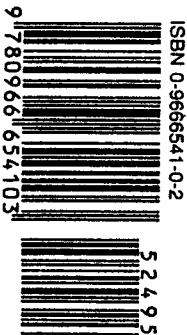




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The true story told by GARY CORNWELL, Deputy Chief Counsel for the U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on Assassinations

# REAL ANSWERS

# REAL ANSWERS

The TRUE STORY told by GARY CORNWELL, Deputy Chief Counsel for the U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on Assassinations, in charge of the investigation

## JOHN F. KENNEDY ASSASSINATION

JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY  
1917

\$24.95 U.S.

**T**he assassination of President John F. Kennedy shocked the world, and the crime captured the imaginations of people everywhere, perhaps more than any other event in the twentieth century. If you were born before November 1963, you probably can still remember where you were when you heard the news of the President's death.

Everyone knows that the crime was investigated by the Warren Commission. Everyone knows that the official government explanation was that Lee Harvey Oswald was the assassin, and that he acted alone. Relatively few believe that was the truth.

What most people do not realize is that there was a second government investigation: even fewer know what evidence and shocking revelations came from it. Between 1977 and 1979, forty-five attorneys, investigators and researchers conducted the most thorough investigation that has ever been conducted to determine whether there really was a conspiracy. As the Deputy Chief Counsel for the Select Committee on Assassinations, Gary Cornwell led that investigation.

Since 1963, many books have been written, and many theories have been suggested — everything but the truth has long been readily available. Finally, here are some *Real Answers*, the inside story of the Kennedy case, told by someone who was there. Cornwell separates history from the speculations, rumors, guesses and wild accusations that have so long been "the Kennedy case." In the end, he leaves you with the honest and profoundly troubling truth.

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*Who did James Earl Ray  
work for? Not a Jew  
in fact*

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### *Author's Note*

It was April 1979, when I completed my work as Deputy Chief Counsel for the Select Committee on Assassinations and we sent the Committee's final report on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy to the Government Printing Office. Over the years since then, I have been asked questions about the case by almost everyone I have met. I have always been amazed at the intense interest and the extensive knowledge that people have of the basic facts, the central issues, and the principal "conspiracy theories." At the same time I have been surprised by the lack of public knowledge of the findings of the Select Committee. (So, you worked on the Warren Commission? Oh! What was the Select Committee on Assassinations?)

Public knowledge of the case has been confined almost entirely to secondary sources of information—news-paper articles, books by private citizens setting forth conspiracy theories, motion pictures and television shows. Although some of that information has been admittedly fictionalized, most of it has purported to be "documentary." Yet real, honest answers to the eternal issues in the case have seldom been given, in large part because the results of the

extensive investigation by the Select Committee on Assassinations have been unknown, or in some cases, to satisfy other agendas, have been purposely ignored.

Some years ago, while I was living in Denver, a public furor arose over the "two-Oswald theory." The newspapers reported "new" speculation that Lee Harvey Oswald, the man whom the Warren Commission in 1964 announced was the sole person responsible for the assassination, was really two different people, one who defected to Russia in 1959, and another (imposter) who returned from Russia in 1962 to kill the president. This time, the furor was over whether or not the body of the Oswald who had been killed by Jack Ruby less than 48 hours after the assassination of the president, should be removed from its grave and reinspected (for height, dental, and other unique identifying characteristics). For weeks the newspapers were full of stories debating the pros and cons of whether to exhumate the body. During this time, my friends frequently asked me, "What do you think they will find if they dig up the body?" I told them that this was not a new conspiracy theory, and that the Select Committee on Assassinations had conducted an extensive investigation of the issue. Our handwriting identification experts compared letters written by Oswald before, during and after his trip to Russia. Our photographic experts and our forensic anthropologists examined pictures taken of him before, during and after Russia. We learned from both photographic and medical experts that apparent height differences,

as measured in police lineup photos and as measured while he lay on the autopsy table after he was killed, were not significant or suspicious, and did not in fact support the theory of two Oswalds. Our experts explained that the *apparent* height of a suspect as reflected in a police lineup photo is determined by the height (and thus view angle) of the camera; and that because of the compression of the spine when standing, people are shorter when standing than when lying down in a prone position (such as, on an autopsy table). I told my friends that my belief, based upon our investigation, was that the two-Oswald theory is contrary to the available scientific evidence, and that if they exhumed the body they would find the one and only Lee Harvey Oswald.

