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Kilduff Adds to Confusion About Assassination

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Malcolm Kilduff, the former White House aide who describes the published criticisms of the Warren Commission report of President Kennedy's assassination as "pure garbage," has succeeded in adding to the confusion that already exists.

Kilduff, who was riding four cars behind the President on the fateful day, is very sure of two things:

The Warren Commission was right in its conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald was the only assassin involved.

But the Warren Commission was wrong in concluding that Texas Gov. John B. Connally was wounded by the same bullet that struck Kennedy in the back of the neck.

Kilduff bases the second conclusion on the fact that he, and reporters in the car with

him, heard three distinct shots fired from the book depository where Oswald was stationed. After the first shot he recalls that Merriman Smith of the United Press International asked, "What was that?" and that he replied, "It sounded to me like a firecracker."

The second shot, according to Kilduff, came at least 5 seconds after the first. The third, which killed Kennedy, followed after a shorter interval.

This testimony, which incidentally was never heard by the Warren Commission, throws at least some doubt on a number of assumptions on which the commission's findings were based.

Among these, the major assumption has been that Kennedy and Connally were both wounded in a very short

interval. Indeed, the commission's single-bullet theory is based on the premise that it would have been impossible for Oswald to fire two shots in the time elapsed. Most experts have held that acceptance of a two-bullet theory would mean accepting the existence of a second assassin.

This generally accepted timing of the shooting depends primarily on a film of the assassination made by an amateur photographer named Abraham Zapruder. The apparently uninterrupted sequence of frames indicates a maximum of 1.3 seconds between the wounding of the two men. Oswald's rifle, in the hands of an expert, required 2.3 seconds between shots.

Kilduff, in disputing this physical evidence, holds that the actual interval between

the first and second shots was actually much longer than the film indicates. Quite long enough, in fact, for Oswald to have recharged his gun and fired them both himself. If he is right, the current speculation about the possibility of a second assassin would carry very little weight.

Nor is the photographic evidence in itself necessarily conclusive. The somewhat blurred series of pictures does not entirely rule out the possibility that Zapruder's finger slipped or that for one reason or another a part of the actual sequence is missing.

It can well be argued, of course, that the recollections of one more witness add very little to the volumes of conflicting testimony, theorizing and speculation that have already accumulated around the assassination. It does, however, provide a strong hint of the chaos that would be created if the advice of the critics were followed and a new inquiry into the case were held.

Despite all of the questions which have been raised, no solid new evidence has been produced so far to fault the basic findings of the original investigation. Nor is it likely that a new investigation opened three years after the event would succeed in resolving any of the controversy which has accumulated around the Warren Commission report.

Sen. Richard B. Russell, D-Ga., who served on the commission, says the problem is not one of raising questions but finding answers. The answers we have now may never be convincing to everybody. But they are likely to remain the best available over the course of time.