

Kennedy

# After Test-Firing,

By RALPH REPERT

(First of a Two-Part Series.)

**O**N A MAY morning in 1967 the telephone rang in the Towson home of Howard Donahue. It was Bill Fitchett, a hunting buddy, with a strange request. Someone was conducting rifle tests, with hunters and target shooters of varied backgrounds, in an effort to prove something. Could he take the day off and help out? Mr. Donahue, suspecting results of the tests might be used later as evidence in a court case, agreed to participate.

Mr. Donahue is a gunsmith. He owns and operates Donahue's Gun Specialties on Dulaney Valley road in Towson. He has developed patentable additions and modifications for firearms, principally with Remington and Winchester. He has worked on guns for United States Olympic team members. He is called into court occasionally to testify as a certified firearms expert.

Half an hour later Bill Fitchett, with his brother, T. Somerset (Set) Fitchett, another hunting buddy, stopped by. The three drove to the Maryland Lava Company, near Bel Air. There they picked up Joan Dinning, the Fitchetts' brother-in-law, had lunch and headed for the H. P. White Ballistics Laboratory not far away.

This installation has laboratories for incredibly fine testing, plus nearly a hundred acres of partially wooded land with firing ranges. It is the biggest independent ballistics research center in the

## Assassination: A Different View

# Maryland Man Has Doubts about Oswald

country. It conducts performance tests with arms and ammunition for clients ranging from inventors and arms manufacturers to insurance companies and police departments.

Laboratory technicians took the four men to a basement range where the Fitchett brothers and Mr. Donahue fired three sets of three shots each from a 6.5mm Mannlicher-Carcano rifle. None had ever fired a Mannlicher, but Mr. Donahue recognized it as a cheaply produced weapon turned out for the Italian army in World War II. He also recognized it as the rifle make and model Lee Harvey Oswald is said to have fired at President Kennedy in Dallas on November 22, 1963.

Like that rifle, the weapon used was equipped with a four-power scope sight. Bit by bit, Mr. Donahue and his friends were filled in on the test. Many had criticized the Warren Report for its one-assassin theory, claiming it was impossible to fire the Mannlicher-Carcano three times in the 6.5 seconds the assassin is thought to have had to fire at the President. The Columbia Broadcasting System, in a televised testing program later to be narrated principally by Walter Cronkite, was trying either to prove or disprove the claim.

Like the Oswald rifle, the test weapon was equipped with a makeshift sling. The three men were told to fire three series of three shots each at a target about 150 feet away, each series as close as possible to five seconds. Mr. Donahue noticed that the cartridges handed him, although of the same type Oswald had fired, were not new ammunition, but reloads.

He also noticed that some of the range's terminal lights weren't working, leaving the target less visible than he would have liked. And that target itself was

tion similar to that of the .30-caliber 1903 Springfield used by most American draftees in basic training in both World Wars. But its bolt action is much stiffer, even awkward. After a spent shell is ejected by the drawn back bolt, the bolt must be thrust forward with considerable force by the heel of the hand to insert a new shell into the breech.

The offhand approach to the test firing, Mr. Donahue learned, was deliberate. CBS had given none of its test marksmen any more advance notice than necessary, apparently feeling that if any of them had time to practice with the Mannlicher, the test scores would have been meaningless. The marksman also learned they were not to be paid for their time and trouble, regardless of what kind of scores they shot, another CBS measure in the interests of impartiality.

After firing, the men left the basement range and moved to a hilly, heavily wooded spot on the laboratory grounds. Here they found a partial reconstruction of the Dealy Plaza site in Dallas where President Kennedy had been shot. Workmen had constructed a 60-foot wooden tower. Running past, in a route which had been surveyed and staked out to duplicate Elm street in Dallas, was a miniature railroad track. On it was an electrically powered vehicle which could be made to travel at about 11 miles an hour, the speed of the presidential procession as it moved along Elm street on that fateful day. Mounted on the vehicle was a standard FBI rapid-fire training target, the Hlesize silhouette of a man's head and shoulders.

"I could see a lot of planning had gone into the CBS test," Mr. Donahue recalls. "FBI and military marksmen had tested Oswald's rifle. For the Warren Commission

The FBI marksmen also had fired from an elevation of only about 30 feet, CBS was later to explain in its broadcasts—about half the height of the sixth floor of the school book depository from which Oswald allegedly fired.

