

losed?



BY JACK SIRICA
STAFF WRITER

9/16/93

G

ERALD POSNER took the obsolete, bolt-action rifle off the wall in his Manhattan study.

Apart from a bayonet holder and a little extra length to the barrel, this was a replica of the original \$12.78 gun that, according to a fresh version of a 30-year-old theory that Posner is plying in a new book, launched two bullets that killed President John F. Kennedy.

That Posner would have felt the need to purchase his own Manlicher-Carcano rifle is emblematic of the plodding, painstaking research that already has won him accolades — and that he hopes will begin to convince Americans that Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, assassinated Kennedy.

"No matter how much you hear the experts say you can operate the bolt in a fraction of a second, you want to see for yourself," Posner said as he held the firearm. "You want to see, as Marina [Oswald's wife], said, he sat on a porch in New Orleans . . . and operated it for hours — does it make a difference" in how quickly the rifle can be fired, reloaded and fired again.

Posner looked down at the metal bolt handle. "I will tell you when I first got it . . . I tended to be gentle with it," he said, recalling his initial unsureness with the World War II weapon. "Now I just slam it . . . If I had personally found that the mechanism is much tougher to operate, I would have questioned the experts in a different way."

As the 30th anniversary of JFK's assassination approaches, Posner's book, "Case Closed," joins a crop of projects, including television specials and nearly a dozen new books, that will take part in what has become an American ritual: re-examining the events that began when shots rang out in Dallas' Dealey Plaza at 12:30 p.m. on Nov. 22, 1963.

But the 39-year-old Posner's book is something different.

In an era when, depending on the poll, as many as 9 in 10 Americans say they believe that Kennedy was the victim of a conspiracy, Posner employs meticulous research to reach what counts as a novel conclusion: That, for all its flaws, the Warren Commission was right. Oswald killed JFK without help from anyone.

Posner has impressed admirers and even some critics with his diligent research and measured analysis. He re-indexed the entire 26-volume Warren Commission report, more than a million words of testimony, exhibits and appendices. That project culminated in a chilling portrait of Oswald as a life-long loner who could have pulled off the Kennedy killing alone.

Posner also employed computer technology not available to the commission in 1964. He says the computer modeling and animation help show that the much-derided "magic bullet" — Oswald's second shot — could indeed have hit both Kennedy and Texas Gov. John Connally. The computer enhancements also help

AMW/02

prove that Oswald had ample time to get off his three shots, Posner says.

The book already has gotten more attention than any recent JFK project save Oliver Stone's movie, "JFK," which suggested that a plot to kill Kennedy emanated from high levels of the United States Government.

Its appeal lies both in its thorough, apparently even-handed research, and the fact that, following the publication in recent years of a near-constant stream of conspiracy books, "Case Closed" may be the first by a respected author to argue persuasively for the Oswald-alone theory, a scenario most Americans dismissed years ago.

"We have forgotten the story," Posner said. "We have forgotten the details of it because we've lost Oswald. In all these thirty years, all the talk was about conspiracies."

Typical of the favorable treatment thus far was a cover story and 24-page special report on the book in U.S. News and World Report. The magazine's cover declared the book "brilliant" and concluded that of all the new books on the assassination, "Case Closed" had the "smell of truth." The others, U.S. News said, merely had a "smell."

"He sweeps away decades of polemical smoke, layer by layer, and builds an unshakable case against JFK's killer," U.S. News said of Posner.

"It's just a model of historical scholarship," said Stephen Ambrose, the Boyd Professor of History at the University of New Orleans; and noted student of assassination literature, who says the book has changed his mind. He said that until this book, he had entertained the possibility of a conspiracy because of doubts about the single-bullet theory. He says Posner has convinced him that a single bullet hit both Kennedy and Connally, and that Oswald acted alone.

But will "Case Closed" change the American mind? Critics — and there are many — say that Posner, a former Manhattan attorney, ignored important evidence in an effort to build a prosecutorial indictment of the realm of conspiracy theories.

Probably the most widely respected believer in the possibility of a JFK conspiracy — former House Select Committee on Assassinations counsel G. Robert Blakey — said Posner's book, rather than having a real impact, would end up a mere "footnote" in a bibliography of assassination literature.

"What's troublesome for me in Posner's book is that he's a lawyer writing the brief for one side, and there's no reason for a person who's seen or heard all the evidence to credit his book as opposed to someone else's," said Blakey, a University of Notre Dame law professor.

"I think Lee Harvey Oswald fired two shots from behind that killed the president of the United States beyond a reasonable doubt," Blakey said. "But I think there is substantial evidence to believe both the ear- and the eye-witnesses that there was another shot in the plaza."

