"I was conscious. I was lying down. I was looking straight into the back of the back seat. And after that shot had hit, I saw blood and tissue all over the blue velour covering of the presidential limousine. All over my clothes.

"My eyes were open. I knew what I saw. There was no question in my mind but what there were three shots. I did not hear the second. I only heard two. Nellie heard three. There weren't four. They didn't come from the grassy knoll. They all came from the same direction. From behind."

Connally recalls that "they developed the theory that the president and I were hit by the same bullet and that one missed completely. I don't believe that. Never have believed that. They posed that question to me during the Warren Commission and I didn't believe it then; don't believe it now."

In his 1966 press conference and a November 1966 *Life* magazine article, Connally went public for the first time about how wrong he believed the Warren Commission had been on this one point. He was careful to say that he didn't dispute the commission's other findings and criticized the "journalistic scavengers" who had been writing sensational stories and cashing in on "unfounded conspiracy theories."

But Connally's press conference didn't raise the first doubts about the report. U.S. Sen. Richard Russell, D-Ga., said he suspected a foreign conspiracy was behind the assassination.

Russell was a senior and highly respected member of the Senate, chairman of the Armed Services Committee and a trusted ally of President Johnson — and a member of the Warren Commission.

In the memo from Roche to President Johnson, filed at the Lyndon B. Johnson Library, Roche wrote: "The comments of Richard Russell and the *Life* magazine article by Governor Connally are the two most serious blows which have yet occurred to the public credibility of the Warren

Commission. "Russell in particular, by undermining the unanimity of the commission, has turned the cat loose among the canaries. Now the newspapermen are beginning the process of interviewing everyone listed in Who's Who on his view of the Warren Commission ...

"Paranoia, regrettably, is more infectious than measles. We have enough problems already with the war in Vietnam, and to have the nation suddenly indulging in an orgy of sick speculation on events in Dallas could really poison the atmosphere."

Telling Johnson he was "fundamentally baffled" over "what response should be made by the government of the United States," Roche said, "The attacks, I submit, can no longer be ignored."

Roche suggested that Johnson "give top priority to the problem, perhaps convening a group of your wisest counselors, and try to work out strategy." Roche also urged that White House aides be barred from commenting to reporters on the Warren Commission.

Johnson acted on the last point immediately. He dictated a note to a secretary, asking that one of his special assistants, Robert E. Kintner, "instruct everybody accordingly" to keep quiet.

Despite Roche's advice not to ignore the attacks on the Warren Commission, the strategy Johnson developed was to ignore them. Publicly, that is.

The president had already become aware of a super-secret group established by Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy in 1963 to examine how Cuban leader Fidel Castro might retaliate against the United States for clandestine attempts on his life.

FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover told Johnson about the group as early as 1964, according to classified documents made available to the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

But the Warren Commission was not told about the attempts on Castro's life — that they were engineered by the CIA, which used American gangsters as hit men in the attempts, or that Robert Kennedy and others in the Kennedy administration knew about them.

At least one member of the Warren Commission, former CIA director Allen Dulles, knew about efforts to assassinate Castro, according to CIA records. But he

said nothing about them to fellow members.

An FBI memo shows that in early May 1962 — some 18 months before his brother was shot to death — Robert Kennedy was informed by two top CIA officials that the CIA had allocated \$150,000 to hire Chicago mobster Sam Giancana to bump off Castro. Hoover showed President Johnson the memo nearly five years later, on March 6, 1967.

At the time Giancana was hired by the CIA, a Giancana girlfriend, Judith Campbell Exner, was in the midst of a two-year sexual relationship with President Kennedy.

On April 3, 1967, less than a month after Hoover notified Johnson about the bizarre CIA plots to kill Castro, top Hoover aide Cartha DeLoach received a late-night call at his home from Marvin Watson, a special assistant to Johnson.

Watson "stated the president had told him in an off moment that he was now convinced there was a plot in connection with the assassination," DeLoach wrote the next day in a memo to Hoover's right-hand man, Clyde Tolson.

