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that he had the impression that the shots came from the knoll). Smith immediately turned to face westwards, now looking in the direction of the Texas Schoolbook Depository and the triple underpass. A woman, seemingly hysterical, approached Smith telling him "They are shooting the President from the bushes."

The bushes to which the woman was referring ran along the southern edge of the Elm Street extension, behind the concrete pergola and all the way around and along the picket fence that overlooked the western end of the grassy knoll. Smith hurried along the fence, checking all the small trees and bushes as he went. Unsure of what he may encounter, the policeman had drawn his service revolver and had soon reached a parking lot in front of some railroad tracks. Smith noted that he was not alone in this area, a deputy sheriff (Seymour Weitzman) was close by as the officer approached an unidentified stranger. Upon seeing the armed policeman, the man showed himself to be a Secret Service Agent, producing ID which the officer took to be genuine. Feeling foolish, Smith holstered his weapon and continued to search the parking lot.<sup>4</sup> Although remaining in the area for some 15 -20 minutes after the shots were fired, Smith found nothing.<sup>5</sup> He was subsequently ordered, along with Officer Welcome Eugene Barnett, to seal off the front entrance of the TSBD. Smith remained at this post until his shift finished at 2:30pm.<sup>6</sup>

The controversial part of this testimony concerns the officer's encounter with the Secret Service Agent. Winston Lawson, one of the two Secret Service Agents with overall responsibility the Dallas trip, told the Warren Commission that there were no Agents on the ground in Dealey Plaza before or immediately after the shooting and that all agents assigned to the motorcade stayed with it until it arrived at Parkland Hospital.<sup>7</sup> For thirty-one years, the research community has queried the identity of this person, many believing him to be a conspirator if not an actual assassin. I hope by taking a close look at what other witnesses have said we can come to a more logical conclusion.

<sup>4</sup> 7WCH p536

<sup>5</sup> 7WCH p535

<sup>6</sup> 7WCH p537

<sup>7</sup> Warren Commission Report, p52

## The Cameraman

59

In order that the American public could be fed not only news reports of the presidential tour of Texas, but also pictures, both movie and still photographers accompanied the president and First Lady throughout the trip. These professionals consisted of both White House staff and representatives of the major news and broadcasting organizations. All these photographers were familiar with one-another and with members of the presidential entourage, some having been assigned to White House duties for several years. For this particular motorcade, the movie photographers were allocated the position of camera car 1. This was the first of the camera cars in the procession, and the 10th vehicle (the Presidential Limousine being the 2nd) in the entire train. The car, a yellow 1964 Chevrolet Impala Convertible, carried six occupants, only three of whom were actually cameramen. David Wiegman Jr. of NBC; Thomas J Craven, Jr. of CBS and Thomas "Ollie" Atkins (White House). The other three were the driver, John Hofan, a Texas Ranger, an NBC sound engineer and Cleveland Ryan, a lighting technician.<sup>8</sup>

Dave Wiegman, easily recognisable in motorcade photographs because of the distinctive Fedora hat which he employed to keep his thinning hair in place during the open air drive, was sitting in the front right hand seat of the Impala. He was thirty-nine years of age in 1963. Photography was not simply his job, it had also been a lifelong interest. In earlier years he had often assisted his father-in-law, a professional photographer, and was known for his freelance work in the Baltimore area. After a short spell working for CBS, covering the absence of Tom Craven (one of his fellow passengers on 22.11.63), he was hired as a cameraman by NBC. Previous to Kennedy's election, Wiegman had covered White House news and affairs for some eight years.<sup>9</sup> He knew all the staff very well.

The cameraman had covered many motorcades and had developed specific techniques in order to capture candid shots. Knowing he would be positioned far behind the Presidential Limousine, Wiegman sat high on the right-hand front door of the convertible. This afforded him the opportunity, should the motorcade slow or stop, to jump out quickly and run forward, hopeful to catch the president shaking hands or conversing with members of the crowd. The technique had delivered the goods in the past, and Wiegman hoped for a repetition on this trip.<sup>10</sup>

The presidential limousine was already on Elm Street when Camera Car 1 made the turn from Main into Houston. When Wiegman heard the first shot, like many other witnesses, he assumed that someone in the crowd was

<sup>8</sup> Todd Wayne Vaughn, Presidential Motorcade Schematic Listing, Nov. 22, 1963, Dallas Texas, privately published 1993. p16

