

3/1/77

3 Never-Before-Seen Movie Clips That Shatter



# JFK Assassination

# Wanted To See

Never-before published photographs taken within seconds of President John F. Kennedy's assassination and a never-before-told story of a secret motion picture made by a White House photographer. The Warren Commission, the FBI and the CIA have never seen the pictures on these pages nor

heard the incredible testimony from the presidential photographer who was riding in the official motorcade in Dallas on that tragic November day more than 13 years ago. A team of MIDNIGHT reporters traveled to the temporary Kennedy Library in Waltham, Mass., to view the secret movie.

And the author of this story, Robert Sibley, a former White House scriptwriter, tracked down the discarded portions of the movie hidden away at the United States National Archive building in Washington, D.C. Now it's all here, for the first time, exclusively for MIDNIGHT readers.

The Oswald 'Lone Killer' Theory

# Film No One

A crucial motion picture film taken at the assassination of President John F. Kennedy has been gathering dust in a federal archive for 13 years.

The film is terribly damaging to the Warren Commission finding that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone assassin.

The man who took the film, an official White House photographer and an eyewitness to the assassination, has never been questioned by the government agency to this day.

The Warren Commission, the FBI, the CIA and the Dallas police — all, apparently overlooked the film and its maker.

More likely, they feared the visual and spoken testimony would damage their neat conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, killed the President.

If that was their fear — they were right.

The movie, a 20-minute chronology titled "The Last Two Days," offers chilling evidence that someone crouched behind the picket fence on the infamous grassy knoll fired the shots that killed President Kennedy. Exactly as so many "discredited" eyewitnesses have been claiming for years.

Further, if the Warren Commission or the police had bothered to interview the movie maker, they would have found a witness of unquestionable integrity who would say the same thing — that the fatal shots were fired from the direction of the grassy knoll.

Thomas Atkins, a retired Navy Commander, is the man who made the movie. In early 1963, he was assigned to record on film the major events and everyday life of President John F. Kennedy.

Atkins had an excellent vantage point from which to witness the devastating events of November 22, 1963. He was in the presidential motorcade, six cars behind the limousine carrying the Kennedys and Gov. and Mrs. Connally.

It is therefore almost inconceivable, considering his official status and proximity, that Atkins was not immediately questioned by those investigating the assassination.

Commander Atkins was never questioned. Yet he remained at the White House as a photographer until 1968. He was embarrassingly available to the Warren Commission, the CIA and the FBI.

Why didn't Atkins volunteer to testify?

There are two reasons — one simple, one not so simple. By nature, Atkins is a reticent man, reluctant to bring attention on himself.

He is also an aware man. And in the back of his mind always, he was alert to the fact that by 1967, 18 witnesses had died — many under mysterious circumstances.



By ROBERT SIBLEY

Actuaries have estimated the odds of the 18 witnesses dying in 3 1/2 years at 100,000 trillion to one.

Atkins was not eager to testify, though he would have if he had been asked.

Equally curious is the Warren Commission's lack of interest in his movie. Seven hundred feet of celluloid were incorporated in his 20-minute film. An additional 1,100 feet were discarded. Photographers refer to the unused or discarded film as "out-takes."

Atkins pieced together his movie "The Last Two Days" within three months of the assassination. His intention was to produce a factual moving documentary about President Kennedy's final days. He was not looking for assassination evidence.

The Warren Commission investigators should therefore have examined every frame of both the movie and the "out-takes" looking for such evidence.

They did neither. Yet they undoubtedly knew of the film's existence. Atkins was a government employe, using a government camera and shooting government film.

When one considers the importance the Warren Commission placed on the amateurish movie taken by Dallas resident Abraham Zapruder using an inexpensive 8 mm camera, it's even more alarming that Commission members didn't at least view the Atkins film.

He was a pro, using a professional camera, the 16 mm Arriflex S.

Atkins, who has just recently retired from the Navy, has often questioned why he and his film were ignored.





**A BIG DAY** for White House photographer Thomas Atkins (left) — whose pictures and statements are on these pages — was in 1968, when he received a Navy commendation.

"It's something I've always wondered about," he told me. "Why didn't they ask me what I knew? I not only was on the White House staff, I was then, and still am, a photographer with a pretty keen visual sense."

This is what Commander Atkins remembers about the events in Dealey Plaza on November 22, 1963, from the instant he heard the first shot.

"At first I thought it was a firecracker going off and I thought that whoever threw that thing at the motorcade is going to be in a heck of a lot of trouble with the Secret Service.

"Then when I heard the second shot, I realized it was gunfire. The third shot came very quickly after that, in less than two seconds, I'm sure.

"In thinking about it later, I got the distinct impression that it was almost like a little kid playing cowboys and Indians, the sounds came so close together. That is, between the second and third shots.

"It was bang... bang, bang. Like kids playing. That's exactly how I remember it."

There is no question that Atkins was in an ideal spot to hear clearly what was going on.

"The car I was in had just made the little right turn (onto Houston Street). I was facing the Texas School Book Depository and Kennedy's car had just made the left turn heading toward the freeway entrance. Although I did not look up at the building, I could hear everything quite clearly."

As Atkins tells it, "The shots came from below and off to the right side from where I was." The shots were, therefore, coming from the grassy knoll.

"I never thought the shots came from above," he reiterated. "They did not sound like shots coming from anything higher than street level."

Is it possible that shots were fired from more than one location? Atkins thinks not.

"They all sounded similar to me and did not seem to be coming from different points around the plaza," he said.