"Watson stated the president felt that CIA had something to do with this plot," DeLoach wrote. Watson said any further information the FBI could shed on that would be appreciated, according to the DeLoach memo, now in FBI files. *↓ In DeLoach Memo*

There is no evidence the FBI furnished information linking elements of the CIA to the Kennedy assassination.

Also in 1967, Johnson was informed through what he considered to be reliable sources that Castro had planned the Kennedy assassination. But according to a U.S. Senate investigative report filed in 1976, the FBI dragged its feet when the White House told the bureau to conduct a vigorous probe of the Castro angle.

Former U.S. Sen. Richard Schweiker, R-Pa., who led the Senate investigation of the Kennedy assassination in 1976, said at the time that instead of dragging its feet, the government "should have opened all the doors and pressed all the buttons."

As a result, Schweiker said, the opportunity to explore a coverup and a conspiracy "fell through the same cracks it had fallen through before. And yet we could have

had another shot at them."

Gerald Ford, who assumed the presidency from 1974-77, was a member of the Warren Commission. He remains adamant that the commission's conclusions were correct.

"I fully supported the Warren Commission's basic conclusions at the time, and I'm even more certain today that the two fundamental determinations are accurate," Ford said by telephone from his Vail, Colo., office. "No. 1, that Lee Harvey Oswald was the assassin. No. 2, the commission found no evidence of a conspiracy, foreign or domestic."

"I would simply add that there has been no new credible evidence that would change either of those conclusions."

If Oswald acted alone, then what about the action of Oswald's killer, Jack Ruby? Was that a spur-of-the-moment murder?

"By an extreme eccentric," Ford answered. "It was an isolated action taken by an extreme eccentric, and that is an understatement."

Ford traveled to Dallas with Earl Warren to interview Ruby on June 7, 1964, in the Dallas County Jail. "I think he was crazy," Ford said of Ruby.

After Schweiker and his Senate investigators completed their work in 1976, the House formed a special committee to look into the assassinations of Kennedy and Martin Luther King.

Ford is as blunt about the work of the House committee in the 1970s as he is about Ruby: "Their work was about zero."

The report filed in 1976 by the Senate unit complained that both the FBI and CIA withheld crucial information from the Warren Commission, and that Hoover considered the commission to be his "adversary." Hoover twice sought "derogatory material" on commission members, the report said.

The House report, filed in 1979, concluded that Ford and his fellow members of the Warren Commission "failed to investigate

adequately the possibility of a conspiracy."

The report also said that acoustic evidence established "a high probability that two gunmen fired at President Kennedy."

Ford said he hasn't read any of the numerous books critical of the Warren Commission, although he has read various newspaper reviews and articles about them.

"None of the critics in any way has undercut my agreement with the basic conclusions of the Warren Commission. There have been a lot of theories, but again, no real evidence that in any way would undercut the commission's determinations."

Of all the book writers, Ford named David Belin as the "best-informed, the most current, informed authority on the assassination, of anybody in the country."

Belin served as counsel to the Warren Commission. After Ford became president, Belin was named executive director of the Rockefeller Commission, established by Ford to investigate charges of illegal CIA activities within the United States.

Reached in Des Moines, Iowa, where he heads a law firm, Belin said mistakes were made by the Warren Commission, and "perhaps the biggest blunder" was to allow the Kennedy family to withhold autopsy photographs and X-rays from the commission staff.

In a book published this month, *Final Disclosure*, Belin says "this shortsighted decision helped breed the various false theories of assassination sensationalists — claims that could have been demolished if the autopsy photographs and X-rays had been shown."

The Belin book emphasizes that the Warren Commission went to great lengths to get the truth, and that in the end the evidence overwhelmingly showed that Oswald alone had fired at the limousine.

But Belin concedes there were mistakes along the way: The com-

mission failed to send either of its expert lawyers on the subject of Jack Ruby to Dallas for the Ruby interview. Therefore, a number of vital questions were not asked of the man who shot Oswald in the police station.

Similarly, he says, the commission failed to use its four lawyers who were most knowledgeable about Oswald's background, and skilled in the area of foreign conspiracies, to question Oswald's widow, Marina Oswald.