<sup>9</sup> Richard B. Trask, Pictures of the Pain, Yoeman Press, 1994 p363

<sup>10</sup> Trask p 372



**"By the time of the third shot Dave Wiegman was out of the car and running, his camera rolling and tucked into his chest, towards the corner of Houston and Elm."**

throwing fire crackers. At the sound of the second explosion there appeared to be a reaction in the motorcade. By the time of the third shot Dave Wiegman was out of the car and running, his camera rolling and tucked into his chest, towards the corner of Houston and Elm. Racing along past the reflecting pool on Houston, his camera caught the doorway of the building that was later to become infamous as the alleged hiding place of the assassin. Wiegman paused momentarily at the junction. Looking quickly down the gradual incline of Elm Street, he did not notice the presidential limousine moving rapidly out of view below the railroad overpass. What he did see was a policeman starting to run up a grassed slope to the North of Elm<sup>11</sup> (this was almost certainly Bobby Hargis, who turned back to his motorcycle without ever reaching the top of the knoll).<sup>12</sup>

*"I figured he knows something's up there, so I ran up there. I found myself there with Lem (Johns) close by, a few feet away. Then I saw people lying on the side, and I saw nothing up there. Lem, sort of looking around. Couldn't see anything. I knew now I'd better get something. I've got to get some footage. I saw these people lying on the ground and I took them. I saw a lady being pulled to the ground....."*<sup>13</sup>

Wiegman's film lasts approximately 36.5 seconds filmed in real time with no breaks.<sup>14</sup> After racing up the knoll and filming the Hesters, who were cowering in the shelter of the pergola, he pans the Plaza again, catching a glimpse of the Newman family lying close to the curb of Elm, and motorcycle officer Clyde Haygood riding along the street, below Wiegman's position. Wiegman stops filming here.<sup>15</sup> It is at this point, at the top of the knoll somewhere, that Wiegman encountered Lem Johns, an individual he knew well. Realizing that the president had gone, and a News Cameraman's job was to follow him and obtain more footage Wiegman made his way back to Camera Car 1 which was parked by the south curb of Elm.

Other cameramen in Wiegman's vehicle testify to Lem Johns vaulting over the trunk of their car as it pulled

away and being hauled in as the car made its way, rapidly toward the Trade Mart.<sup>16</sup>

### The Secret Service Man

Thomas Lemuel "Lem" Johns was considered something of a legend in the Secret Service - a man of action. Much respected by LBJ, he rose to become the Agent in Charge of the White House Detail during Johnson's term of office.<sup>17</sup> On the 22nd of November 1963 Johns was assigned to the Vice Presidential Detail as ATSAIC (Assistant to Special Agent in Charge). SAIC Rufus Youngblood was the Agent to whom Johns was responsible.<sup>18</sup> Whilst Youngblood occupied a position in the vice president's vehicle the other Secret Service agents in Johnson's party followed behind in a yellow 1964 model Ford Mercury four door sedan. Lem Johns sat in the right rear seat alongside SA Warren "Woody" Taylor.<sup>19</sup>

The Mercury can be clearly seen in the famous Altgens photograph of Elm Street at the time when the President is first hit. The left rear door is open as though an agent is about to emerge. Over the years it has been claimed by some researchers that Johnson's Secret Service Agents had prior knowledge of the assassination, and cite the fact that the door was open before the shots as proof. In fact this "state of readiness" was common practice throughout the motorcade, whenever the procession slowed down. An earlier still photograph, taken on Main at 12.20 p.m., also shows the left rear door open.<sup>20</sup> Another reason for the open door may have been that it was Secret Service policy to use a car door, opened to 45° as a sweep, a kind of moving wedge to either intimidate, or brush aside, crowds that appeared to be closing in.<sup>21</sup>

Only four of the Secret Service Agents in the motorcade appear to have taken decisive action during the time the shots were being fired. Clint Hill, of course, ran from the presidential follow up car and crawled across the trunk of the president's limousine to try and Kennedy with his own body. SA John Ready left the follow up car, but was recalled before being able to offer any help. ASIC Youngblood seems to have reacted even more quickly. Almost immediately after the first shot, he was over his seat, pushing the vice president to the floor of the vehicle, once again using his own body as a shield against any attack that may have been directed at Johnson.<sup>22</sup> The final agent who seems to have been more alert to danger than his some of his companions was "Lem" [Johns]. By the

<sup>11</sup> Trask p372

<sup>12</sup> Vaughn pp8-9

<sup>13</sup> Trask p371. Wiegman's statement to Trask.

<sup>14</sup> Trask p373

<sup>15</sup> Trask p374

<sup>16</sup> Trask p375

<sup>17</sup> Rufus Youngblood Twenty Years In The Secret Service, Sim and Schuster, 1973, p189.

<sup>18</sup> 18WCH p768

<sup>19</sup> Vaughn p13

<sup>20</sup> Trask p38. Cecil Stoughton Photo 18. 18WCH p773.

