

II
CA

The Floor-laying Crew

The arrangement of boxes at the window from which the shots were fired was studied... Most of those cartons had been moved there by other employees to clear an area for laying a new flooring on the west end of the sixth floor. Superintendent Roy Truly testified that the floorlaying crew moved a long row of boxes parallel to the windows on the south side and had "quite a lot of cartons" in the southeast corner of the building. He said that there was not any particular pattern that the men used in putting them there. "They were just piled up there more or less at that time."(230)

Like the passage about the "feeble individual", this reference to the floor-laying crew is included in Chapter VI of the WCR, which was written with the intention of dispelling "rumors and suspicions developed regarding the existence of a conspiracy to assassinate President Kennedy."(224) And like their mention of the feeble individual, the Commission's reference to the floor-laying crew ironically does more harm to its own credibility than it does to the conspiracy theories the Commission sought to refute.

In its efforts to disprove the presence of accomplices — and thereby incriminate Oswald as the lone assassin — the Commission set out to explain the arrangement of boxes that purportedly served as a sniper's nest in the southeast corner of the sixth floor. In order to show that "one man could have done this in a matter of seconds,"(231) the Commission explained away the question of "whether Oswald required any assistance in moving the cartons" by declaring that most of them had been moved there by the floor-laying crew earlier that morning.

This explanation also covered "the significance of the presence of fingerprints other than Oswald's on the four cartons found in and near the window." The Commission found that "two of these four boxes... had been moved by the floor-laying crew from the west side of the floor to the area near the southwest [sic] corner." (The WCR undoubtedly meant to say southeast corner here.) But remarkably, "none of the warehouse employees who might have customarily handled these cartons left prints which could be indentified."(231)

Unlike the 16 other employees who might have handled these cartons,* Oswald left three identifiable prints on two of the boxes. Twenty-five other

* TSBD Superintendent Roy Truly claimed that "the only employees who could possibly have handled the cartons" on the sixth floor, besides himself, were Arce, Jack Dougherty, Buell Frazier, Charles Givens, James Jarman, Carl Jones, Frankie Kaiser, Roy Lewis, Billy Lovelady, Harold Norman, Eddie Piper, William Shelley, Edward Shields, Troy Eugene West and Bonnie Ray Williams. (CE 3131) [Note: Neither Jones nor Lewis is on the WCR's List of Witnesses.]

identifiable prints were found on the four cartons within the alleged sniper's nest. The cartons surrounding this nest, "thus shielding Oswald from the view of anyone on the sixth floor," apparently were not dusted for prints. And "one identifiable palmprint was not indentified."(231)

It is in this context that one of history's most astounding examples of investigative malfeasance -- on the part of both the Warren Commission and police personnel on the scene -- can be discerned in the following sentence: "All but one of 25 definitely identifiable prints were the prints of two persons -- an FBI employee and a member of the Dallas Police Department who handled the cartons during the course of the investigation."(231)

It is truly incredible that trained police officials, including the FBI, would be so careless as to leave so many prints on key items of evidence before those items were even dusted for prints -- especially during an investigation of the murder of a president of the United States. Yet the Warren Commission would have us believe that there is nothing unusual about the fact that as many as sixteen TSBD employees could have handled these cartons without leaving a single identifiable print, while the accused assassin and his investigators left dozens of prints on these same cartons (as did one unidentified person who left a single identifiable print). Such ludicrous claims by the Commission only give credence to those conspiracy theories that hold that criminal elements within the FBI and Dallas Police Department were themselves part of a conspiracy to kill JFK, and that it was the Warren Commission's purpose to cover up this fact.

The fact that the floor-laying crew did not leave any identifiable prints on the cartons they moved to the southeast corner, where "they were just piled up there more or less at that time," does not, of course, imply that the crew was deliberately careful not to leave any prints, which would suggest criminal intent; it is entirely possible that they wore gloves and/or used a dolly to move the books and "clear an area for laying a new floor."

When asked by assistant counsel David Belin about the cartons stacked in the southeast corner, crew member Charles Givens stated that he "didn't pay attention about any being stacked, because we had taken all that stock from that side of the building and ran it down that side... ran it down the side right in front of the window."(VI,350) Regrettably, Belin did not ask for a less ambivalent description of "that side," but it appears that Givens meant that cartons were moved from the west side to the southeast window.

Belin also failed to ask why the entire floor wasn't cleared before the project was begun, given that there was ample room on floors 5 and 7 to store the boxes.

Bonnie Ray Williams, the "other boy" who was transferred with Danny Arce from the warehouse to the depository near the end of October, described the floor-laying process this way:

We moved cartons from, I believe, the west side of the sixth floor to the east side of the sixth floor, because I think there was a vacancy in there. After we moved the cartons, we started laying the floor. Then we had to move the cartons. As we go we would move the cartons to vacate the space, so we could lay the floor..... I think we just moved them out and right back in, as I remember. But I think after we got a little further over, I think we had to move some books. We had to move these books to the east side of the building...(III,161-2,167)

Williams did not say why, if there was a "vacancy" on the east side, they did not begin laying the floor on that side; nor did Williams explain how order fillers were able to find books during this process, since there was no filing system in place in the TSBD at that time. "You just asked older fellows that had been there where certain books were," said Williams in explaining the normal way order fillers performed their task.(III,166)

Williams' description of the floor-laying process does explain, however, the film footage and photographs taken shortly after the assassination, which clearly show cartons stacked on the west side of the floor in roughly the same density as the cartons on the east side. The photos do not show open spaces or "vacancies" of the type one would expect to see in a normal floor-laying process. In fact, the entire sixth floor appeared to fit the random pattern described by Mr. Truly, with boxes "just piled up there more or less."

