

CHAPTER 33

Film Flam

Now that we know from this most eminent of assassination scholars, as he without feigning false modesty describes himself; the man who but for the conspiracy against him would have, again his words, broken the case wide open, that the assassination pictures were all faked, with Bronson's as one example; the man whose unequalled work and experience tells him that the FBI had no motive for lying and does not lie; and the scholar of the most incisive and all-encompassing understanding knows that the FBI's rejection of a picture actually showing the President being killed as worthless reflects its investigatory good judgement, what other proofs does he offer that all the assassination film was faked or altered or somehow made into hoaxes to divert all other scholars?

As we have already seen, Livingstone's section on Zapruder and his film (pages 319-336) begin with a more modest Livingstone inaccuracy, that Zapruder intended to film the motorcade when in fact his secretary chided him for not being prepared to. So, he went home and got his camera. The conclusion of this opening paragraph, as with Bronson, is that Zapruder's "film is questionable, and appears to have been altered."

As he continues with his "A Short History of the Zapruder Film" he says that the selling of a small number of copies made from the copy LIFE magazine gave Garrison for his use in the Shaw trial of 1969 accounts for its "loss of value to LIFE and they sold it back to the Zapruder family for \$1 in 1975."

In this formulation we have a reflection of the scholarship, in this instance not uniquely Livingstone's, that is typical of most working in the field. It is "improving" on fact, on truth, on reality,

what Jim Garrison referred to as his “objectifying” what was real.

The slight sale of those few copies of the Zapruder film made, pretty clearly, for the poor copy LIFE provided to Garrison, with identifying characteristics built into it without much skill or cunning, was entirely irrelevant.

What gave the real impetus to LIFE’s decision to return the film to the Zapruder estate was confrontation with the decision to sue ABC-TV and others for violation of the copyright that LIFE held under the exclusive-rights deal made with Zapruder himself.

Here is what actually happened. As Livingstone knew very well.

Robert Groden, then a young film technician, managed to latch onto as clear a print of that film as there is other than the original. He got in touch with me. He and his wife Chris came here almost every weekend from their then home in Hopelawn, New Jersey, near Perth Amboy. At my suggestion Robert began the work he did with it. I asked him to slow the film down by duplicating each frame 10 times. He did that and that did make it much easier to see details. I then asked him if he could isolate JFK more in what he had. He said he could and he did, enlarging the tiny fraction of what was so tiny on the tiny film to begin with, the part that was JFK. That, too, helped understand what the film captured and reflects. Then he went off and did other enlargings that I think had no value.

During those many weekends Robert and Chris spent with us, when he and I studied his work projected on a screen in our basement, we developed a friendship that lasted until his got too big for him and his practices grew shady. Whether or not their first-born, Robert, was conceived in our home the Grodens asked my wife and me to be his godparents. We were happy to be that. We were even more pleased when Robert turned out to be the most pleasant of infants, a quality he preserved as he grew.

It was when Groden offered the use of his exceptionally clear print of the Zapruder film to

Geraldo Rivera, who then had a popular show of titillation on the ABC-TV network, that the Zapruder film excited the nation and confronted LIFE with deciding whether or not to do something about the unquestioned violation of its exclusive rights to the Zapruder film.

Groden and others then started showing the film to Members of the Congress. That more than anything else led to the creation of what I refer to as the House Assassins Committee. It really stirred the Members and their staffs, most of all because of the clarity with which the President's head snaps backward at the time of the fatal shot when the Warren Report says he was hit from the back, not from the front.

It was the resolution offered by Congressman Thomas Downing of Virginia that led to the creation of that committee. I was involved in that, in conferences with his staff at our home and in his office and in other ways. It was in his office that I suggested changes in the resolution they had drafted that were incorporated in it.

Groden thus became a celebrity. Livingstone was not the first to make him coauthor of a book for which he wrote almost nothing at all. It was his pictures those who wrote those books were interested in, and in using his name that was so intimately tied in with the Zapruder film.

Livingstone himself told me that Groden did not give him more than eight pages of writing for his High Trash, his first book.