At the base of the higher tower CBS had built, Mr. Donahue was handed another Mannlicher-Carcano.

"I was giving my full attention to the business at hand. It didn't hit me until later—like a dash of cold water—that I had noticed the serial number on that rifle. Because most military firearms have at least six- or seven-digit serial numbers, this one caught my attention. I remember it as C 2766.

"In all honesty, I must admit my imagination could play tricks on me as readily as with the next man, and it is possible that my subconscious mind is still working overtime on this incident. But in my heart I still feel 100 per cent sure I remember that number correctly. The serial number on the rifle Oswald used, I later ascertained by checking the Warren Report, was C 2766. That weapon is supposed to have been locked up, along with other assassination evidence, in the National Archives."

The day had turned windy and cloudy, and Mr. Donahue felt the tower shudder as wind hit it. At the top level were other members of the test group, three state policemen in uniform, two wearing pistol expert medals, the third with a sharpshooter rating.

"The three of us who comprised the civilian half of the six-man test team represented a varied background. Set Fitchett is an excellent all-around marksman, highly skilled with pistol, rifle and shot-

gun. As a varmint hunter, he is thoroughly familiar with the scope sight.

"His brother Bill [William Wells Fitchett] is an excellent shot with rifle or shotgun, not only a good target marksman but also one of the finest field shots I know.

"As for my own background, I have been a pretty decent marksman since I have been big enough to lift a rifle. Long ago I took the NRA target shooting course in Towson Armory and became an expert small bore rifleman. My principal targets for some years have been clay pigeons. My NRA rating with the caliber gun is expert.

"However, toward the end of World War II I bought a .257 Roberts Full Moon, a target rifle made by Winchester. It is equipped with an eight-power scope, and fires a high-velocity shell similar in many respects to those fired in the case of rifle Oswald had. In long-range varmint hunting, I became proficient enough with the rifle and the special ammunition to kill crows and woodchucks, some of them more than 300 yards away."

Atop the tower, Mr. Donahue found the small area crowded with several other men, plus banks of CBS photographic and recording equipment. He was surprised to note the windmill built as a copy of that in the Texas School Book Depository, was only 14½ inches from the tower. A few packing cases were scattered around, as they had been on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository.

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No matter that, the three men were told that the aim of the test, "ring wasn't being in order to prove accuracy," but merely to let her familiarize themselves with the Mannlicher-Carcano.

It requires a familiarity. It is a six-shot rifle which operates with a bolt ac-

more advance notice than necessary, apparently feeling that if any of them had time to practice with the Mannlicher, the test scores would have been meaningless. The marksman also learned they were not to be paid for their time and trouble, regardless of what kind of scores they shot, another CBS measure in the interests of impartiality.

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"I could see a lot of planning had gone into the CBS test," Mr. Donahue recalls. "FBI and military marksmen had tested Oswald's rifle for the Warren Commission's fact finding on the rifle's capabilities. The questions at hand had dealt with how the rifle would perform against a moving target. But the FBI had done its test-firing at stationary targets. It did not explain why."