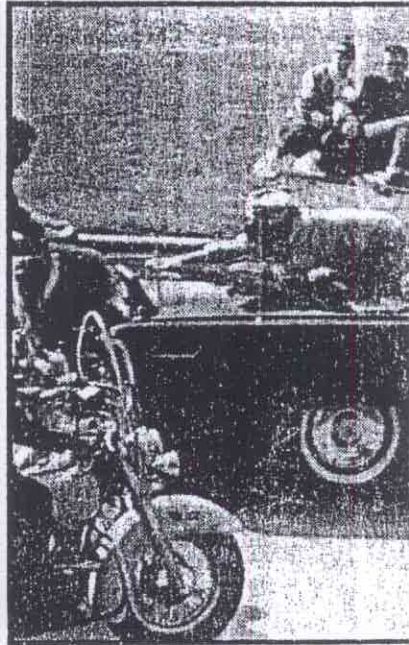
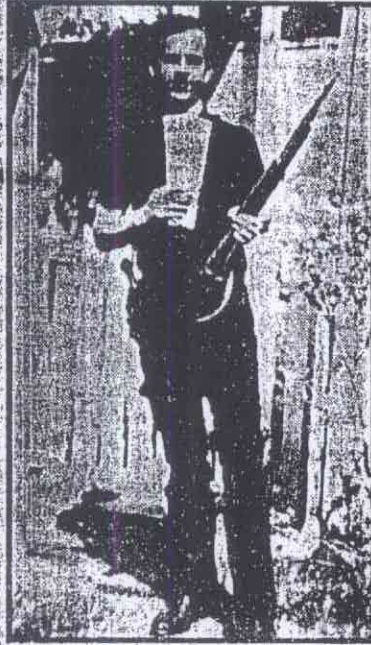
"I think a reasonable person can agree with me," Blakey added. "I'm not so arrogant as to say, 'Case Closed.'"

"Case Closed" essentially is a straightforward narration of how Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, came to kill Kennedy. The conclusion, though arrived at more artfully, is precisely that of the Warren Commission, which endured both contemporary and subsequent derision for not seeing a conspiracy.

But there are some new twists.

Posner produced one the old-fashioned way: By creating his own index of the Warren Commission report, he found what he says is information about Oswald that others have missed or ignored.

"I thought that unless I obtained an understanding of Oswald, you still don't understand why he shoots Jack Kennedy," Posner said. "To me, that is a fundamental flaw in the Warren Commission and in every other book that said Oswald did it."



Lee Harvey Oswald with Mannlicher-Carcano rifle, above, in a photo some contend was motorcade in Oliver Stone's film, 'JFK.'

The Plot's the 1

BY FRED BRUNING

STAFF WRITER

THE ASSASSINATION of John F. Kennedy and attendant whodunit theories have done much to define the last quarter of this American century — the killing of a beloved president because his loss represented to millions the sudden snatching away of hope, and the conspiracy arguments because they revealed a powerful skepticism straining at the national psyche.

By the time the Warren Commission declared in 1964 that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone in slaying Kennedy the previous year, polls showed that a third of Americans believed instead that Oswald was only a player in someone's diabolical game. The number hit 60 percent in 1966 and continued climbing. When pollsters questioned Americans following the controversial 1991 movie, "JFK," 77 percent said they had no doubt: Kennedy was the victim of a conspiracy.

It was as though Kennedy's death had inspired a new religion — an orthodoxy of disbelief. "The theories really ran around the country like wildfire," recalled Ramsey Clark, who served as U.S. attorney general from 1967-69. "It was hard to go to a college campus and not find a dozen or so young people who would come up very agitated, presenting all kinds of theories." Seeing that Clark wasn't buying, students seemed incredulous. "They would walk away shaking their heads," he said.

In his book, "Case Closed," Gerald Posner says Americans embraced alternative explanations to the Kennedy killing because the event simply seemed too painful for the work of a "misguided sociopath" like Lee Oswald. Accepting the president's death was difficult enough. Accepting the banality of his assassin was asking too much.

ment and beyond. As debate churning for a decade "JFK" to your search for truth march

Because the Warr centerpiece of the est argument, Stone like "march" for truth wil

"What made us [A] conspiracy theories w report was woefully, w than Vankin, author (Cover-ups and Crime Mind Control in Amer

Vankin says the Wa safest, most political you see that, you hav ing on," said the aut Oswald was merely or

Though he reject Guthman, press secre the president's broth says most Americans reasonable "skeptics sassination. "There h Guthman, now a jour

Others note that Ar brace conspiracy ex whose history is rep some of it murderous. eager for the outland the Super Bowl, or w the White House, or, Jack Kennedy's deat with Lee Harvey Osw

"People would rath than the simple ansv California psychotheri