"I was raised in a small town in northern Ohio where fishing and hunting are part of the experience of young boys growing up in that part of the

**Few crimes other than the murder of Oswald by Ruby have been so fully recorded on film as the assassination of President Kennedy. One would have expected the Warren Commission to requisition every known still or motion picture and to examine the photographic evidence with the utmost care, in order to establish as firmly as possible the exact location of the assassin or assassins and other clues...**

**Not only was this invaluable body of photographic evidence untapped and ignored, the eyewitnesses who held the cameras were not asked to testify...**

**from "Accessories After the Fact" (New York: Vintage 1976) by Sylvia Meagher**

country. I would say that I am not unfamiliar with the sound of guns and I think I can tell where gunfire is coming from."

One important section of Atkins' film is highly supportive of his personal observations. The scene, filmed less than five seconds after the fatal shots were fired, shows a family of four lying on the grass at the bottom of the grassy knoll.

The couple, later identified as William and Gayle Newman, had "hit the ground" as soon as the shooting started. They were pictured still protectively sheltering their two young children and looking toward the top of the knoll.

Later, both Mr. and Mrs. Newman swore in an affidavit that the shots were fired from atop the knoll.

Also seen in these crucial frames is a policeman turning his motorcycle in toward the grassy knoll. He is Dallas Police Officer Bobby W. Hargis. He is about to dismount and run up the grassy knoll, pistol in hand, to "look for the gunman."

In the background of the pictures, one of the automobiles in the presidential motorcade is speeding away to Parkland Hospital where Kennedy was taken.

An unidentified man standing in the car is pointing toward the grassy knoll.

This is what the members of the Warren Commission would have seen and heard had they called Thomas Atkins to testify and had they viewed his film.

Perhaps that is the very reason he was not called.

After the assassination, Atkins flew back to Washington on Air Force Two, the backup plane to Air Force One, which was carrying the President's body, Mrs. Kennedy and the Johnsons.

Aboard Air Force Two, Atkins, still in shock, talked about what he had seen, heard and filmed in the presence of FBI and Secret Service



**ABOVE: THE ASSASSINATION SCENE** of President John F. Kennedy, that no one can forget. **RIGHT: Lee Harvey Oswald,** the man who killed the president according to all official reports.

agents.

Under FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, information and witnesses were hidden from the Warren Commission and the public, we now know. It is entirely plausible that what the FBI overheard Atkins say was also conveniently tucked away.

It is also, of course, possible that the Warren Commission itself decided to "block out" the existence of the film and, indeed, of Atkins.

For even setting aside his contention that the shots came from the direction of the grassy knoll, not the School Book Depository, Atkins' testimony would have been damaging.

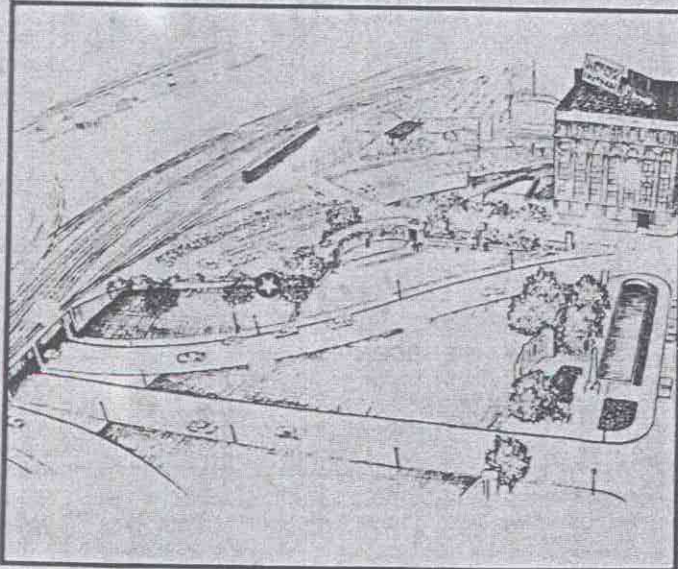
A key condition of the commission's lone assassin theory is that

Oswald required a minimum of 2.3 seconds between shots using his manually-operated bolt action Mannlicher-Carcano rifle.

Atkins was certain the second and third shots came one immediately after the other. As a member of the White House staff and a Navy officer, he would have been an extremely difficult witness to discredit.

Commander Atkins is still alive, now retired in Florida. And his film "The Last Two Days" is still gathering dust in the national archives, waiting to be seen.

After more than 13 years, it's about time somebody in Washington asked some questions and took a look.



**THIS DIAGRAM OF DEALEY PLAZA** in Dallas shows the grassy knoll area located to the right of traffic on the roadway. Commander Atkins believes that the shots fired at President Kennedy came from this direction. On top of the knoll is a fence with a parking lot behind.

## The Forgotten Film, 'The Last Two Days'

**LESS THAN FIVE SECONDS** after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, these movie pictures of the grassy knoll area were taken by White House photographer Thomas Atkins.

This is the first time these three stills, taken from the unused portion of Atkins' film "The Last Two Days," have ever been published.

Frame one clearly shows Mr. and Mrs. William Newman on the knoll just after they "hit the ground" as a reaction to the rifle shots.

They are protecting their two small children, and in frame three, looking at the top

of the grassy knoll, where both later swore in an affidavit, they heard the shots fired which killed the President.

In the background of frames two and three Dallas Police Officer Bobby W. Hargis can be seen turning his motorcycle in toward the grassy knoll. Seconds later, Hargis dismounted, and pistol in hand, he climbed the hill to "look for the gunman."

A man in the white automobile, also seen in these pictures, is pointing in the direction of the grassy knoll. The car, part of the Presidential motorcade, is speeding to Parkland Hospital, where Kennedy died.