

“He Looks Like a Maniac”

Oswald had little time for planning, perhaps not much more than twenty-four hours. He had to decide how to slip the gun into the Depository and where to take a sniper's position. His lack of preparation is evident by the fact he only had four bullets with him, though the rifle's clip could hold six. They were all he had left from his last practice session, and he evidently did not have time on Thursday, November 21, to buy more.

Having never before seen a presidential motorcade, Oswald had little idea of what to expect for security, but knew it would be a far more difficult task than taking aim at the retired General Walker. He could not be sure whether the President would have the bubble top on the car,* or if Secret Service agents would ride on the rear of the limousine partially blocking his view. Lookouts might be posted in tall buildings, perhaps even in the Depository, and he could not be certain of finding a deserted floor or area from which to shoot. Yet if he found it impossible to shoot at the President, he could probably abort his plan and return with the rifle to the Paines'. It was not a suicide mission. Oswald also wanted to escape, although he probably had not planned much beyond getting away from the Depository before the police sealed the area.

*The bubble top was not bulletproof, but it might have deflected the bullets' trajectory, or the sun's reflection could have obscured his target.

After firing the final shot, he slipped through the narrow gap he had created between the cartons of books. He hurried diagonally across the sixth floor, toward the rear staircase. Next to the stairs, Oswald dropped the rifle into an opening between several large boxes. It hid the gun from view unless someone stood almost directly over the boxes and peered down. Oswald rapidly descended the stairs until he heard the sound of footsteps running up. He ducked off at the second floor, and dashed into the adjoining lunch room. But suddenly a voice called out, and when he turned, he was face to face with a Dallas policeman with a drawn revolver.*

Marrison Baker was a motorcycle policeman riding in the motorcade about one-half block behind the President's car. Baker had just returned from deer hunting, and he recognized the first shot as coming from "a high-powered rifle . . . and it sounded high . . ." He looked up to where he thought the shots came from, the Book Depository, and saw a flock of pigeons fly off the building. Baker immediately raced his cycle 200 feet and jumped off in front of the Depository's steps and in another 45 feet he was inside the building. He yelled for directions to the stairs or elevator, and the building manager, Roy Truly, rushed him through a pair of swinging doors to the closest elevator. Truly kept pressing the down button and screaming, "Bring that elevator down here!" but nothing happened.** Truly said, "Let's take the stairs." They

*There is a question whether Oswald could have gone downstairs immediately after the assassination, since other Depository workers, including the three men on the fifth floor—Jarman, Williams, and Norman—as well as two fourth-floor office workers, Sandra Styles and Victoria Adams, also ran down the stairs and did not see him. But Oswald immediately took the staircase, whereas the three men admitted they stayed upstairs for ten to fifteen minutes after the shooting (WC Vol. III, p. 182). As for Styles and Adams, although they thought they came down quickly, they actually did not arrive on the first floor until at least four to five minutes after the third shot. The critical testimony is from Victoria Adams, who said that when she got to the first floor, she saw Billy Lovelady and William Shelley. Those two men, by their own testimony, did not return to the Depository for some five minutes after the shooting (see WC Vol. VI, pp. 331, 339, 389).

**Truly later decided that Oswald might have left the elevator's wooden grate open on the sixth floor so the car could not be operated.

the front was propitious. Immediately after the shots, two construction workers, George Rackley and James Romack, volunteered to help the police by keeping a watch on the rear exit. During the five minutes they were there, before they were replaced by police units, no one left from that exit.⁴ The building's front was not covered for at least ten minutes, and possibly longer.⁵

On his way past the second-floor offices, Oswald ran into another Depository worker, Mrs. Robert Reid. She had panicked after the shots and ran into the building to her office. In her own reconstruction of her actions after the assassination, Reid returned to the office area in just under two minutes, which would dovetail perfectly with Baker and Truly's encounter with Oswald thirty seconds earlier. She saw Oswald just after he left the lunch room where Officer Baker had confronted him, and he was walking toward the front stairs.⁶ "I met him by the time I passed my desk several feet," she recalled, "and I told him, 'Oh, the President has been shot, but maybe they didn't hit him.' He mumbled something to me, I kept walking, he did, too. I didn't pay any attention to what he said . . ."⁷ Reid noticed the full bottle of Coke, and thought Oswald seemed calm. Although she considered it "a little strange" that he should be wandering in the second-floor offices just moments after the assassination, she soon forgot about him.