What was most interesting to me was that not once in any of the newspaper articles that I saw was the investigation of the Select Committee on Assassinations ever mentioned. The articles only rehearsed the historical rationales for believing in the possibility of two Oswalds. There was no mention that the Select Committee on Assassinations extensively investigated these rationales; no mention of all of the scientific evidence on the subject that was set forth in its final report; no mention even that the committee ever existed. From the newspaper accounts, it appeared as if this was some new theory, based upon newly discovered evidence, that needed to be look into. Well, the body was finally exhumed, and the new inspection confirmed that it was the body of the one and only Lee Harvey Oswald.

My point is not that the investigation of the Select Committee answered all questions relating to the Kennedy case. Nor do I suggest that the American public should necessarily accept the findings of the Select Committee as the last word on any question related to the Kennedy case. My point is that I know from twenty years of talking to people about the subject that what the Select Committee did is of great interest to the American public, and that if the news media felt that the possibility of digging up Oswald's body was of interest to the public, then the result of the Select Committee's scientific investigation of the issue was relevant information to report—to say nothing of simply being interesting.

That most people have derived their information about the case from secondary sources is also indicated by my own (admittedly not-very-scientific) survey over the past several months. I created a Web site on the Internet to announce the writing of this book, and to solicit comments and questions that would help me in writing the book. I asked that each person who submitted a comment also tell me how many books they had read on the subject, and among those books, whether they had read the Warren Commission Report or the Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations. About 1/3 of those who provided comments indicated that they had not read any previous book on the subject. Of the 2/3 who had read a book or books on the subject (including many who had read dozens), over 1/3 of those had

not read the Warren Commission's report, and only a few had read the Select Committee's final report. These figures are probably explained in large part by the fact that while it is sometimes possible to find a copy of the Warren Commission Report in a bookstore, no publisher (apparently) has published the final Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations since its only non-governmental publication by Bantam Books in July 1979.

Notwithstanding the heavy reliance upon often unreliable secondary sources of information, almost everyone I have talked to over the years has had a very definite opinion about the case. In particular, everyone either believes there was, or there was not, a conspiracy—few people seem to have no opinion—and everyone seems to have many (sometimes, unalterable) reasons to support their position. Occasionally, I have even found it difficult to get a word in myself, as their enthusiasm for their views spills forth. (The case certainly does capture our imaginations!)

I do not, however, fault those who may hold "uninformed" opinions. As a trial lawyer, I have learned that the human mind cannot focus on a vacuum, so it creates an image (if none is provided) to give content to thought. Thus, if I were to tell you that I live on a lake near Austin, Texas, a picture of the house would quite naturally form in your mind. If I didn't take the time or care enough to actually describe the house to you, your image of the house probably would not be very accurate, but it would be just as real to you as if

I had actually described it to you or shown you a photo of it. Similarly, you may have had the experience of "meeting" someone for the first time over the telephone, and then being quite surprised when you finally met them in person to find that they didn't look anything like you had pictured them in your mind.

Recent studies reflect that 78% of the American public believes there was a conspiracy, which means that 78% of the American public does not believe our government's conclusion when the case was first investigated in 1963-64. That vacuum has had exactly the same effect as if no answer had ever been provided—people have done the best thing they could under the circumstances, namely, create their own answers and their own reasons to support them.

If there is some criticism to be leveled in this regard, it should be leveled as much at me as at anyone else. (Let he who is without blame cast the first stone.) I ran the investigation for the U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on Assassinations, and yet I have never before made any real effort to make available to the American public what I learned from running that investigation. Begging your pardon for the delay, I offer this book in the spirit of "better late than never."

The questions and answers are not set out in order of importance. Nor are answers to the most commonly asked questions at the front. So, you may want to simply skip to the questions that are of most interest to you.

On the other hand, the main reason to study the Kennedy case—particularly, now, so many years after the event—is probably to discover the lessons it holds about life. Thus, the greatest value probably comes not from reading someone else's conclusion about "what happened," but from the process of personally thinking through the questions of *how* and *why* it happened. In addition, I suspect that some of you may want to evaluate not only the information I provide, but also its source, in the case. If those concepts appeal to you, you may want to start reading from the beginning.



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*What happened on November 22, 1963?  
(Just the Facts.)*

**John F. Kennedy, the 35th President of the United States, was shot to death on November 22, 1963, while riding in a motorcade in Dallas, Texas.**

**That was the first sentence from the first chapter of the final Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations. In a very real sense, those are the only facts that have been without significant dispute in the thirty-five years since the tragic event. As you will learn by reading this book, if you are not already aware, that tragic event was followed by a tragic investigation, which in turn was followed by thirty-five years of often misguided and sometimes reckless speculation and misinformation about the available evidence.**

**Kennedy became the youngest ever president of the**

United States in 1960 by narrowly defeating his Republican opponent, Vice President Richard Nixon, by 118,450 votes out of nearly 69 million votes cast. Despite the slim election victory, Kennedy's initial popularity was great. His youth, good looks, wealth, intelligence and determination gave him a unique magic and power that made people feel strongly about him, both those who loved and admired him, and those who hated and feared him.