And, as is not uncommon in the field, they had a falling out that resulted in Groden suing Livingstone.

It was not the minuscule sales of pirated poor copies of the poor copy of the film that LIFE gave Garrison and Garrison showed over and over again during his unsuccessful prosecution of Clay Shaw that led to LIFE's decision to revert the rights to the film.

As Livingstone knew. But he also wanted to “objectify” Groden. As he did and as what I quote above from his killing of the truth with his knowingly false account in his personal Killing the Truth. His truth-killing account of the history of the Zapruder film had nothing at all to do with the reversion of the rights to it by LIFE.

In fact, LIFE returned the film to avoid the controversies and possible litigation over unauthorized uses and to end the charge that it was suppressing evidence. Contrary to Livingstone’s opinion that “the film had fallen into the public domain” it has in all probability earned more money for Zapruder’s heirs since the rights were reverted to it than it made for LIFE and that is only because the rights were never surrendered and they did not lapse. Otherwise nobody would be paying a cent to the Zapruder family to be able to use it. And ever so many more did pay to use it in movies and on TV.

At the bottom of this very first page of this so-called history of the film there is again the question, does he have the Commission’s 26 volumes of published evidence, and if he does, has he used them? Or understood them?

“Not even the members of the Warren Commission saw it,” he says.

In fact, the evening of February 25, 1964, an evening showing being less of a problem for the very active Members, LIFE sent the then assistant chief of its photo lab, Herbert Orth, to the Commission’s offices for that showing (5H138).

Livingstone may have his own special dictionary as well as his pet dislikes when he says that in his November 1967 book, Six Seconds in Dallas, Josiah Thompson “was the first to publish significant commentary on the film.” Earlier “commentary” is in my first two books that, among other things, forced the Zapruder camera into the Archives and the previously withheld frames into public access as well as the admission from LIFE that some of the key frames of the original no longer exist appears not

to be “significant” to Livingstone.

His history gets a bit convoluted when his first reference to frames that can be projected is, “prior to the [1975] transfer of the original back to Zapruder, LIFE made color transparencies or slides [they are not identical] from the original frames of the film and placed these as a gift in the National Archives” (pages 321-2).

In fact, LIFE made for the Commission the slides it published and used in its own work as a result of that February 25 showing of the film. What he refers to is apparently an additional set of slides or of color transparencies.

That he may be referring to transparencies may be indicated by his comment that in going to the Archives to see them, “Don’t try to bring your own pencil or paper, either” (page 322).

Here we have Livingstone, who complains that the film was doctored, complaining about the Archives banning from the study of prints and transparencies of what can be used to doctor those prints and transparencies. Any mark on any of them from any pen or pencil would alter them.

The restrictions he reports did not exist.

When I studied the slides in 1966 and 1967, I did have my notebook, pen and portable typewriter. I never had any need to touch any slide because they were projected for me and I had the use of both hands in making notes and even measurements on the screen. When I wanted to be able to see the film in slow motion and going backward from time to time I was permitted to bring my 8mm Bolex projector and to operate it myself in examination of the film, with the Archives personnel interested observers.

He quotes a letter from an Archives official stating that “there is not other documentation in the file to indicate what set of slides were made by whom and from what generation copies of the various

copies were made” (page 323). But the previous page identifies as “other” the original slides provided by LIFE in February, 1964. There is no question about them and without question they were made from the original. They are the ones I began to study in the Spring of 1966.

In his accounting of them Livingstone refers to what could not possibly have been that as the “original set,” frames 164 through 486. He says they were numbered by LIFE. I have no knowledge of that but I do of what he refers to as the “reproduction set,” which were not slides at all and in fact are not the “original set” provided by LIFE in 1964. Reproduction was from a set of black and white photographs made from these slides by the FBI Lab’s photo expert, Agent Lyndal L. Shaneyfelt. His testimony on this begins on page 138 of Volume V of the hearings. It is his numbering that is on those slides and the black-and-white version of them published as Exhibit 885 (18H1-80).

