

The mystery of the mortal wound: Kennedy, still clutching at his throat wound, is hit with explosive force from behind . . .

Dallas: New Questions and Answers

CHEAP SHOT
They are a breed apart—an odd-lot assortment of skeptics and ideologues, rationalists and fantasists who have never believed that Lee Harvey Oswald alone killed John F. Kennedy and have invested up to a dozen years of their lives in trying to disprove it. They flowered first in the middle '60s, then fell into discouraged retreat with the collapse of former New Orleans D.A. Jim Garrison's jerry-built attempt to prove their case in court. But the true disbelievers are back now, more numerous and insistent than ever, with their three-Oswald and four-assassin scenarios and their dizzying egresses of every scrap of paper and every frame of film on the JFK shelves in the National Archives. And this time, in a nation still traumatized by the crimes and lies of Watergate, they have found their widest audience yet for their demand that the inquest be reopened.

Their doubts, reasonable or not, have inspired at least two dozen nonfiction books, four novels, three feature films, several national conferences and a recent freshet of articles in journals ranging from Penthouse to Rolling Stone. A bootleg copy of the famed Zapruder home movie of the assassination—blood, brain fragments and all—has played twice this spring on network TV and numberless times to smaller audiences around the nation. A group of Old New Leftists in Cambridge, Mass., embraced

the cause and booked 250 campus lectures (at \$780 each) in a single year. A Warren commission staff alumnus, who still believes that Oswald acted alone, has urged a review of the case—and now Texas's U.S. Rep. Henry Gonzalez has formally proposed that Congress undertake the rehearing.

The Warren verdict is indeed threaded through with unanswered questions and unresolved anomalies. What its detractors offer in its place is one or another alternative hypothesis far tidier than the commission's one-man, one-gun analysis. But their sort of tidiness has its own vices. Supposition is elevated into fact; accident becomes criminal design; evidence is accepted on faith if it fits a conspiracy theory and rejected as manufactured if it does not. The doubters, moreover, have never harmonized their own doubts about whether or not Oswald was involved at all, or how many assassins fired how many shots, or who might have put them up to it—the CIA, or the Mafia, or the Communists, or Texas oil, or some other party or parties unknown.*

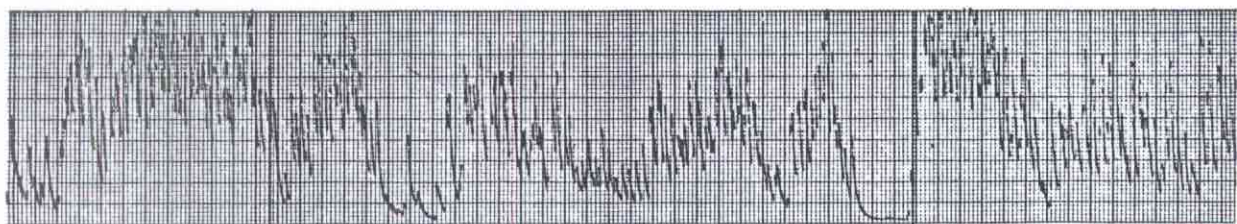
Still, amid the mélange of fact and guess, reason and imagination, there are provocative questions:

DID OSWALD DO IT?

The Voice Test: "I didn't shoot anybody, no sir," Oswald told an interviewer at Dallas police headquarters, and many

doubters have always chosen to believe him. Now they have been joined by a sometime CIA computer analyst, George O'Toole, who played a tape of Oswald's denial to a Psychological Stress Evaluator—a device that supposedly measures and charts tension in a person's voice—and found none of the bunched-up, hedge-shaped clusters of squiggles that commonly accompany lying. In Penthouse and in a newly published book, "The Assassination Tapes," O'Toole rendered his unambiguous judgment: "Quite clearly, Lee Harvey Oswald was telling the truth."

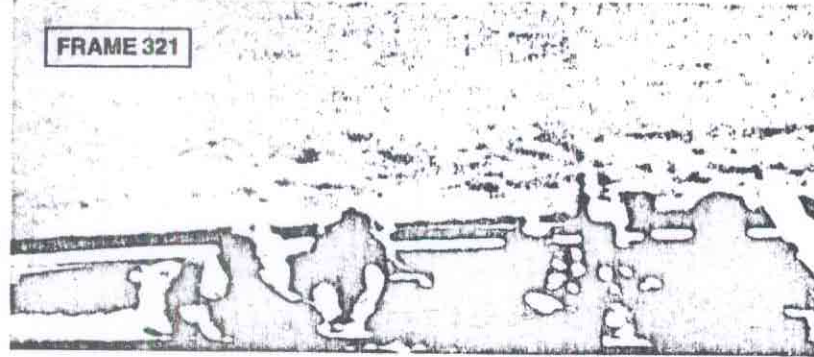
The Flaws: The PSE, while gradually gaining acceptance, remains controversial among experts in lie-detection; neither the FBI nor the CIA uses it, and Dr. Joseph Kubis, a Fordham psychologist who tested it extensively for the Army, came away doubting its validity. There remains, moreover, the powerful circumstantial case that Oswald was involved, alone or not. The only known murder weapon, a 1940 Mannlicher-Carcano rifle, was traced to him and bore his palmprint; the only recovered cartridges and bullet fragments were traced to the rifle; the revolver that killed Dallas police patrolman J.D. Tippit was in Oswald's possession when he was arrested in a movie theater 80 minutes after the assassination. Even some conspiracy theorists concede the case, and David