"Therefore (she) was not questioned as thoroughly as she should have been," said Belin.

Oswald's widow, now Marina Porter, lives near Rockwall in north-central Texas. She recently told the *Ladies' Home Journal* that she would not want to deal with another blue-ribbon panel such as the Warren Commission.

"The dignitaries," she scoffed. "Those nice men in three-piece suits. They never do anything wrong; I don't believe that anymore. I don't believe the government always tells people the truth."

Author Henry Hurt puts it another way, while essentially agreeing with Marina Porter. Hurt, roving editor of the *Reader's Digest*, put a lot of painstaking research into a 1986 book, *Reasonable Doubt*, that is highly critical of the findings of the Warren Commission.

Belin singles out Hurt and several other commission critics as "sensationalists" who have omitted facts and evidence to make their cases against the commission.

Hurt argues in turn that the Warren Commission set itself up as the final authority.

"What David Belin is saying is that 'might makes right' and that 'we had a Mount Everest of authority behind us, the full power of the federal government,'" he says.

Marina Porter says now she believes there was a complicated conspiracy and that Oswald was a part of it.

Many conspiracy theorists be-

lieve strongly that the Mafia did it, and connived to bring Oswald into the plot; or that Oswald was used by the Castro government to get its revenge on Kennedy.

"Oh, I think anything is possible," John Connally said. "You can envision the plausibility of the theory that the Mafia was involved; that they were upset about Robert Kennedy (who was vigorously going after organized crime); and they figured that if John Kennedy were assassinated, Johnson would fire Robert Kennedy as attorney general and they'd get even with him; get him off their backs."

Oswald, who was a pro-Cuban Marxist, could have been manipulated by the Castro government to take a shot at Kennedy, Connally concedes with a great deal of skepticism.

"You can speculate that Castro's people might have stimulated Oswald to do this kind of thing," said Connally. "Who knows? I'm sure not going to be denying that some mental stimulant might not have been provided by Castro."

"But I don't think that if Castro would have set out to plot an assassination that he would have chosen a renegade, just a passer-by like Oswald, to perform the act."

"I can't believe that Castro would have tried to retaliate against the president through Lee Harvey Oswald. But that's not to say he didn't encourage him to do it. You know, he well could have encouraged him without trying to help him."