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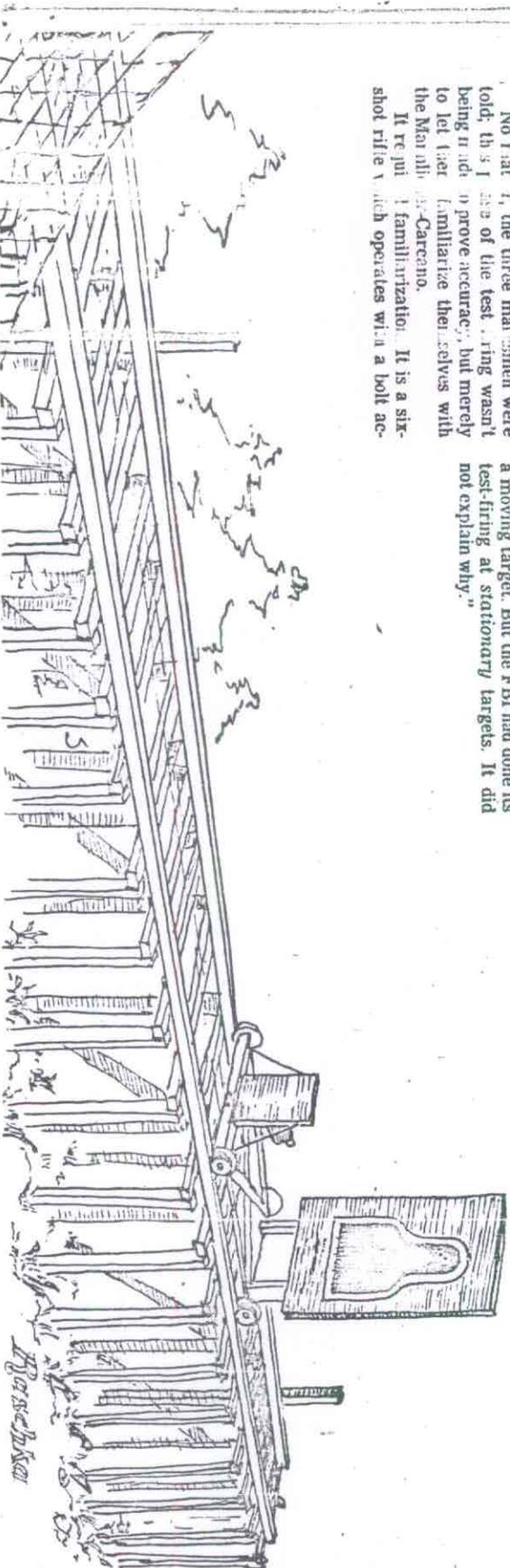
guns. I have hunted, my principal species targets for some years have been clay pigeons. My NRA rating with the scattergun is expert.

"However, toward the end of World War II I bought a 257 Roberts Bullgun, a target rifle made by Winchester. It is equipped with an eight-power scope, and fires a high-velocity shell similar in many respects to those fired in the type of rifle Oswald had. In long-range varmint hunting, I became proficient enough with the rifle and the special ammunition to kill crows and woodchucks, sometimes more than 300 yards away."

Atop the tower, Mr. Donahue found the small area crowded with seven other men, plus banks of CBS photographic and recording equipment. He was surprised to note the windowsill, built as a copy of that in the Texas School Book Depository, was only 14½ inches from the floor. A few packing cases were scattered around, as they had been on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository.

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movement. Along with the other marksmen, he was told he could fire in any position he chose, and could rig up any kind of a rifle rest he liked with the scattered car-

tons.  
"The police officers fired first, from various positions. Some moved the boxes around to use as rifle rests. Everybody had a lot of trouble stabilizing the rifle. The bolt action was so clumsy that after a man squeezed off a shot, ejected the empty cartridge, and rammed in a new one with that stiff bolt mechanism, his rifle remained nowhere near on-target, and he had to find the target in his scope sight and aim all over again."

Firing was further complicated because time was such an important factor. As the silhouette target moved at 11 miles an hour it passed two stakes. The first represented the first instant and spot in which Oswald would have had a possible shot at the President. The second marked the position of the presidential car when the Zapruder films and other evidence had shown that the last shot was fired.

Test marksmen were not allowed to fire until the vehicle passed the first stake, and shots squeezed off after it passed the second stake were not recorded in the elaborate set up of cameras, timing devices and other measuring instruments.

As the test proceeded rain began to fall, the wind rose and the lower swayed with each gust.  
"When it came my turn to fire, I decided on the position Oswald might have chosen," Mr. Donahue recalls, "because we were about the same size. Oswald was 5-9 and weighed 169 pounds. I am an inch shorter and, at the time of the test, 5 pounds heavier."

Mr. Donahue didn't consider firing from a standing position. Oswald couldn't have, for only the lower part of the window from which he is said to have fired had been open. Mr. Donahue felt it would have been nearly impossible, anyhow, for

any man in that position to operate a bolt properly for accurate and rapid firing.

The 14 1/2-inch height of the window sill ruled out firing from the prone or sitting position—Oswald wasn't tall enough—so Mr. Donahue chose his own variation of the kneeling position.

Actually, it was more of a squat, with his left leg bent under him, his right knee bent, his buttock resting on the heel of his right foot. It is a position he had earlier found comfortable and effective in field shooting.

He twined the rifle sling around his left arm in an arrangement known as the hasty sling.