What he knows but omits is that nine of the frames were not published and were made available after I complained to the Archives. It is in those nine frames that Livingstone saw that the back of the head was not blown out and because he knew very well that it had been, that being his need for fame and fortune, he decided that the film was faked and that I was conspiring against him.

It took a few days - very few - for him to decide that in telling him what to study in that film when he asked me to so that he would see for himself, as he phoned to tell me he did, that the basis of his earlier work is false - and he thanked me for wising him up in that call - I conspired against him.

Should I not also wonder if he believes that the reason he wrote and published two very large books supposedly on the assassination without ever studying that film which is such basic evidence of the crime was also my conspiring against him?

Ignoring that most basic evidence for all those years is his kind of “scholarship” but because he knows so well that he is never wrong and someone else always is, someone else had to be responsible.

He refers to the “sprocket hole area of the frame” without explaining what that is (page 324) and winds up saying “we did not see any information of great value in the sprocket areas...” (page 325).

The film is moved through the camera and through the projector by gears that engage the holes near the edge of the film. When projected, that area, of at least 20 percent of the film that is exposed, is not seen.

There is in fact significant information in that area. He uses it from my earlier publication of it later. He does not attribute that use to my work, his source. This is the complaint he makes against almost all others.

The Commission’s account of the crime is that the first shot was fired at Frame 210. The official version is that no shot was fired earlier than that. What he says is not of any value is the proof in the part of Frame 202 that is not seen on projection that a shot had been fired by then. This is to say earlier than in the official account. That is not valuable information?

In the official account Oswald is the lone assassin and he could not have fired a shot before Frame 210. But the official evidence itself proves that there was an earlier shot. That alone proves there had been a conspiracy to kill the President.

That is of no value?

The official solution to the assassination of a President is false and that has no value to him?

What, then, does have value to him?

Well, he feuded with Groden. His next section is on that and is worth neither time nor attention.

He resumes with “The Shooting” on page 329.

He refers there to “blurs” in the film “that came often from Zapruder shaking the camera in

response to a shot, according to the House Committee (see High Treason).” Anent his complaint again, that people take his work and use it as theirs and his practice of that, he knows very well that he read that and much more about it in Whitewash, which dates to a dozen years before that committee was established, and a few more years before he published his first book. What undoubtedly makes this not “significant” commentary as he defines it is that the House committee was not the first to take that from my first book. Even a nobel laureate made a study based on it. “Blur” is his word to suggest origin with him. Until he took that description all others referred to it as a “jiggle,” and not necessarily from shots but from Zapruder’s nervous reaction to them and to what he saw happen to the President. Discussion of that in the first book to bring it to light obviously is not “significant” to him.

He quotes another of his completely dependable experts, Chris Sharrett’s 1992 letter to him saying what they both know is not true, that interpretations of the Zapruder film come from Richard E. Sprague’s 1967 memo on it. My interpretations were first published, as both know, in 1965.

My point in this is not that I mind a bit because I do not. In this and in other items like this I address both his honesty and his knowledge.

Without explaining what it is, another tribute to the editing, and with the same oracle as his quoted sources, he states that, “The Stemmons sign has no relevance to anything.”

Stemmons is the name of an approaching freeway, with an entrance from the street ahead indicated. There was a point at which that sign blocked any view of the President from Zapruder’s lens. The period that “irrelevant” sign blocked view of the President includes Frame 210, the frame at which the Commission says the President was hit by the first bullet fired.

When that “has no real relevance,” what can (page 331)?

He here and later goes into reasons to believe that there was an earlier shot and with fidelity to

his practice, if faithful to little else, the one source he does not refer to is the first of all of them, my 1965 book.

As he continues with his oracles he introduces “Vince Palamara” as one who in the film “sees” what is referred to as “streaks” on the head going to the grassy knoll. The implication is that the streak represents a bullet.

Not only is Oracle Palamara unidentified, he is another of the innumerable non-persons in the index.

Still another follows. This oracle is Anthony Marsh. He, too, not only is not identified, he is so expert, he, too, is banished from the index. Justly so, I add, because his contribution to what is supposed to prove that the Zapruder film, too, was forged is that by his computer “study” he proves that “the President’s head does not move forward at any time at the time of the fatal shot (frame 313).”