He was outside the Depository less than three minutes after he fired the final shot, and for the first time he saw the pandemonium he had created. His actions after that are unquestionably those of someone in flight. After his arrest, he maintained that when he learned of the shooting, his immediate thought was there would be no more work for the day, so he simply went home. Although politics was his favorite subject, he was not interested, apparently, in whether the President had been hit or if the assassin had been caught. Instead, he headed for his rooming house.

Oswald could have taken either of two buses, one that would drop him off right at his address, the Beckley line, or one that would let him off several blocks away, the Marsalis line. Both

not reach the sixth floor. When Oswald had left the sixth floor he could only descend one staircase, the rear one.

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light and time exposures. But before he could finish, he was told the FBI was sending an agent to collect the rifle and to take it to FBI headquarters in Washington for further tests. "So I put the gun back in the stock," Day says. "I had my orders and I didn't do anything else to it. Around 11:30, the FBI came, Agent [Vince] Drain, and I gave him the gun. I told Vince, 'Here's a print right here,' and I pointed to it. I didn't give him that lifted print on the tape. They said give him the gun, and that's what I gave him. The gun had our powder all over it by then, and I know I wouldn't have liked to receive it in that condition once somebody else had started their work on it. It should have stayed with us."⁹⁰

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Day had so completely lifted the palm print that the FBI, in its November 24 examination of the rifle, did not find any evidence of it.⁹¹ No one knew that Oswald's print had been found on the rifle until Dallas district attorney Henry Wade told a reporter in an evening press conference on November 24.⁹² The FBI then examined Day's lifted print and confirmed it was Oswald's when it discovered that irregularities in the lift corresponded exactly with imperfections on the rifle barrel.⁹³

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The print was important, because it was the first piece of direct physical evidence that placed the rifle in Oswald's hands. But the failure of the FBI to find a print in its initial examination has led to accusations that the Dallas police must have concocted the evidence in order to close the case against Oswald.⁹⁴ Oliver Stone, in *JFK*, created a scene that showed an unidentified man placing the gun into Oswald's dead hand to obtain a print. Such charges are ignorant of the chain of evidence, of how Day maintained the rifle under lock and key from the moment it was found on the sixth floor until it was turned over to the FBI. But to add to the conspiracy grist, FBI agent Drain claimed that Day never told him about the print when he picked up the gun.⁹⁵ J. Edgar Hoover was furious that his vaunted FBI laboratory failed to pick up any trace of one of the most critical prints in the

⁹⁰The FBI did find a full print on the rifle, but it turned out to belong to Drain's assistant. Drain was later reprimanded by the FBI for mishandling the gun on the way to Washington (Interview with Bob Gemberling, March 8, 1992).

ghastly, pale, with blood all over her dress—it was a terribly personal moment."²⁵

Ken O'Donnell, one of the President's aides, tried to persuade Jacqueline to step outside after the last rites, but she refused to leave her husband's side. She remained while some nurses and residents wrapped the President in white sheets, a plastic mattress cover, and some pillowcases, and awaited the arrival of the casket.²⁶

The attending doctors had decided to fix the time of death as 1:00 P.M. and, since the cause of death was the massive head wound, decided that Dr. Clark, a neurosurgeon, should sign the death certificate. Mac Kilduff, a Kennedy aide, went to a side room, where Vice-President Johnson was under heavy Secret Service guard. "Mr. President," he said, and by so addressing LBJ notified him that Kennedy was dead. He informed Johnson that he wanted to announce Kennedy's death, but LBJ told him to wait until his party was away from the hospital. No one was sure who had killed the President or if it was a conspiracy that targeted other members of the government. Johnson decided to return to Washington as soon as possible. Once Johnson was in the car on the way to the airport, Kilduff entered Parkland classrooms 101-102, which had been converted into a temporary press hall. It was 1:33 when he mounted the dais, and there were shouts of, "Quiet!" "President John F. Kennedy died at approximately 1:00 Central Standard Time today here in Dallas." There was a tremendous rush into the hospital corridors by newsmen hurrying to get the word over the wire services.

While the drama with President Kennedy unfolded, another life-and-death battle was being waged with Governor John Connally. He had bullet wounds in his right rear shoulder, under his right nipple, right wrist, and his left thigh. Dr. Robert Shaw, a thoracic (chest) surgeon, took over the Governor's care at 12:45. Within forty-five minutes, Dr. Shaw had moved Connally to surgery and for nearly two hours sutured the Governor's damaged lung and muscles.²⁷ "His wounds were life-threatening," recalls

²⁷On the following day, minor operations were done on both Connally's wrist and thigh.