Due to a stuck bolt, Mr. Donahue got off only one shot in his first series. ("It's hard for me to believe Oswald was a professional hit man, as many people say he was. I can't imagine a real pro trying to do a job with a weapon as cheap, shoddy and unreliable as that Mannlicher.") Mr. Donahue says he was still working the bolt imperfectly in his second series and he got off only two shots. Both, however, were hits. They were recorded by a motion picture camera mounted on the carriage of the moving target.

"In my third series of three, I fired the split-second the target passed the first stake. With my right hand I hit the bolt handle to eject. It was stuck again. Realizing how little time I had, I hit the bolt with all the force possible, ejecting the empty. I felt more than half my time had passed when I slammed the bolt forward to insert the second round, picked up the target in the cross hairs, and fired.

"Even while the rifle was in its slight recoil, I brought up my right hand, hit the bolt to eject, slammed it forward to load, picked up the target, and squeezed off my final shot.

"By the time I ejected the last shell, took off the sling and stood up, the target had been returned and was being examined. My three shots were hits, within a 3-

inch circle in the central head area. I heard a technician at the base of the tower call out: 'We've got a good one! Four-point-eight seconds from first to last shot!'"

A second timing device clocked the three shots at 5.2 seconds. But at even the slower reading, Mr. Donahue had supported the Warren Report's indication that one assassin could have fired three shots from a Mannlicher-Carcano within 6.5 seconds. He was not informed until several days later that, out of scores of test firings which had been made in the three previous years by CBS, his performance with the Mannlicher-Carcano was the only one which equaled or excelled that attributed to Lee Harvey Oswald.

CBS televised its test findings the following month during a widely heralded news inquiry. "The Warren Report," which began with an hour of commentary from 10 to 11 P.M. on Sunday, June 25, and continued with additional hour-long segments on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday.

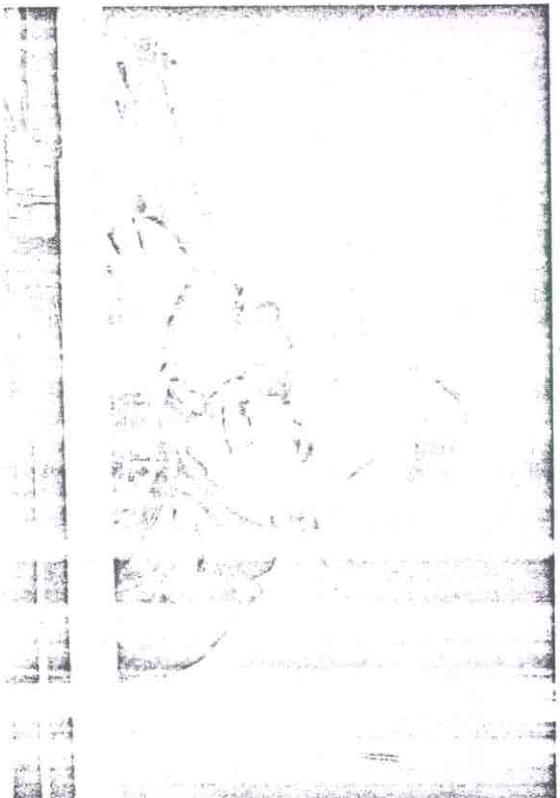
Walter Cronkite, the prime-time commentator, stated as the opinion of CBS News that "the role of the FBI as well as the Secret Service, both in the assassination and its aftermath, has been less than glorious," and said performance of the two agencies had weakened the credibility of the Warren Report.

CBS had concluded, Mr. Cronkite said, that Lee Harvey Oswald should be identified as Kennedy, but in the following report he pointed out "... we drew the line between Oswald as a killer, and Oswald as the killer."

The commentator also noted that "although the Warren Commission has full power to conduct its own investigation, it permitted the FBI and CIA to investigate themselves—each to assist a permanent shadow on the assassination."