← I didn't ———— shoot anybody ———— no sir →

Oswald's voice chart: Did the absence of stress signs amid the squiggles prove his innocence of murdering JFK?

* IN SHORT, THEY SHOULD HAVE SOLVED THE CASE!



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... but did a second hit from up front drive him violently backward?

Belin, a Warren staff alumnus now directing the Rockefeller commission inquiry into the CIA, says flatly: "I have no doubt that Oswald killed Kennedy."

WAS THERE A CONSPIRACY?

The Superbullet: The Warren commission's one-man theory rested heavily on the hypothesis that Oswald's first shot struck JFK in the upper back, exited from his throat, tore through then Texas Gov. John Connally's torso and right wrist, and burrowed into his left thigh. To have conceded that the two men were hit by separate shots would have been to acknowledge a second gun; Oswald almost certainly could not have fired his clumsy bolt-action rifle that quickly. Yet the single bullet said to have caused all this damage came away miraculously unscathed. And ongoing studies of the Zapruder film—most recently by Robert Groden, 29, a New York optics expert currently touring with a pirated print—seem to the doubters to show Kennedy and Connally reacting to their wounds a half-second to one and a half seconds apart. The conclusion: they must have been hit by separate guns.

The Flaws: The nearly pristine condition of what critics call Superbullet is indeed hard to explain; the commission's defenders are mostly reduced to arguing that it could have survived intact because it did. But the doubters are stuck with the perplexing question of what *did* become of the bullet that hit Kennedy if it didn't strike Connally as well. And the film is at best ambiguous on the timing of their wounds. To some viewers, Connally seems to go stiff almost simultaneously with Kennedy's first visible reaction, and his right hand flies upward clutching his Stetson—reflexes that might support a single-bullet theory. Connally's major reaction to his wounds does come a half second or so later, when he begins sagging rightward, spins and then slumps heavily to his left. The commission called this a delayed reaction, and subsequent studies by UCLA physicist B.K. Jones tend

to buttress its case. Jones found that Connally's reaction was too exaggerated to be explained by the impact of the bullet; he suggests that Connally was reacting physiologically to his wounds.

The Fatal Wound: With gut-wrenching clarity, Groden's blowups of the Zapruder film show JFK's head snapping forward under the impact of a bullet that blew away one side of his skull; then, a split-second later, his hand and body lurch even more violently up, back and leftward into Jackie's arms. The doubters' theory: that Kennedy was hit by separate shots, one from the rear and one from the front, a single movie frame (or one-eighteenth of a second) apart.

The Flaws: The film itself shows an explosion of blood, brain and bone fragments spraying upward and forward, suggesting a hit from the rear. A second bullet striking Kennedy from up front might have been expected to produce a comparable burst backward, but none is visible. Physicist Jones's studies, moreover, concluded that a double hit would have required a "giant" second bullet with ten times the momentum of the first to drive JFK back and leftward so forcefully. His hypothesis: the movement was a neuromuscular reaction to the damage to Kennedy's brain.

The Mystery Men: The conspiratorialists have long been fascinated by a frame in a second amateur film shot by Orville Nix;

it shows—or so they believe—a figure aiming what could be a rifle over the top of what could be a station wagon on the grassy knoll ahead of the President's motorcade. And Groden, in the best "Blowup" tradition, thinks he has found two and possibly three more assassins in the Zapruder film: one, rifle still in hand, dimly visible through some low-hanging tree branches along the motorcade route, the other—perhaps with backup man—behind a fence on the grassy knoll.

The Flaws: The Nix "assassin," if he exists, could as easily be sighting a camera as a gun; if it is a rifle, he appears to have the wrong arm propped on the car roof. Groden's "gunmen" are too gauzy even to be identified positively as human beings, let alone assassins, and are accordingly regarded as dubious even among some diehard conspiratorialists.

WAS OSWALD A GOVERNMENT AGENT?

