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The San Diego Union-Tribune

September 5, 1993, Sunday

SECTION: BOOKS; Ed. 1,2; Pg. BOOKS-4

LENGTH: 1067 words

HEADLINE: BOOK SHOTS HOLES IN CONSPIRACY THEORIES

BYLINE: JAMES C. ALVORD
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BODY:

CASE CLOSED Lee Harvey Oswald and the Assassination of JFK

Gerald Posner (Random House, 512 pages, \$25)

Case closed? Not likely.

It isn't that Wall Street lawyer-turned-author Gerald Posner hasn't presented a meticulously documented, nearly airtight case against Lee Harvey Oswald. But a week before last, the National Archives released more than 1,000 boxes of previously classified materials relating to the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Included were more than 90,000 pages of documents from the CIA and no fewer than 30 separate files the agency kept on the ex-Marine before he was alleged to have killed the president. Rather than being closed, as Posner suggests, the case may be just entering a whole new discovery phase.

Posner must have known he was swimming upstream when he began to write this impressive indictment of Oswald. More than 2,000 books have already been published on the subject; only a handful take the position that the Warren Commission got it right. Further, national surveys have consistently found that almost 80 percent of Americans believe a conspiracy was behind the murder of President Kennedy.

Undaunted by all of this, Posner presents a calm chronology of Oswald's life starting with his formative years in New Orleans and ending that strange Sunday morning in the basement of the Dallas Police headquarters when Jack Ruby stepped up and became an assassin in his own right.

Along the way, Posner uses previous work done by the Warren Commission and the House Select Committee on Assassinations as well as his own original research and analysis. He parades out the familiar cast of Dealey Plaza witnesses and underground figures, demystifying them with brutal facts and seemingly irrefutable logic.

For example, Jean Hill, the mysterious "Lady in Red" who was portrayed heroically in Oliver Stone's recent "JFK" movie epic, is exposed as having either a vivid imagination or a very bad memory. Hill, author of her own assassination account, "The Last Dissenting Witness," was standing on the south side of Elm Street directly to Kennedy's left as the motorcade rolled through Dealey Plaza. She was arguably the closest person to JFK, excluding passengers in the limousine, when the final shot was fired.

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Given her position, Hill also had a straight-on view of the famed grassy knoll as well. (Researchers have long theorized that one or more shooters were stationed behind a tall picket fence on the top of a gently sloping knoll facing the motorcade). Hill subsequently told a terrifying tale of immediately running across the street and up the grassy knoll in hot pursuit of a man she thought may have shot the president.

Posner's examination of other photos taken during and some minutes after the assassination show Hill never left her original position. If she ran up the grassy knoll, it had to be a long time after all gunmen, real or imagined, had left.

When not using existing photo evidence or startling inconsistencies in the testimony of key witnesses, Posner offers the work of Failure Analysis Associates, a "prominent firm" specializing in computerized reconstructions for lawsuits. Among the more interesting experiments referenced is a process called "reverse projection" in which a full-sized model of the presidential limousine is created on the computer, complete with passengers. Using film enhancements and sophisticated techniques of measurement, a strong case for three shots from the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository is made, thereby implicating Oswald and virtually eliminating any possibility of other shooters in Dealey Plaza.

In a similar fashion, Posner bravely offers an unwavering endorsement of the often-ridiculed "magic bullet" theory. According to the theory, if Oswald acted alone, a single bullet had to puncture Kennedy's back, exit his neck, enter Gov. John Connally's back, strike a rib, exit his chest, pass through his wrist, enter his right thigh and emerge in a near-perfect condition. Amazingly, with computers and not mirrors, Posner's experts confirm that this improbable scenario is actually quite possible.

Unfortunately, as attorneys like Posner are well aware, it is not unusual for two highly qualified experts to embrace two separate and completely incompatible theories. A good expert, it is said, can start with any conclusion and create the statistics to back it up. Ironically, that has been the rap on the Warren Commission for these past 30 years. The commission was told Oswald acted alone in killing President Kennedy, and its members and staff labored mightily to prove it.

While the author may be vulnerable to the same charges of harboring a preconceived battle plan, his impressive scholarship and incisive analysis should not be overlooked. The book contains hundreds of fascinating footnotes and ends with 71 pages of citations to other authorities.

Posner may not have closed the case on the assassination of President Kennedy, but he has struck a severe blow to the conspiracy community, which to date may have thought itself above reproach.

ALVORD, a former journalist, is an attorney in private practice.

GRAPHIC: 1 PHOTO; Gerald Posner argues that Lee Harvey Oswald, later gunned down by Jack Ruby, was JFK's lone assassin.

TYPE: REVIEW

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SUBJECT: Case Closed: Lee Harvey Oswald and the