It was his sense of having contributed a service that wretched Mr. DeLoach's interest in the assassination. He brought and read a condemnation of the Warren Report,

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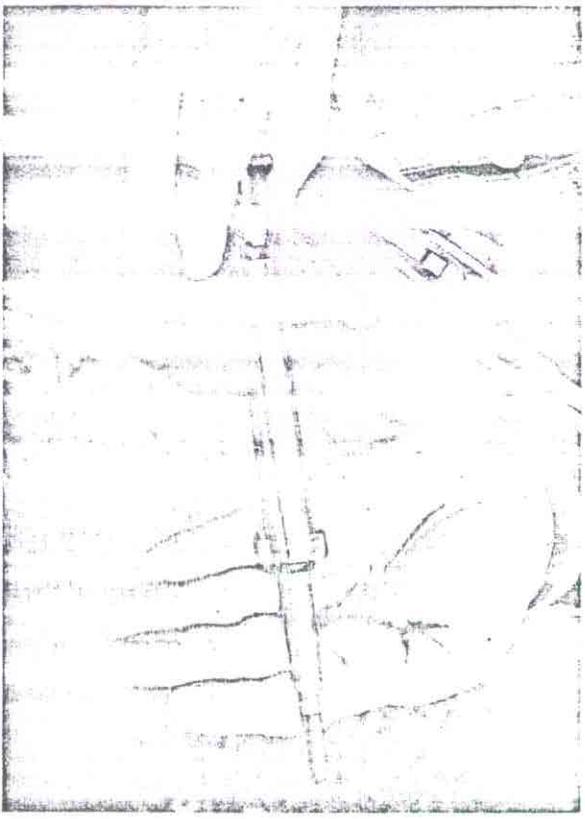
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service that whetted Mr. Donahue's interest in the assassination. He bought and read a condensation of the Warren Report, Wednesday.

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The force needed to push a cartridge into a Mannlicher-Carcano, the type gun Oswald is said to have used, sometimes dents the cartridge as it did this one (attached to a disintegrating bolt) at point indicated by Howard Donahue's thumb. This cartridge came from the same lot as the Oswald cartridges.



Mr. Donahue, holding a Mannlicher-Carcano, demonstrates the position he used during a test-firing conducted in Maryland in an effort to prove or disprove the Warren Report contention that three shots could be fired from a weapon of this type in 6.5 seconds or less.

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and later began reading different books critical of the report.

He read "Whitewash," written by a former OSS intelligence analyst turned chicken farmer; "Rush to Judgment," by Mark Lane, an attorney and former New York state assemblyman; "Six Seconds in Dallas," by Josiah Thompson, a professor of philosophy; books by newspapermen, law enforcement agents and others.

He found nothing to change his opinion of the Warren Report, but he did conclude that most of the authors criticizing it had little knowledge of ballistics and capabilities of weapons.

Too many, Mr. Donahue felt, had accepted carelessly, broad and generalized descriptive terms, and based their arguments on them. He resented seeing the term "pin-point accuracy" mentioned in connection with Lee Harvey Oswald. "Out of the two or three or however many shots he is supposed to have gotten off [the Warren Report indicates there were three] one missed the presidential limousine.

"Another fallacy, widely accepted once it was reported, was that the Mannlicher-Carcano requires a minimum of 2.3 seconds for bolt action between shots. In my best series of three in the CBS test, I got off my last two shots in less than two seconds.

"Proper technique is the answer. Robert Frazier, of the FBI, had claimed the 2.3-second limitations of the Mannlicher-Carcano after firing the weapon Oswald had used.

"Later, in a magazine article, I saw a picture of Mr. Frazier presumably posing

to show how he had fired the rifle, and he was being very wrong about it. He had a box for a rifle rest and was not using a sling. These two factors alone would rule him out as a competent rapid-fire and accurate marksman.

"But the most glaring error was the way Mr. Frazier was shown manipulating the bolt. As I mentioned, the Mannlicher-Carcano bolt is a stiff, awkward affair. Moving it back and forth to eject an empty shell and reload requires effort, so much so that with the palm of his hand the marksman must hit the bolt forcibly. In both the forward and backward strokes. There isn't enough time between shots for the most competent marksman to close his hand, so he leaves it open.

"I examined the picture with disbelief. Frazier was grasping the bolt with his thumb and fingers, as you would hold the handle of a teacup."

Later Mr. Donahue read in Thomas G. Buchanan's book "Who Killed Kennedy?":

"It is doubtful if a single man exists who could have fired this weapon with the skill required [in the time required]. But if the feat is possible, it is, in the opinion of the experts, a superlative performance which requires one of the world's best marksmen...."

