

Evidence Indicates Shots Came from Book Building

Few Facts Support Case for Grassy Knoll

Editor's Note: This is the fourth installment of an Associated Press survey of book criticisms of the Warren Commission Report as compared to actual contents of the report.

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IV—THE GRASSY KNOLL

It happened in a small park called Dealey Plaza, named in honor of a famous Dallas publisher. Its central landmark used to be a bronze statue of that citizen, George B. Dealey. Now there are others: the yellow brick mass of the Texas School Book Depository and, close by, an embankment now called "the grassy knoll"

Some saw a rifle in a building window.

The Warren Commission decided it was from there the assassin fired.

Some saw a puff of smoke on a grassy knoll.

Critics have decided it was from there an assassin fired.

The grassy knoll is a slope of greensward running southwesterly away from the Texas School Book Depository. There is an arcade on its ridge, then a picket fence, shoulder high. The knoll runs along the north side of Elm Street on which Kennedy was slain. It ends at a railroad overpass which Elm Street goes beneath.

Several Men Saw Smoke Near Fence

Several men on the overpass saw smoke near the fence as the president fell. If the smoke came from the assassin's rifle, Kennedy could not have been shot in the back, as the autopsy doctors decided. It is as simple

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as that: he was facing obliquely toward the knoll.

If he was shot from the knoll, the throat wound must be one of entry, not exit even though doctors said it was of exit. The fabric of the hole in the back of his jacket could not have been bent inwards, even though it was. Gov. Connally could not have been shot in the back by the same bullet, even though doctors said he was. Lee Harvey Oswald would not have been a lone assassin.

The commission gave less attention to the knoll than it did the overpass. It ruled out the overpass in favor of the depository as the assassin's lair for many reasons, one being that no one on the overpass saw a rifle being fired from there. No one saw a rifle fired from the knoll, either.

Yet the knoll abides. It does so because critics stress what people saw and heard there. They have not, however, stressed everything that people heard or saw there. Or did not hear or see.

Consider S. M. Holland.

Holland was standing on an overpass above Elm Street as the motorcade approached. The grassy knoll was slightly to his left in the foreground. The Texas School Book Depository, from which the commission says the shots were fired, was also slightly to his left but behind the presidential limousine.

Holland heard a noise like a firecracker. "I looked toward the arcade and trees and saw a puff of smoke come from the trees." That is what Holland told sheriff's deputies right after the assassination, and that is how Mark Lane quotes him in "Rush to Judgment."

Holland Saw Only One Puff of Smoke

But there is more to the sentence, although Lane does not include it. It reads: "... And I heard three more shots after the first shot, but that was the only puff of smoke I saw."

If one puff of smoke suggests someone shot a gun from the knoll, what does the absence of three subsequent puffs suggest? The jury, the reading public, was not asked to decide. Mark Lane did it for them. He decided not to raise the question.

Epstein wrote "... Six out of seven of these witnesses (on the overpass) who gave an opinion as to the source of the shots indicated that the shots had come from a 'grassy knoll.'" They did?

The six cited are James Simmons, Austin Miller, Thomas Murphy, Frank Reilly, J. W. Foster and Holland.

This is what they say in the report volumes:

Simmons (paraphrased by the FBI): "(He) advised that it was his opinion that the shots came from the direction of the Texas School Book Depository."

Miller: "It sounded like it came from the, I would say from right there in the car. Would be to my left, the way I was looking at him, over toward that incline (the knoll)."

Murphy: "These shots came from a spot just west of the Texas School Book Depository."

Reilly: "The shots came from that park where all the shrubs is up there, to the north of Elm Street, up the slope."

Foster: "It (the sound) came from back in the corner of Elm and Houston streets." (The depository is at the corner of Elm and Houston).

Holland, who also picked the knoll, testified he immediately ran to that area. He saw no one suspicious.

Those are the six who "indicated the shots came from a 'grassy knoll.'" Two, actually, picked the depository area. One who indicated the knoll also thought the shots sounded like they came from Kennedy's car.

Lane Says Six Others Saw Smoke

Besides Holland, Lane says six others on the overpass saw smoke. Austin Miller is one. In an affidavit Nov. 22, 1963, he said he saw "smoke or steam" coming from the knoll area. When Miller was later questioned by commission counsel, Lane writes, Miller was "dismissed before he could mention the crucial observation contained in his affidavit."