This goes to show what can be done with computers when they are substituted for both human vision and human common sense.

If one wants to know whether the President’s head does move forward at that point all one need do is what I did, use my unaided eyes on the film. At the time of the fatal shot it is obvious that the head makes an abrupt, violent move forward only to immediately move with even more violence backward. This forward motion is so obvious it can be seen, as many others and I first saw it, in the Commission’s printed slides in Exhibit 885. When this is so clear to the unaided eye, what is the purpose of using a computer other than to prove that up is down, in is out, and forward is not forward.

This “enhancement” is followed by the claim that there is a difference between “a large hole in Kennedy’s head” as seen in the film as projected and as seen on transparencies, his building of a case for faking the film. “But (emphasis in the writing) it is not visible in each set of slides in the National

Archives” (page 334).

One of those sets of slides, the only one when I studied the film at length and in detail, is without question made from the original film. What is on the original film is on it. It is what others and I studied, the slides and the prints made from the slides that even as published are rather clear. My recollections after 29 years is that the hole in the side of the head was gruesomely visible in those slides. What they are being compared with is properly unidentified. More safely in any event. If what he says is by any chance true.

On page 335 he gets into his conjectures that become instant proof in his own mind, “Frame 337 may show a hole in the back of the head.” It does not. In anticipation of just this kind of outrageous indecency from him I have a color print of it. The back of the head is not only intact, there isn’t even a trace of blood on it or on the shirt collar. Once he decided that the film was forged and I was conspiring against him, I had to get that print for my own protection.

To be certain without question is one of the reasons I wanted to study this and other parts of the Zapruder film as could not be done on projection from a booth. My Bolex was safe to use even on action stopping. It did not burn the film. I also could use it slow motion. Then when I forced the unpublished nine slides, beginning with 335, into the trays of the slides for study I examined that when it was blown up to the full width of a four-foot screen.

The back of the head is intact!

No blood is visible on it or on the shirt collar!

I warned Livingstone in advance that he would not like what he saw and three weeks later he phoned to tell me I was correct, that he had been wrong, the back of the head is intact, and that he appreciated my correcting him.

It did not take much contemplation to know that his first book is based on the canard that did not originate with him, that the autopsy film had been faked. And that autopsy film, too, shows the back of the head intact. It thus could not be faked film.

And with the basis of his two books proven wrong, what remained for Livingstone and the book he was then working on?

Confronting this, consciously or otherwise, is what convinced him that he is as always correct and what contradicts what says is faked. Even if it was impossible to fake, it was somehow faked anyway. (He never once says where, when, how or by whom any of the film was faked. It was just faked because he says it was faked.)

And that is how I, so feeble I am - prohibited lifting more than 15 pounds- with skin so friable the corner of his book peeled the outer layer of my forearm skin back more than an inch on contact, when it has been unsafe for me to drive out of Frederick since 1977 and I haven't, and when I then could and only infrequently and with care and slowly, use the stairs to our basement where all my FOIA records are, became first a conspirator against him and then the "leader" of that "gang" of Texans with whom my contact of any kind for more than two decades ranges from non-existent to rare.

And it was never with regard to him until he began his virulent campaign against us. Then, in self-protection, I collected what I could by asking for it openly and by mail.

He lets it all out at this point (page 335). Because of his hokuspokus with that unidentified non-slide of the Zapruder film does not show what he refers to as a "blob" it "has been forged."

His last paragraph allegedly on the Zapruder film begins with the comment that is entirely unexplained about "the Betzner photograph." He says "the Betzner photograph was taken at Z186, Willis at 202" (page 336). Hugh Betzner, then a young man, took three still pictures of the motorcade

after it had passed him when he was on the south side of Elm Street.

Here Livingstone then says, “Willis at Z 202.” He has no source on this, naturally, he who complains about others using his work as their own. That is uniquely my work, second book, dating to 1966.