Although he would have enjoyed being labeled "one of the world's best marksmen," Mr. Donahue wrote off that incorrect phase of Mr. Buchanan's explanation, and others like it, as hogwash. The irritation whetted his curiosity further, and he began accumulating more assassination records.

Another irritation was the widely circulated description of the Mannlicher-Carcano cartridge, which fit both President Kennedy and Governor Connally, as a low to-medium-powered military cartridge which could not possibly have penetrated to men.

"The fact is," Mr. Donahue says, "that the cartridge is extremely powerful. Its caliber is .24. Its long, heavy, 110-grain bullet leaves the rifle muzzle at 2,344 feet per second. It was designed to penetrate 14 inches in a 4-inch-thick African big game hunter, has used a 60-grain Mannlicher—with ammunition that is similar to that of Oswald's rifle—kill scores of elephants with single head shots. And still there are so-called experts who claim the cartridge fired by Oswald hadn't the power to penetrate two living men."

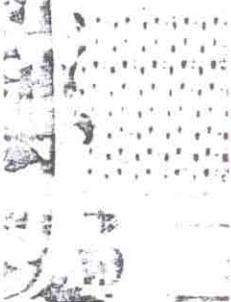
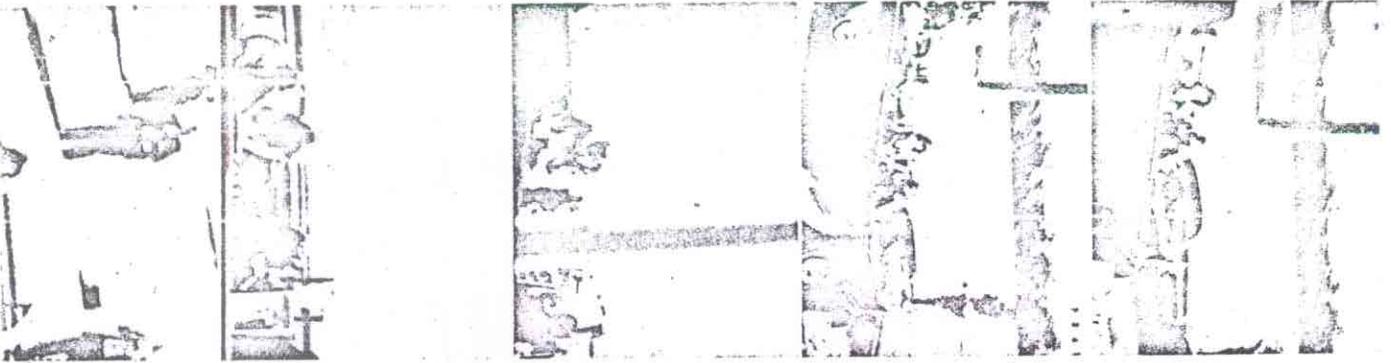
In his nine-year study Mr. Donahue has sought not to discredit the Warren Report, but to support it. He still believes the report to have been put together honestly on the basis of the information given to the commission. He believes, however, that its members did not have evidence which would have cleared the report.

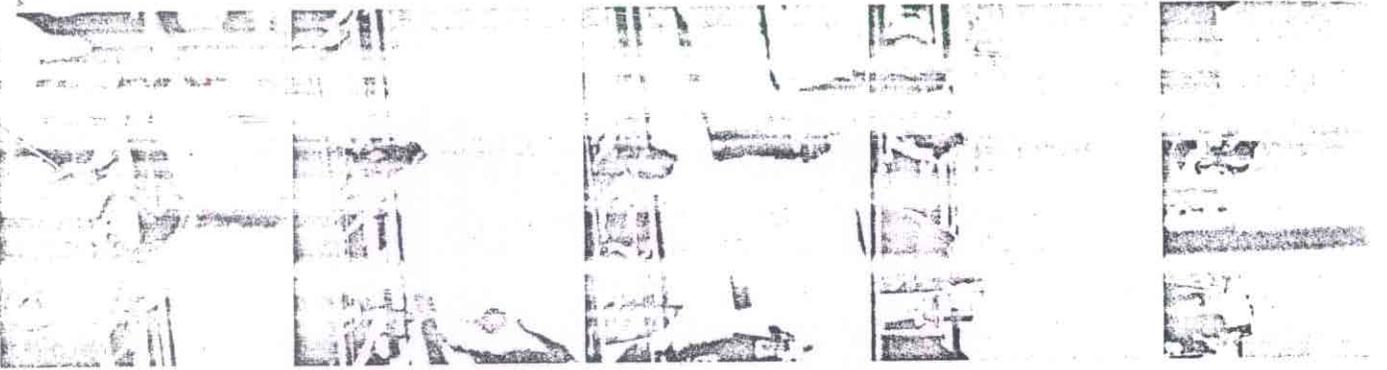
Mr. Donahue believes too, that no premeditated murder was committed in Dealey Plaza in Dallas on November 22, 1963.