The FBI-CIA Connection: The conspiracy literature is shot through with speculation that Oswald was an operative or at least an informer for one or both agencies, which were then heavily involved in trying to penetrate domestic radical groups. The CIA links are largely suppositious, based on some striking oddities in Oswald's record (the ease with which he got a Marine Corps discharge, then defected to Russia, then came home on a government loan) and some thready connections with various people and places thought to be in the CIA's ambit. The FBI story had rather more body: Oswald in fact was carrying the name and phone number of Dallas agent James Hosty in his pocket notebook, and there were rumors—now often quoted as fact—that he was on the bureau payroll as informant number S-179 at \$200 a month.

The Flaws: The CIA connection remains speculative, pending further inquiry by the Rockefeller commission and the two Congressional committees inquiring into the agency's operations. The FBI's Hosty insisted he had contacted Oswald only as a matter of routine surveillance of a returned defector. And the embellishments about his informant status and his payroll number apparently

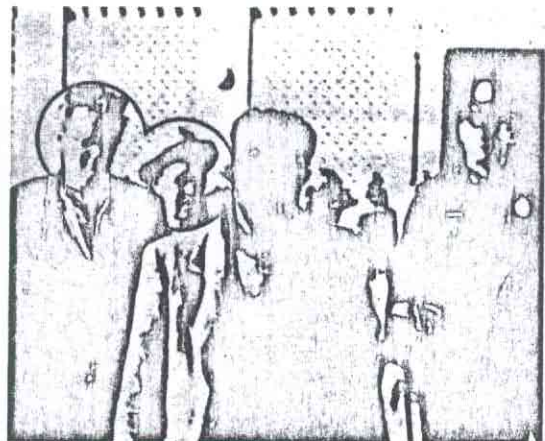
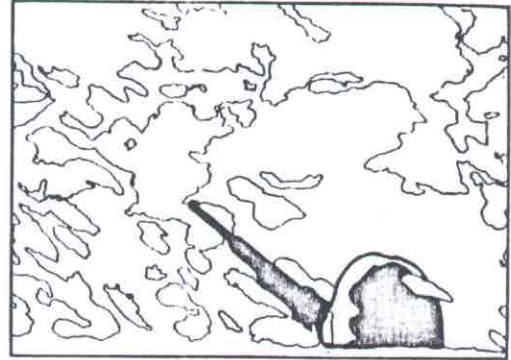
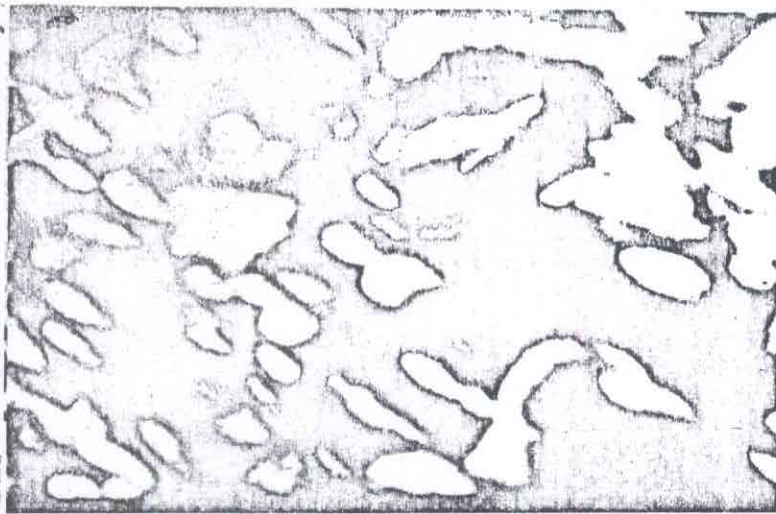


Photo play: Some conspiracy theorists profess to recognize Watergate conspirators Sturgis and Hunt (above) among the three tramps in police custody near the scene of the Kennedy assassination

April 28, 1975

**AS IF WE MUST RESOLVE THIS!



Blowup: Was the shadowy form under the tree leaves the head of an assassin holding a rifle?
 *** TOTAL DISTORTION OF SCOTT.

*** originated in a hoax, hatched in December 1963 by two Texas newsmen and a Dallas assistant D.A. who suspected the bureau of tapping their phones. As one of the reporters, Alonzo Hudkins, recounted it, the three set out to prove their suspicion by staging a conference call, referring to Oswald as an informant and debating what his number was—S-179 or 172. Sure enough, said Hudkins, an agent materialized within a half hour, dropped a few off-the-point questions, then asked casually: "Say, have you heard anything about a secret payroll number Oswald may have had?" Hudkins played dumb, and heard nothing more of the tale until a New York newspaper printed Hoover's denial—before the charge had ever reached print.