<sup>21</sup> Youngblood p111

<sup>22</sup> 18WCH p768



time the third shot was fired, Johns was out of the follow-up car, and running towards the Vice President's vehicle.

"... before I reached the vice president's car a third shot had sounded and the entire motorcade then picked up speed and I was left on the street at this point. I obtained a ride with White House movie men and joined the vice president and ASAIC Youngblood at the Hospital."<sup>23</sup>

Johns was possibly the last individual to climb aboard camera car 1<sup>24</sup>, which did not go straight to Parkland. The camera car was now a good few minutes behind the President, and no-one in it was aware that Kennedy had been hit. The cameramen went to the next venue on the presidential itinerary which happened to be the Trade Mart. It was here that Johns learned that both Kennedy and Johnson were at Parkland. He commandeered a police three wheeler motorcycle cop to take him directly to the hospital, advising the film crew to follow-up close behind.<sup>25</sup> Once at Parkland, Johns rejoined his colleagues and set about organizing the Vice President's departure from Love Field Airport.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Men Who Weren't There**

Taken individually these accounts do not help to solve the mystery of the Agent behind the picket fence, but when put together they seem to present a more logical explanation than any that have yet been offered.

It would appear that both Johns and Wiegman left their respective vehicles at about the same time (between the second and third shots). Johns, by his own admission, tried to reach the vice president's Car and failed. Meanwhile, Wiegman continued his run along Houston, and Smith was told of "shots from the bushes" by a near hysterical woman. The policeman set off at a slightly slower rate than the other two, checking the trees and shrubs as he moved along the Elm Street extension. Johns had lost the motorcade. He did not jump straight into camera car 1 for a lift - it was not yet there! As Wiegman was still running, and subsequently met Johns at the top of the knoll, the Agent must have run to where he believed the shots had originated - towards the picket fence. A few seconds later Wiegman, having turned the corner and seeing Hargis start toward the pergola, headed up the grass bank, still filming. As Johns is not visible in the Wiegman footage, one must ask the question: where is he? Seconds later Wiegman attests to seeing him there, implying, in his statement, that Johns was already somewhere close by "looking around" when Wiegman arrived. The obvious and logical assumption is that Johns, having reached the Pergola seconds before Wiegman and found nothing, simply ran round the side of the concrete structure and directly into the parking lot. Hence he cannot be found in the Wiegman film.

<sup>23</sup> 18WCH p 774. Johns Testimony.

<sup>24</sup> Trask p375. Craven statement to Trask.

<sup>25</sup> Trask p376

<sup>26</sup> William Manchester The Death of a President, Michael Joseph, 1967, p278.

Is there any support for this theory? Two other Cameramen, Atkins and Craven, left the car on Elm and proceeded to shoot film of the Newman family lying on the ground on the North side of the street.<sup>27</sup> These movie makers along with Altgens and Frank Cancellare can be seen in photographs taken from within the passing Press Bus.<sup>28</sup> Although most of the knoll and pergola is visible, Wiegman is not. Where is he? We know he had not returned to the car, parked along the South side of Elm, because he reappears in later photographs, together with his aforementioned colleagues and the Newmans,<sup>29</sup> after which they all make a run for the camera car. Where, we may ask, is Johns during this time? He is not visible in any of the aftermath pictures, although many of them show much of the knoll and the street.<sup>30</sup> He is not already in the car, Craven indicates that he was either the last or next-to-last to jump into the car as it was pulling away.<sup>31</sup> Was there a point when, momentarily, both Wiegman and Johns were behind the picket fence?

Jean Hill, an eyewitness to the assassination, was standing on the South side of Elm Street, almost level with the president's car at the time of the fatal head shot. Hill has consistently maintained that immediately after the shots, whilst everyone else remained stunned and inactive, she saw a man, running hard, cross from East to West across the face of the pergola and disappear behind the picket fence.<sup>32</sup> Hill has theorized that this individual was one of the conspirators. Is it not more likely that this was Lem Johns, racing to where he thought the shots had originated after he had lost the Vice president's car? If so this puts him in the very position, at the correct time, to meet Officer Joe M Smith who was entering the parking lot from behind the pergola.

If we make a leap of faith and accept the above scenario, why did Johns simply not attest to it and clear up the confusion? We must look closely at what the Secret Service expects from its agents. "Secret Service procedure requires that each agent stays with the person being protected and not be diverted unless it is necessary to accomplish the protective assignment."<sup>33</sup> These agents, assigned to protective duty, are not detectives whose task it is to solve crimes and apprehend criminals. In this instance Johns should have stayed with the vice president, in case there was an attempt on his life. There

<sup>27</sup> Trask pp374-375

<sup>28</sup> Rickerby post-assassination photographs of Dealey Plaza.