He believes that, but for a freakish, once-in-a-million turn of events, John F. Kennedy might be alive today, with Lee Harvey Oswald serving a prison sentence for his attempted murder.

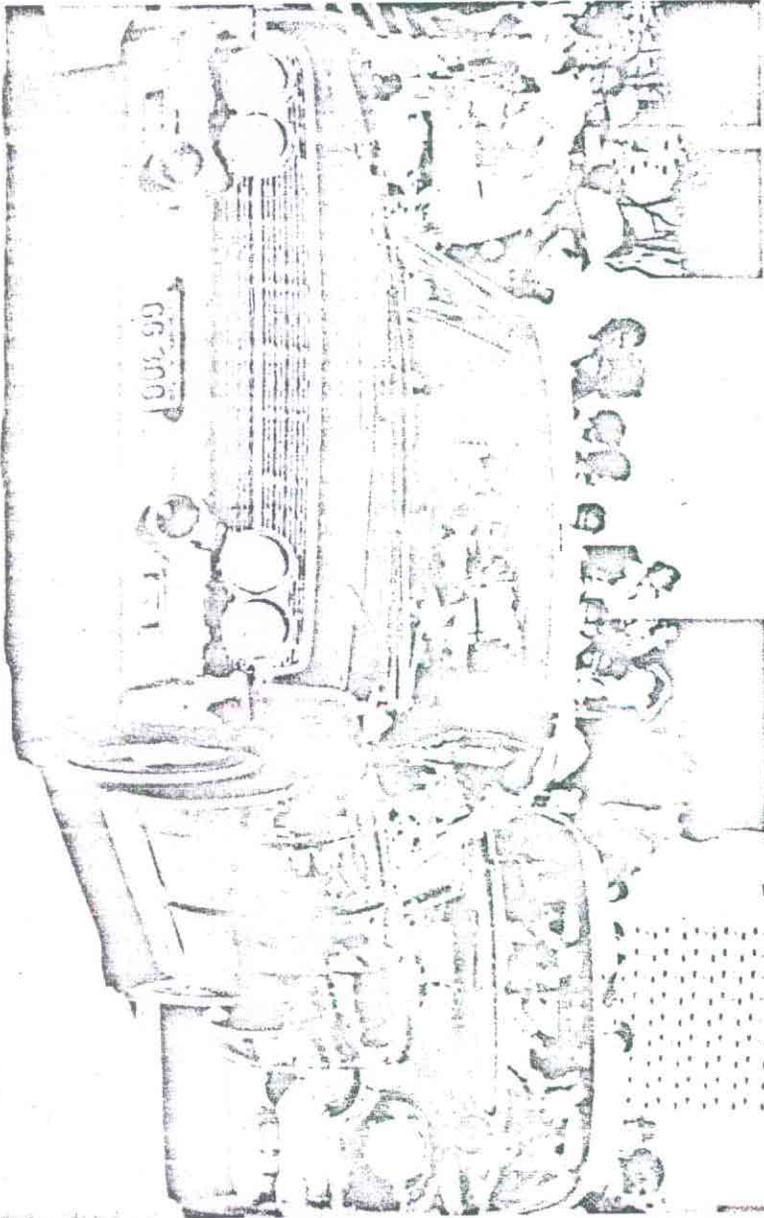
And he believes he knows how President Kennedy was killed.

To be continued next week.





Two Secret Service men, and a few people in the crowd, turn their attention from the motorcade and look searchingly an instant after one shot was fired during the assassination of President Kennedy, who was in the car in the foreground. Left, the assassination as recorded on motion picture film, with the President lurching forward in frame three.



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