The 'Dirty Rumor': The commission's critics maintain that, whatever the merits, it did not pursue the agency connections hard enough, and instead took the FBI and CIA denials at face value. Their exhibit A is a lately surfaced transcript of a closed-door commission meeting in January 1964, at which staff director J. Lee Rankin began unhappily: "We do have a dirty rumor [about Oswald as informant S-179] . . . and it must be wiped out insofar as it is possible to do so by this commission." What follows is a long, unflattering debate in which the commission wobbles indecisively between offending Hoover by mounting its own investigation, or merely accepting his word—even on the advice of former CIA director Allen Dulles that Hoover would probably lie if it were so. They settled on a "marriage" of the two approaches, but critics charge they did precious little independent inquiry.

The Flaws: The "rumor" was an insubstantial one to start with, as the commission staff may have sensed from the first; one of the Texas lawmen who reported it to them, in any event, was the assistant D.A. who had helped make it up. Most accounts of the meeting, moreover, unkindly omit a second sentence from Rankin's opening remarks, in which he admonishes the commission that the country will expect it "to try to find out the facts . . . [so it] can fairly say, 'In our

opinion, he was or was not an employee of any intelligence agency of the United States.'" If the ensuing inquiry did not go much beyond Hoover's flat denial, it did substantially undercut the tale that Oswald drew down \$200 a month. The commission published an exhaustive 100-page anatomy of Oswald's finances over his last seventeen months, during which he earned \$3,655 and pinched every penny of it; it uncovered no evidence that any hidden benefactor was doubling his income under the table.

The No-Oswald Theory: For years, various conspiracy theorists have posited the possibility that there may have been two or even three Oswalds, one the real article, the other (or others) assigned by unknown conspirators to prepare weeks and months ahead for his frame-up by planting incriminating clues about him. In the new wave, Peter Dale Scott, a Berkeley medievalist and assassination buff, has added an ingenious new wrinkle: that there may have been no real Oswald at all. One principal source of this speculation is that Oswald's height—5 feet 9 at his death—fluctuates in various physical-examination records over four years between 5 feet 8 and 5 feet 11. Says Scott: "I'm really intrigued that the only reality of Lee Harvey Oswald is some documents, a passport which was used by different people. Who was Lee Harvey Oswald? Whoever

happened to be carrying the passport."

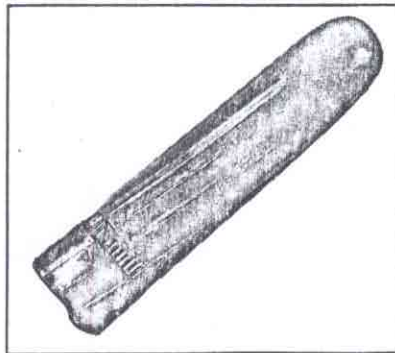
The Flaws: Such records are often carelessly made; the one that says Oswald was 5 feet 8, for instance, is accompanied by a photograph of Oswald standing against a wall grid on which his height is 5 feet 9. In any case, if there was no Lee Harvey Oswald, who is the woman who for 35 years has been claiming to be Lee Harvey Oswald's mother?

The Plumber Connection: A number of conspiratorialists, notably comedian Dick Gregory, have promoted the theory that Watergate conspirators E. Howard Hunt and Frank Sturgis may have been present—and in fact briefly detained—at the assassination scene. Their "evidence" is a press photo of the Dallas police with three unidentified "tramps" in tow; the shortest of the three looks to some doubters like Hunt, the tallest like Sturgis. The implication: the plumbers-to-be were somehow associated with the events that bloody noonday in Dallas.

The Flaws: The look-alikes, on close inspection, don't. The "Hunt" figure seems older in 1963, when he would have been 45, than he does now at 56, and the "Sturgis" Doppelgänger is craggier and fairer than his real-life incarnation.

What the doubters have confirmed, after a dozen years' labor, is that the Warren inquiry was a flawed and at critical moments a timid one. What they have yet to provide is a satisfying alternative to the official theory—a hypothesis that does not require whole squads of assassins vanishing into thin air and whole platoons of lawmen conspiring successfully over a decade and more to protect them. The conspiracy theorists may, as they claim, have raised enough reasonable doubt to warrant reopening the case, in a committee of Congress or some other open and independent forum. But it would be perilously wishful thinking to expect such an inquiry to lay all doubts to rest—to make order of the chaos of Dallas, Nov. 22, 1963, or to promulgate some final, symmetrical "truth" about the death of John F. Kennedy.

—PETER GOLDMAN with JOHN J. LINDSAY in Washington and bureau reports



Superbullet: Both JFK and Connally?

JUST
Flashed
up!

38
 *** THIS STORY (FAKSE) MAKES THE FBI. ROKE
 MORE, NOT LESS, SINISTER

Newsweek, April 28, 1975
 WHY THE HEH
 SHOULD WE NEED TO
 PROVIDE THIS ALTERNATIVE