The early 1960's were times filled with high stakes and volatile political, social and economic changes, both at home and abroad; times characterized by passion, "intractable" positions, and violence. As the fall of 1963 approached, Kennedy's popularity had declined to 59 percent from its high of 83 percent in the spring of 1961, and his concern for the upcoming 1964 election led him to schedule a trip to Texas, the home state of his Vice-President, Lyndon Johnson, where he hoped to shore up his falling popularity by touring the major cities of Houston, San Antonio, Ft. Worth and Dallas.

Kennedy enjoyed traveling, and was essentially reckless in ignoring the protective measures that the Secret Service urged him to adopt. Only once (during another trip in November, 1963, to Chicago) did he allow his limousine to be flanked by police officers on motorcycles, and he never allowed Secret Service officers to ride on the rear bumper of the limousine. He was philosophical about the danger, believing that assassination was a risk inherent in a democratic society. In fact, during the November trip to Dallas, Presi-

dent Kennedy told a White House assistant that if anybody really wanted to shoot him, it would not be a very difficult job, since "all they would have to do is get on a high building with a telescopic rifle, and there is nothing anybody could do to defend against such an attempt."

Kennedy had lost considerable public support in the South, mainly because of his active civil rights program. Newsweek magazine, in fact, reported in October 1963, that no Democratic president had ever been so disliked in the South. Of the major Texas cities, Dallas was particularly troubling. As summarized in the final Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations, Dallas was viewed as:

... a violent, hysterical center of right-wing fanaticism. There, in 1960, then-Texas Senator Lyndon B. Johnson had been heckled and spat upon. In October 1963, just a month before the President's scheduled visit, Ambassador to the United Nations Adlai Stevenson was jected, hit with a placard and spat upon. Byron Skelton, the National Democratic Committeeman from Texas, wrote Attorney General Robert Kennedy about his concern for President Kennedy's safety and urged him to dissuade his brother from going to Texas.

The Dallas newspapers announced on September 13 that Kennedy was coming to Texas; the Governor of Texas, John Connally, announced the itinerary for the president's trip through Texas on November 1; the final motorcade route for the Dallas visit was selected on November 15 and (at the urging of Kennedy's staff) the route was published in the Dallas newspapers on November 18 and 19. Lee Harvey

Oswald had returned from Mexico to Dallas in early October, and secured a position at the School Book Depository on October 15.

Although the Secret Service had received 34 threats on the president's life from Texas during the preceding two years, and had generally identified six categories of persons who posed a potential threat (right-wing extremists, left-wing extremists, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, Black militants, and miscellaneous mental cases), political embarrassment was the chief concern for the Dallas trip. During the week prior to the trip, defamatory posters and leaflets were widely distributed in Dallas, and on the Friday morning of the motorcade, a full-page advertisement sponsored by the "America-thinking Citizens of Dallas" appeared in the Dallas Morning News, charging that Kennedy had ignored the Constitution, scrapped the Monroe Doctrine in favor of the "Spirit of Moscow," and become "soft on Communists, fellow-travelers, and ultra-leftists in America."

President Kennedy and his wife arrived in Texas on Thursday, November 21. They first visited Houston and San Antonio, where they were greeted by enthusiastic crowds, and then flew to Ft. Worth to spend the night. On Friday morning it was raining in Ft. Worth when Kennedy addressed the Chamber of Commerce, a speech that Governor Connally later described as being laced with fun, and very well received. Kennedy told his staff that if the weather cleared, he did not want to use the protective bubble on the limousine during the motorcade in Dallas. As Air Force One

looked off for Dallas, Kennedy remarked to Governor Connally that it looked like they were in luck and were going to get sunshine.

When they arrived in Dallas it was a gorgeous fall day, 68 degrees with clear blue skies. They were met by an enthusiastic crowd of about 400. After shaking hands and greeting those at the edges of the crowd, President Kennedy and his wife Jackie joined Governor Connally and his wife Nellie in the presidential limousine. The president sat in the rear seat on the right, with Governor Connally in a jump seat in front of him. Their wives sat on their left. Two secret service agents occupied the front seat.