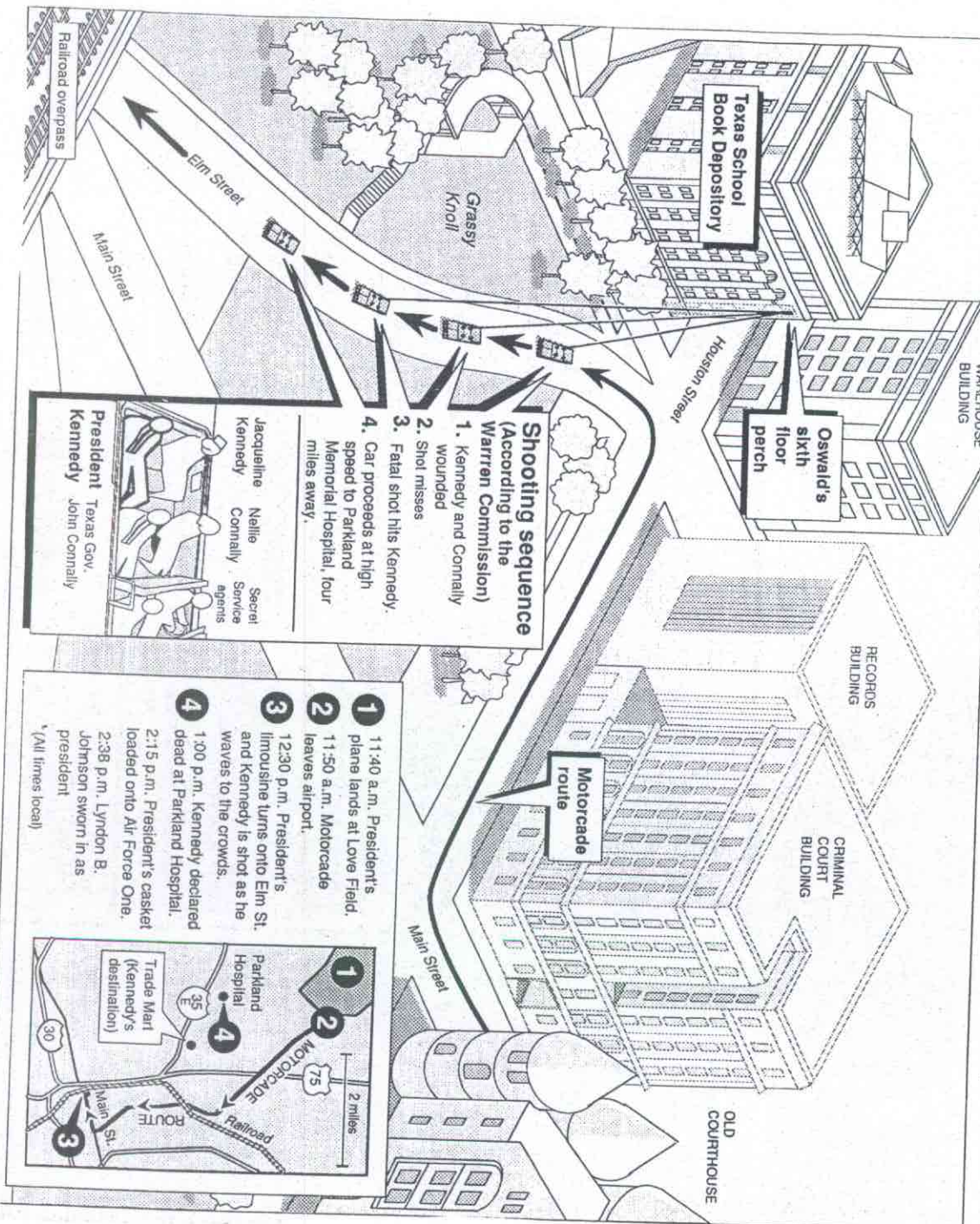
Connally thought about that for a moment, and added: "But you know, in the case of Oswald we tend to imply a devious motivation and a conspiracy behind that motivation. And yet every day in the newspapers you see the acts of crazy people."

"I think at times we reach too hard, perhaps, for some motivation. And I think we've done that in this case and will continue to do it."

NEXT: Dallas and the artifacts.

THE ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY

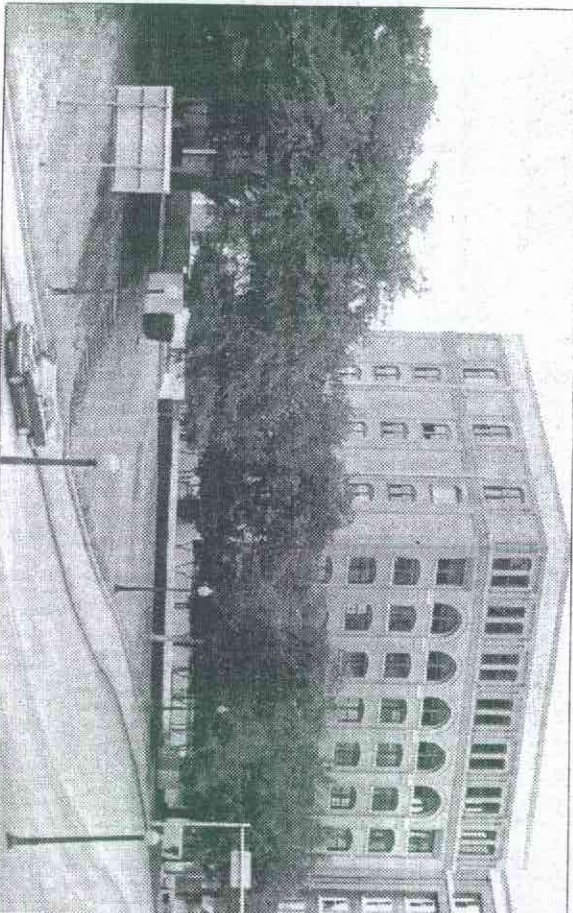
November 22, 1963





'I felt the blow. Then I saw I was drenched with blood. I knew I'd been hit. I said, "My God, they're going to kill us all."'