Actually, at the end of his interrogation, during which he indeed did not mention any smoke, Miller was asked if he could add anything "that might be of any help to the commission or to the investigation of the assassination."

Miller: "Offhand, no sir, I don't recall anything else."

Maybe he forgot the smoke, maybe not. But it is hardly accurate to convey the impression that the commission had turned Miller off before he could give testimony against the deposito-

ry theory by "dismissing" him. Lane goes on. "Clemon Johnson told FBI agents that he had observed 'white smoke.' That is ALL he says about Clemon Johnson. But Johnson's full statement as paraphrased by the FBI was: "Johnson stated that white smoke was observed near the pavilion arcade but he felt this smoke came from a motorcycle abandoned near the spot by Dallas policemen." Who does it seem, is dismissing what?

The other four who Lane says saw smoke—Richard Dodd, Walter Windborn, Simmons and Murphy—were interviewed by him in 1966. Whatever they told Lane then, only one—Simmons—mentioned smoke to the FBI when questioned during the assassination investigation.

First Recollection Isn't Mentioned

Simmons said he thought he saw "exhaust fumes" of smoke near the embankment in front of the Texas School Book Depos-

itory. He ran toward that building with a policeman, first looking over the knoll fence. Two years later the "exhaust fumes" by the depository have become "a puff of smoke" near the fence. Lane saves the reader the trouble of having to decide which recollection is accurate. The first, given to the FBI, is not included in his book.

Whether they saw smoke or not, it apparently did not aid Dodd or Windborn in placing the source of the shots. They told the FBI they couldn't tell where they came from.

There are three other aspects of smoke, not dwelled upon by Lane or Epstein in connection with the knoll.

1—There was a steam pipe in the area.

2—FBI tests showed the alleged assassination rifle produced only a "small amount" of smoke when fired: modern military gunpowder is smokeless.

3—NONE of the approximately 200 assassination witnesses

questioned other than the four on the overpass mentions/seeing ANY smoke, anywhere. Lane says only those on the overpass could see smoke from the knoll because of its elevation and the bushes around it. But those persons on the south side of Elm Street should have seen it, if there was any. They, not those on the overpass, were in a direct line of fire. None of them mentioned smoke.

'Those Sounds Came from Our Building'

Campbell was standing in front of the depository, as Lane mentions. He does NOT mention that at his elbow stood Mrs. Robert Reid, a fellow employe. Lane does NOT mention that Mrs. Reid testified:

"I turned to Mr. Campbell and I said, 'Oh, my goodness, I am afraid those sounds came from our building' because it sounded like they came just so directly over my head."

Two witnesses. Two versions. Both appear in the Warren report. Only one does in "Rush to Judgment".

"Many other persons scattered throughout Dealey Plaza (through which Elm Street runs and the knoll and depository overlook) placed the origin of the shots (on the knoll)," Lane Hill did. Billie Joe Lovelady did. Faye Chism did. Roy Truly did.

Many Thought Shots Came from Depository

At least 34 people did, although it is difficult to pinpoint from some of their statements. It is also not always easy to pinpoint the more than 60 witnesses who thought the shots came from the depository.

Such as:

F. Lee Mudd — "From the direction of the depository."

Charles Hester—"It appeared to be a building on the corner of Elm and Houston streets."

Charles Brehm—"One of two buildings on Elm and Houston."

Marion Baker—"High up, pretty sure from the depository."

T. E. Moore—"From a high area."

Allan Sweatt—"Vicinity of Elm and Houston."

Or the 15 people of the motorcade itself who thought the shots came from the "right rear."

Since almost none of such witnesses is mentioned in Lane's book, perhaps that is why he felt no need to mention such others whose testimony is helpful in locating the source of the shots.