<sup>29</sup> Cancellare post-assassination photographs.

<sup>30</sup> Letter to the author from Richard B. Trask (author, Pictures of the Pain and acknowledged expert on assassination-related photographs) Note: Trask makes it clear, in his correspondence that he does not agree with the theory put forward here. He believes the time frame for such a meeting was not not long enough. As shown above, I would argue the opposite.

<sup>31</sup> Trask p379

<sup>32</sup> Jean Hill, The Last Dissenting Witness, Pelican, 1992, p23.

<sup>33</sup> Warren Commission Report, Government Printing Office p52



is an indication that this apparent dereliction of duty was not entirely unintentional. There seems to be little doubt that Johns initial aim was to reach LBJ's car, but when this proved impossible it is alleged that he "waved-on" his own follow-up car, thus choosing to stay in the Plaza<sup>34</sup> (Johns could have flagged down various other motorcade vehicles which through Elm Street between the time he was left stranded and the time that camera car 1 departed the scene). If this is so, Johns must have had a reason for this action. Was this perhaps to investigate the area from which he thought the shots emanated? It is hardly surprising then, in view of later events, that he omitted to mention this episode in his report to his superiors made only seven days after the event.<sup>35</sup> He was not to know that Smith, when giving evidence to the Warren Commission, eight months later, would testify to meeting an agent on the knoll. If Johns was this agent he could not now change his story. The Secret Service version of events had already been furnished to the Commission stating that all agents had accompanied the motorcade to Parkland, and that no agents remained in Dealey Plaza after the shooting.<sup>36</sup>

### **A Man of Action**

Another question to be asked is whether it is likely that Johns would have taken action such as this in breach of regulations. Consider the following: whilst Johnson was being ushered aboard Airforce 1 at Love Field, Johns, along with a Police driver whom he had commandeered, found himself on completely the opposite side of the airfield to the Aircraft he was trying to reach. His solution was as quick as it was dangerous. In complete contravention of all Airport safety regulations, with Air traffic controllers watching open-mouthed, he ordered the officer to drive straight across the runways, regardless of other air traffic, to Johnson's Aircraft.<sup>37</sup> I think one would have to agree that Johns was a man who thought quickly and acted decisively.

I do not maintain that the above evidence proves beyond doubt that the person encountered by Smith was Agent Lem Johns, and I can offer no explanation for the sightings of other Secret Service Agents in the area. Nevertheless, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, I this explanation to be the most logical to date.

Before closing, I cannot ignore testimony which appears to contradict my conclusions. In 1978, Officer J. M. Smith was interviewed by author Anthony Summers. In that interview Smith stated that the man he met "had hands like a mechanic and wore a sports shirt".<sup>38</sup> I am of the opinion that the "auto mechanic's" hands are not too difficult to explain. It is entirely possible that between exiting the car and meeting

Smith the agent could have dirtied his hands (on the fence, dusty cars etc...). The sports shirt is more difficult to discard. All I can offer, by way of explanation, is that this statement was made fifteen years after the event, by which time Smith was well aware of the controversy his original statement had caused. At no time in his original Warren Commission Testimony does he mention the agent's unusual dress or appearance. In fact, reading his testimony gives one the impression that he was entirely satisfied, at the time, that the man was who he said he was.

Unless other evidence is found in the future, I suggest that we accept what appears to be the most logical scenario as being what did, in fact, happen.

Let us reflect on comments made by the late and much respected Sylvia Meagher when discussing this incident:

*"Few mysteries in the case are as important as this one, and it is appalling that the Commission failed to recognize the grounds here for serious suspicion of a well-planned conspiracy at work"*<sup>39</sup>

I believe Sylvia Meagher was right. Had the Committee conducted a thorough investigation they may well have been forced to ask "Why was a trained Secret Service Agent searching the top of the Grassy Knoll if there was no gunfire from this position?" Far from indicating that no shots emanated from the knoll, this scenario points to exactly the opposite conclusion.

### **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank Richard Trask for the book, Pictures of the Pain, upon which this article relies so heavily. I may not agree with his conclusions but as a source of information Trask's work has no equal. My thanks are also due to Ian Griggs for access to the 26 Volumes and generously sharing his knowledge and information, and finally, for questions asked on my behalf, John Rudd.

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<sup>34</sup> Manchester p284

<sup>35</sup> 18WCH p773

<sup>36</sup> WCR p52

<sup>37</sup> Manchester p284

<sup>38</sup> Anthony Summers Conspiracy, Gollanz, 1980 p81

<sup>39</sup> Sylvia Meagher Accessories After the Fact Vintage Books, 1976, p26