—John Connally



AP/Karl Gude

Controversial theories concern the grassy knoll near the Texas School Book Depository.

Staff photo by David Kennedy

KENNEDY:

Tragic news echoed across U.S., world

By Seth Kantor
American-Statesman Staff

DALLAS — A Dallas newspaper reporter was driving on a highway in South Texas when the bulletin came over his car radio: President Kennedy was shot and perhaps fatally wounded in downtown Dallas.

At that instant, the reporter saw the car in front of him veer crazily, almost off the road, then almost over the center line. He knew the driver in the car ahead had just heard the same bulletin.

Millions of Americans heard that bulletin and others. Less than 30 minutes after the shooting Nov. 22, 1963, most of the nation knew about it, including children in schoolrooms across the country. It was the single most staggering news event since the bombing of Pearl Harbor 22 years earlier.

Here three people recollect what happened to them on that Friday in November, 25 years ago:

David Brinkley, the television network news commentator, was stationed in Washington with NBC.

Brinkley's first reaction was rage. "I thought one of those nutty right-wingers in Texas had done it," he told an interviewer for the Columbia University oral history project three weeks after the shooting.

"It caught us at a bad time," Brinkley said, because all the network executives who could get things done quickly in Washington and New York were out to lunch at that time, a time when seconds counted.

"Two, three, four, five minutes after the news broke, they still were running some silly women's program out of here. So I called the local (station) manager's office. He was out, and I screamed at his secretary to find him, to get that junk off the air and put the news on the air."

Despite all his anguish, when Brinkley got on the air, he "was intentionally calm, low-key, so as not to inflame the country."

Don Ray Archer, who today is a lieutenant in charge of the general assignment division of the Dallas Police Department, was an auto theft detective in 1963. He was assigned to guard the president on the podium of the Trade Mart — where Kennedy was headed when he was shot.



Staff photo by Seth Kantor
Officer Don Ray Archer was assigned to guard Kennedy at the Trade Mart in Dallas.

"Somebody had a transistor radio and got the report that there had been a shooting in the parade motorcade," Archer recalled in his police station office.

Archer recalls that the audience awaiting the president's arrival "was dismissed quietly. A rabbi told them to go home and pray for the president. But we (the police detail) stayed at the Trade Mart until we got orders to report downtown for assignment."

"Then at 1:10 p.m. (40 minutes after the shooting), seven of us crowded into an unmarked car and headed in a hurry toward headquarters," he said. "In the car, we got word that officer (J.D.) Tippit had been shot."

"We were coming down North Harwood, where Ross crosses it, a busy downtown intersection, when someone told the captain who was driving that he'd better turn on the siren to get through the intersection."

"But what with all the excitement, he turned on the windshield wipers instead. We all just ducked, and I never saw how we got through there."

Raymond Telles of El Paso was U.S. ambassador to Costa Rica, where news of Kennedy's death "was taken as a personal or national tragedy. You could walk the streets that day and you would see people crying openly."

Telles commented on recollections he made in 1970 for the oral history collection that was being prepared for the John F. Kennedy Library.

He told of a shabbily dressed old woman who showed up at the U.S. Embassy in San Jose on the day Kennedy was shot. She pressed a 10-colon note — worth \$1.50 then — into the ambassador's hand.

She insisted that Telles accept it and send it to the president's widow because "now that President Kennedy is dead, I am sure that she is going to have many expenses."

25 years later

Contradictions abound during investigations into president's killing

WASHINGTON — Even as the events following President John F. Kennedy's assassination were being played out in Dallas, the FBI, Secret Service, CIA and U.S. military intelligence agencies opened investigations into the slaying.

Here are other official investigations that followed:

- **President's Commission on the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy** (known as the Warren Commission). Appointed by President Johnson. Presided over by Chief Justice Earl Warren. Dec. 5, 1963-Sept. 27, 1964.