Projection, Movement Seen in Window

Such as Mrs. Earle Cabell, the Dallas mayor's wife, who looked towards the depository at the sound of shots and "saw a projection" in an upper window. Or Bob Jackson, a press photographer, who also looked up at the depository and told col-

leagues in a motorcade press car "there is the gun!" Or James Crawford who looked up at the sound of the third shot and "saw a movement" in the southeast window of the sixth floor of the depository and told a friend "if those were shots, they came from that window" and then advised police to search around some boxes he saw in the window. Police did. They found three rifle shells that were fired by a rifle also found on that floor—by that rifle and no other. Bullet fragments found in Kennedy's car also came from that rifle and no other.

Maybe Lane had the Mrs. Cabells and Bob Jacksons in mind when he said there is "some evidence" shots came from the depository. There is "some" evidence. No one saw a puff of smoke there. Only a rifleman.

Epstein thinks there is "compelling" evidence shots were fired from the depository. But he faults the commission for not looking more thoroughly into the possibility of the knoll. He asks why the commission did not call the 10 witnesses who stood between the knoll and the president's car because nine of them "thought the shots had come from the knoll directly behind them."

Commission Did Have Statements

If the commission did not call them, it did have their statements.

This is what they said:

A. J. Millican: He said he heard three shots from the depository area, two from the arcade and three more from the arcade but further away.

Charles Hester: He said "the shots sounded like they definitely came from in or around the (depository) building."

Abraham Zapruder: "I thought it (the shots) came from in back of me. Of course you can't tell when something is in line—it could be from anywhere."

"Q: Did you form any opinion about the direction from which the shots came by the sound. . . .?"

"A: No, there was too much reverberation. There was an echo which gave me sound all over."

Mary Elizabeth Woodward: She told the FBI the shots came "from possibly behind her" or from the overpass. "However, because of the loud echo, she could not say where the shots had come from other than they had come from above her head."

Mrs. Hester: She was standing near the overpass approximately in line with Kennedy's car and the depository. She said she could give no position for the shots other than to tell the FBI she believed she and her husband were in the line of fire.

The other four of the nine

Epstein said identified the knoll did, indeed, think the shots came from there.

Epstein continues: Eight witnesses were standing across the street from the knoll: all eight said they thought the shots had come from the knoll."

Actually four of them did. One said she couldn't determine the source. Two thought the shots came possibly from the depository area. One said they came from one of two buildings at the corner of Elm and Houston. There are three buildings there, one the depository.

Volumes Don't Support Lane

In the second chapter of his book, Lane writes: Twenty-five witnesses are known to have given statements or affidavits on Nov. 22 and Nov. 23—the day of and the day after the assassination—about the origin of the shots. Twenty-two said they believed that the shots came from the knoll."

Should one check the commission volumes he would find that, yes, 23 people did give statements to law officials on those two days. Nine cited the knoll. Twelve cited the depository. Two indicated it could have been either.

There is a witness mentioned in another context by Lane whose testimony has some relevance as to the conflicting opinions of where the shots came from. He is Lee E. Bowers. He was working in a signal tower in the railroad area behind the knoll. His testimony is in Volume VI.

Bowers: The sounds came from either from up against the school book depository building or near the mouth of the triple underpass."

Q: "You were not able to tell which?"

Bowers: "No, I could not."

Q: Well, now, had you had any experience before being in the tower as to sounds coming from these various places?"

Bowers: "Yes, I had worked this same tower for some 10 or 12 years, and was there during the time they were renovating the school depository building, and had noticed at that time the similarity of sounds occurring in either of these two locations."

Bowers' testimony doesn't rule out the knoll. It doesn't rule out the depository. It does help those investigators trying to explain why witnesses to the assassination gave conflicting opinions as to the sound of the shots. If Bowers was helpful in this regard to Lane or Epstein, they didn't mention it.

What People Did on Grassy Knoll

Apart from what witnesses heard or did not hear from the knoll, Lane attaches significance to what they DID there.

"Many officers said that as

soon as the shots were fired, they ran directly to the knoll and behind the wooden fence and began to search the area, some passing the book depository on the way."

Why did people converge on the knoll?

The Hesters ran TOWARD it to seek shelter from the gunfire. Miss Patricia Ann Lawrence, who had been standing at Elm and Houston, ran "along with the crowd" to where the President's car had been when he was hit. So did Mrs. Charles Davis. "I just ran along with them," said Danny Arce.

Curtis Bishop, on the overpass, saw people running in every direction." Geneva Hine,

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