The motorcade was led by two cars containing Dallas Police Chief Jesse Curry and other members of the police force and Secret Service. The presidential limousine was third, followed by a car with White House staff and Secret Service agents (who stood on the running boards), then a limousine with Vice President Lyndon Johnson and his wife and Texas Senator Ralph Yarborough, and finally a long line of follow-up cars carrying members of Congress, other dignitaries, photographers, members of the White House staff and others.

As the motorcade left the Love Field airport at about 11:50 a.m., Governor Connally remained worried that some political embarrassment or demonstration would occur, or that the crowds would be unfriendly, indifferent or sullen, and mar the president's trip to Texas that, up until then, had been so positive.

But as the motorcade neared the center of the city, Governor Connally's fears began to subside:

The further we got toward town, the denser became the crowds, and when we got down on Main Street, the crowds were extremely thick. They were pushed off of curbs; they were out in the street, and they were backed all the way up against the walls of the buildings. They were just as thick as they could be. I don't know how many. But, there were at least a quarter of a million people on the parade route that day and everywhere the reception was good.

The Governor noticed that Mrs. Kennedy seemed to become more relaxed and was enjoying the crowds. When a lone heckler held up a placard reading, "Kennedy Go Home," the president light heartedly said, "Don't you imagine he's a nice fellow," and the Governor replied, "Yes, I imagine he's a nice fellow." Apart from that incident, Connally described the reception as being "more enthusiastic than I could have hoped for." A little girl held up a sign containing the request, "President Kennedy, will you shake hands with me?" The president had the limousine stop, he shook hands with the little girl, and the car was mobbed by admirers who had to be separated from the president by the Secret Service agents. Closer to downtown, the president again had the limousine stop so he could talk to a Catholic nun and her group of school children. Again, enthusiastic supporters rushed from the curb to greet the president, and had to be restrained by Secret Service agents.

As the motorcade neared Dealey Plaza, the crowds grew larger, packing the sidewalks, hanging out of office building windows, and cheering, and it was clear that President Kennedy was delighted with his Dallas reception. In Governor Connally's words, "... the trip had been absolutely wonderful, and we were heaving a sigh of relief because once we got through the motorcade at Dallas and through the Dallas luncheon, then everything else was pretty much routine."

After the limousine turned into Dealey Plaza and headed north on Houston Street toward the Texas School Book Depository one block ahead, Mrs. Connally turned to the president and said, "Mr. President, you can't say Dallas doesn't love you." "That's obvious," he said in response.

The limousine made a hairpin turn in front of the Book Depository, and headed west on Elm Street. It was about 12:30 p.m.; the president was waving to the crowds as shots rang out.

Mrs. Connally turned to her right and saw the president put both hands over his neck, then slump down into the seat. Thinking the noise was a rifle shot, the Governor first turned to his right, attempting to see the president. He later said:

... I never made the full turn. About the time I turned back where I was facing more or less straight ahead, the way the car was moving, I was hit. I was knocked over, just doubled over by the force of the bullet. It went in my back and came out my chest about 2 inches below and to the left of my right

nipple. The force of the bullet drove my body over almost double, and when I looked, immediately I could see I was drenched with blood. So, I knew I had been badly hit and I more or less straightened up. At about this time, Nellie reached over and pulled me down into her lap.

I was in her lap facing forward when another shot was fired . . . I did not hear the shot that hit me. I wasn't conscious of it. I am sure I heard it, but I was not conscious of it at all. I heard another shot. I heard it hit. It hit with a very pronounced impact . . . it made a very, very strong sound.

Immediately, I could see blood and brain tissue all over the interior of the car and all over our clothes. We were both covered with brain tissue, and there were pieces of brain tissue as big as your little finger.

■ ■ ■

When I was hit, or shortly before I was hit—no, I guess it was after I was hit—I said first, just almost in despair, I said, "no, no, no," just thinking how tragic it was that we had gone through this 24 hours, it had all been so wonderful and so beautifully executed.

The President had been so marvelously received and then here, at the last moment, this great tragedy. I just said, "no, no, no, no." Then I said right after I was hit, I said, "My God, they are going to kill us all."

Initially thinking that her husband was dead as he lay in her lap, Mrs. Connally did not look back, but after one of the shots, she heard Mrs. Kennedy say, "They have shot my husband." Then, after another shot, she heard Mrs. Kennedy say, "They have killed my husband. I have his brains in my hand."

The limousine accelerated and sped toward Parkland Hospital. According to Mrs. Connally, "There was no screaming in that horrible car. It was just a silent, terrible drive." At 1:00 p.m., President Kennedy was pronounced dead.