Findings: No conspiracy. Lee Harvey Oswald fired three shots and acted alone. Jack Ruby killed Oswald two days later in an independent act of passion.

- **Texas Court of Inquiry.** Established Nov. 25, 1963, by Texas Attorney General Waggoner Carr. Robert Storey of Dallas and Leon Jaworski of Houston were appointed as special counsel.

Results: The court was short-lived. It worked closely with the Warren Commission and came up with no independent findings. Carr issued a report in 1964, which consisted of formal correspondence between state officials and the Warren Commission.

- **New Orleans criminal conspiracy investigation.** Grand jury investigation launched Feb. 16, 1967, by District Attorney Jim Garrison. Clay L. Shaw, a prominent New Orleans business and social figure, was indicted and went to trial Jan. 21, 1969, on charges of conspiring with the late Guy Banister, Davis Ferrie and Lee Harvey Oswald to kill the president.

Garrison claimed Shaw conspired with elements of the CIA fiercely opposed to Cuba's Fidel Castro to plot the murder of JFK

and to use Oswald as the assassin. The 39-day trial was filled with bizarre charges and a circus-like atmosphere. Garrison also attempted to prove during the trial that there had been a second gunman firing in Dealey Plaza.

Shaw was acquitted on the jury's first ballot March 1, 1969.

- **Commission on CIA Activities Within the United States** (Rockefeller Commission). Appointed by President Ford. Presided over by Vice President Nelson Rockefeller. Jan. 5, 1975-June 6, 1975.

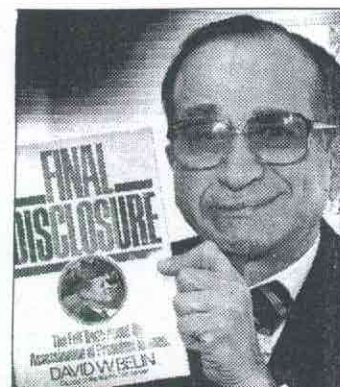
Finding: The CIA withheld vital information from the Warren Commission about CIA plots to assassinate Castro before and during 1963, and its use of American gangsters to make the hit. The CIA attempts on his life gave the Cuban dictator a motive for going after Kennedy.

- **Special Senate Intelligence Committee panel** to investigate the assassination. Committee Chairman Frank Church of Idaho appointed Sens. Gary Hart of Colorado and Richard Schweiker of Pennsylvania as the two panel members. Sept. 25, 1975-June 23, 1976.

Conclusions: Both the CIA and FBI blocked information from reaching the Warren Commission. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover believed the commission was out to embarrass his bureau.

- **House Select Committee on Assassinations.** Established by the U.S. House to investigate the shootings of JFK and Martin Luther King. First chairman of the 12-member panel was Rep. Tom Downing of Virginia, followed by Henry Gonzalez of Texas and then by Louis Stokes of Ohio. Sept. 17, 1976-Dec. 29, 1978.

Findings: There was a conspiracy. Organized crime members are



David Belin, counsel to the Warren Commission, has written a book about the assassination.

the most likely suspects. Acoustic and photographic evidence, including a sound test at Dealey Plaza, supports the likelihood that a second gunman fired a fourth shot at the president from the grassy knoll area of Dealey Plaza. These majority findings were not unanimous.

- **Texas State Appeals Court.** After a lengthy legal battle, the court ruled in favor of removing Oswald's casket from a grave in Rose Hill Burial Park, Fort Worth. British barrister and author Michael Eddowes won the right to have the body exhumed to see if it was the remains of a Soviet spy.

Under tight security, the skeletal remains were studied at Baylor University Medical Center in Dallas by a team of pathologists, who had access to Oswald's earliest medical and Marine Corps dental records. Oct. 4, 1981.

Final report: The man buried in Oswald's grave was Oswald.

- **Justice Department.** The House assassinations committee, when it disbanded 10 years ago, urged the Justice Department to review its findings, study the photographic and acoustic evidence, and consider whether any further U.S. government investigation was needed.

Findings: No substantive evidence of a fourth shot or second gunman. Case closed.

—Seth Kantor