Phil Willis took many pictures with his Argus C3 35mm camera. He selected ten of them, or perhaps it was a dozen, had them packed in transparent plastic that let the package of them lie flat, and sold them. They are also in the Commission’s evidence. This eminent and careful scholar, meticulous and careful as he is, is not referring to all of them when he says “Willis.” He also is not referring to the set of them that Willis sold. He is referring only to the fifth of the set Willis sells, the set in evidence. It and Betzner’s are quite similar, showing close to the same view.

But how does Livingstone know that it coincided with Frame 202? The Commission’s version is that it coincides with Frame 210 or one a tiny fraction of a second later.

There is only one source for Willis having taken his fifth slide at frame 202.

That is Whitewash II. My book. Can Livingstone use the book of a conspirator against him as a source?

Remember that when he and his mavens who are experts on all things to him made their study of those slides, which do include the film not seen on projection, the exposed film in the sprocket-hole area, he said, as quoted earlier, “we did not see any information of great value in the sprocket area” (page 325).

At one and the same time he says there is nothing of any “great value” there and simultaneously what Whitewash II is specific in saying is visible only in that sprocket-hole film! It is so visible I was able to see it in the published black-and-whites despite the losses in clarity in the making of the black-

and-white copies from color and then the greater loss of clarity in the printing process.

Not of any “great value” when it proves the Commission was wrong in stating that the first shot was not fired until later, at Frame 210, when Willis snapped his picture before he was ready when frightened by that shot? There is universal agreement on that, assassination nuts not included in “universal.”

Not of any “great value” when if the Commission is correct in saying that it could imagine contorting the President’s body and that of Texas Governor John B. Connally so that in its magical career that magic bullet could have inflicted all the seven non-fatal wounds both suffered, this alone provided that this fabulous history could not be attributed to that bullet at any other second?

And when that is the sina qua non of the official “solution” to the crime?

When proving that the Commission is wrong in its basic single-bullet theory is not important, and when this proves that there had been a conspiracy that is not important either, what in the world can possibly be important?

This takes us back to his very first page, to his rare wisdom and understanding denied mere mortals, to where from his imagined Olympus he speaks of we few mortals he misuses his book contract to malign. He there says of us about this very item of evidence that is not of any real importance to him, “they have misled all of us and that the real evidence of conspiracy does not lie in criticism (sic) of the magic bullet theory or most if not all of what they have put forward.”

When proving that there had been a conspiracy (and disproving the single-bullet theory is not merely arguing about it) does not mean anything except that he has been misled, as he put it, what can mean anything or does to him?

It is, as I said earlier, to him only what is not real is real and only what is real is what he says is

not real.

He winds this chapter down with what one of his mavens sees in some amateur film that is not there to be seen, without any knowledge about what he talks about anyway. His subhead is “The Dallas Cinema Associates Film” (pages 337-8). An account of this group is in my 1967 book, Photographic Whitewash. One of those who brought them all together got that idea, she would collect all those amateur movie photographers who had taken motorcade movies. After Mrs. Irving (Anita) Gewirtz got them started as the Dallas Cinema Associates they got Rudolf Viktor (Rudy) Brenk to make a single movie of it they could sell. He did. It was schmalz in which what evidence it held was outtakes. They sold the schmalz to Hollywood and that is how a print was given to the Archives. When I saw it there I asked my friend Richard E. Sprague, then an oft-traveled man in his work, to see when he was in Dallas if he could rescue those outtakes. He did rescue quite a few that do have some value. This is not the place for that, Livingstone not claiming that those outtakes, too, were forged. If he even knew about them.

But it is the place to say once again that his ignorance of what he writes about is flagrant to anyone who knows anything about the established fact. So is his dishonesty.

He takes a few more swipes at Groden but that is not worth any time or attention.

And so we have seen how this greatest of all experts, the man who was going to break the case open in a few weeks in 1992, has proven to the world that Zapruder’s and all other assassination film was forged, that there are two sets of it and of all the other evidence.

But he has not broken the case open.

With this collection of “evidence” and “proofs” he could not even break into Macy’s nor Gimble’s when all their doors were open!

And yet with it he has a considerable following and all the air time he could use with his first two books.

He gives rationality and reason bad names.

While saying that all others misled him!