The arduous, piecemeal approach the floor-laying crew employed in their task might also explain the extraordinary amount of time spent on this project. While it is not clear from the record exactly how many workers were employed on the floor-laying crew,* the record does establish that a minimum of four men — Arce, Williams, Charles Givens and Billy Lovelady — worked on this project under the supervision of foreman William Shelley. They had been working on the sixth floor for only two days before November 22. The previous four weeks were spent working on the fifth floor.

* The number of possible workers would appear to be limited to those listed in the previous footnote; however, documents in the Commission Exhibits reveal a number of other potential crew members among the "mystery" employees who do not appear on the List of Witnesses and who were never asked any questions by the Commission — about sightings of Oswald, strangers in the building, or even the assassination itself. Besides Carl Edward Jones and Roy Edward Lewis, mentioned in the previous note, the mystery workers include Haddon Spurgeon Aiken, Avery Davis, Spaulden Earnest Jones, Herbert Lester Junker, and Lloyd R. Viles. "Joe Earl Jarman" appears on one list of TSBD employees with an address different from that of James Earl Jarman, Jr.

Danny Arce claimed that the crew began laying floor in the TSBD "four or five weeks" before the assassination. Bonnie Ray Williams estimated that "we had been working on the fifth floor, I think, about three weeks. I think altogether I had been up there just about four weeks, I think." Arce said that he and Williams were transferred from the warehouse to the depository because "they were short of help up there"; Williams claimed that this transfer was due to the fact that "business was slow, and they were trying to keep us on without laying us off at the time."

Regardless of which version is true -- that Arce and Williams were transferred because of either a shortage or surplus of labor in the TSBD,* and that the fifth floor took as little as three weeks, or as many as five weeks, to complete -- the fact remains that the progress of this project was exceedingly slow. The actual rate of progress can be determined by dividing the surface area of the floor by the number of man-hours needed to complete its resurfacing.

The surface area of the fifth floor, like the sixth, seventh, etc., is just under 100 square feet. The stairwell, elevators, and thirty six support columns further reduce the surface area of the floor -- but for present purposes, the round figure of 100 square feet is adequate to illustrate glacial pace of the floor-laying crew.

Assuming a 40-hour work week for each member of the crew, which consisted of a minimum of four men, and assuming the median estimate of four weeks, as stated by Arce and Williams (the others never said), this project required 640 man-hours to cover 100 square feet of the fifth floor with plywood. This works out to 25 square feet per week; reduced further, the four-man (minimum) crew required a full eight-hour day to lay five square feet of plywood on the floor. At this rate, the crew completed no more than $2\frac{1}{2}$ square feet on the sixth floor the morning of November 22.

Of course, it is possible that the slowness of these workers was due to a desire to do a professional job. Precise measurements and careful planning would naturally slow the rate of progress, especially for workers who normally did other kinds of work (all of the reported crew members were order-fillers, like Oswald, and some did other "odd jobs"). However, the

* It should be noted that Oswald, Buell Wesley Frazier, and perhaps some of the "mystery" workers were hired in October, suggesting that Arce's claim of a labor shortage at that time is closer to the truth. However, it is curious that trained order-fillers, rather than the new-hires, were assigned to the floor-laying crew.

fact that the ceilings were not repaired, the walls were not painted, and the floors were not cleared **before** the plywood was laid belies the lack of professionalism and planning on the part of the floor-laying crew. The TSBD management undoubtedly would have done better if they had hired professional carpenters, who could have finished this project in a fraction of the time and at a fraction of the labor cost, with superior results.

The quality of the floor-laying crew's work is perhaps best summarized in the words of Williams, who judged the success of his work by the amount of light that could be seen through cracks in the ceiling of the fifth floor: "Even after the thick new floor that was put over the old floor on the sixth floor, well, you still could see light. And the new floor extended a little beyond the old floor. So therefore I would say that you could see light much more when the old floor was there."(III,176)

* * *

If the Warren Commission had truly sought to "meet its obligations fully... in order to develop any investigative lead relevant to the issue of conspiracy,"(225) they would have taken a closer look at the members of the floor-laying crew. In particular, the Commission should have noted the inconsistencies, the omissions, and the anomalies that permeate the testimony of these and other TSBD employees. Some things they said were incontrovertibly false. The so-called "elevator race" between members of the floor-laying crew, for example, could not have happened as described by the participants -- if only because no two employees gave matching accounts of this race. (see the following discussion of "The Elevators")

An objective inquiry into any conspiracy theory would have necessarily examined the words and actions of all personnel in the TSBD. Questions about membership in one or more of the radical right-wing groups in Dallas,* for example, were germane to any honest inquiry into the most plausible and probable conspiracy scenarios. The possibility that the TSBD was itself a front organization for such groups should have been among the first considerations of the Commission: Did the John Birch Society or Ku Klux Klan hold meetings on the seventh floor? Did "Wanted for Treason" posters or "Welcome to Dallas" greetings adorn the walls of the TSBD on the day of the assassination?

At a minimum, the Commission should have considered the possibility that a "feeble individual" brought weapons into the building that day, and that accomplices later hid them under floorboards covered with boxes of books.

* FBI agent James Hosty, upon learning JFK had been shot, "was dead sure one of those [right-wing] radicals" was responsible. ("Assignment: Oswald", p. 12)