

## Oswald Really Did It, and Without Help

By ALEX HEARD

If you doubt that 30 years of JFK assassination theory have had an effect, consider what is happening to Gerald Posner's "Case Closed: Lee Harvey Oswald and the Assassination of JFK" (Random House, 607 pages, \$25). This exhaustive re-examination is getting the full treatment reserved for major works of controversial revelations, complete with a publisher's embargo and serialization in a newsweekly.

The scoop? That Oswald, acting alone, brimming with half-baked ideology and loser's envy, killed JFK by firing three rifle shots from the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository. With the help of a new computer enhancement of the famous home movie taken by Abraham Zapruder, Mr. Posner concludes that the first shot missed, the second wounded both Kennedy and Gov. John Connally and the third struck the president fatally in the head.

If that sounds familiar, it should. Though Mr. Posner's account differs in some important particulars, he's advancing the same bottom line as the Warren Report, the 1964 document that hundreds of well-meaning researchers, conspiracy buffs of varying ability and honesty, outright cranks and (in a class by himself) Oliver Stone would have you believe was the work either of fools or evil partners in a treacherous and far-reaching coverup.

Mr. Posner isn't the first writer to take violent issue with what past theorists have said. But for a couple of reasons his work ought to have more impact than previous Oswald-really-did-it books. First, Mr. Posner doesn't bear The Taint: Unlike pro-Warren Report writers such as David Belin ("Final Disclosure," 1988), he has no connection with the loathed Warren Commission. Second, instead of simply reviewing the evidence and serving up a stale cud that ignores the more feverish modern

conspiratorial theories, he strapped on his machete and waded all the way into the 26 groaning volumes of Warren Report testimony and exhibits, into the mountain of documents and arcana associated with the 1979 report of the House Select Committee on Assassinations, into the reams of other documents pried loose from the government over time by the buffs. He conducted some 200 new interviews. One of his more compelling subjects is Yuri Nosenko, the famous Soviet defector who was a KGB official during Oswald's interlude as a Soviet defector. Mr. Nosenko flatly waves off the idea that the KGB recruited or in fact had

"motive, means, and opportunity to have President John F. Kennedy assassinated." By the time "JFK" hit the screen in 1991, a lot of Americans—including people who had scarcely given the Kennedy assassination a thought—were primed to believe a much more fantastic theory than that. Namely, that JFK was whacked in a complex plot involving the mob, anti-Castro Cubans, the CIA, right-wingers, and military men convinced JFK would keep them from waging war in Vietnam.

Mr. Posner begins his account with Oswald and ends with Oswald, and along the way walks the reader through a reappraisal of the case that's comprehensive enough for beginners and detailed enough for hard-core buffs. But this is far from a Cliffs-Notes outline of the world's most discussed shooting. It is pointed enough to raise plenty of hackles in buffdom. It's a safe bet, however, that the hottest crossfire will be aimed at Mr. Posner's theory (based on a new reckoning of when Oswald's first shot was fired) that Oswald had at least eight seconds to get off his shots, and that the first shot missed. (The Warren Commission was uncertain about the timing, and about whether the first or second shot missed.) This matters, because many buffs insist Oswald's pace was more hurried—three shots in 4.8 or 5.6 seconds—making it hard to believe he fired with accuracy. Mr. Posner also scoffs at the idea that Oswald was a poor shot, and that the so-called magic bullet that hit JFK and Connally emerged in "pristine" condition. In fact, Mr. Posner notes, it's slightly flattened.

So is this case really closed? No chance. The buffs hungrily await this book and we'll have to see if they find flaws in Mr. Posner's argument. But the salient fact for now is this: They can't ignore it.

Mr. Heard is writing a book on American subcultures.

### Bookshelf

"Case Closed"

By Gerald Posner

any interest in Oswald. But what about the fact that Oswald did Marine duty at Atsugi, where the U-2 spy plane was based?

"We had better information already coming from KGB sources than he could ever give us," says Mr. Nosenko. The KGB, he insists, "didn't want Oswald from day one."

Addressing such points is crucial, because some pro-Warren Report writers' disdain for the buffs is such that they ignore their wilder claims. That's a mistake, and Mr. Posner avoids it. JFK-assassination theory entered new realms of complexity in the '70s, in part because difficult-to-believe, real-world conspiracies like Watergate made anything seem possible. Then, too, the House Select Committee opened the theory floodgates late in the decade by concluding that a fourth shot had been fired (possibly, it said, from the infamous grassy knoll), and that New Orleans crime boss Carlos Marcello had the