

Rebuttal by the protagonist of one-bullet verdict



COMMISSION'S DEFENDER. Arlen Specter, 36, handled Commission's investigation of the shooting. He is now district attorney of Philadelphia.



The Warren Commission, in interrogating Governor Connally, respected both his veracity as a man and his importance as a witness—"He was perhaps the most important witness," says Arlen Specter, the Commission lawyer who interrogated the governor. Yet in the end the Commission disagreed with him, and did so on a basic principle of criminal investigation. That principle, in Specter's words, is: "Beware of isolated bits of evidence. To understand the whole picture, you must know evidence beyond what was experienced by any single witness. We re-examined facts in the light of Connally's account. But when we compared his sensory perceptions with other evidence we were forced to find his conclusions incorrect." Before the Warren Commission began its work, the generally ac-

cepted theory held that separate bullets struck the President and Connally. The FBI subscribed to this theory in a three-part report published in 1963. Specter himself believed in it at first. It was also believed that there was only one assassin—Lee Harvey Oswald.

When it became clear that it would require at least 2.3 seconds between shots for Oswald to have fired twice, Specter and his investigators began trying to see if Kennedy could have been hit

FBI RE-ENACTMENT. View through Oswald's rifle scope as seen in FBI's reconstruction shows the crosshairs on Kennedy's stand-in as he emerges from behind tree. This is the earliest moment, the Commission says, that the President could have been hit.

2.3 seconds before Connally. This would mean placing Kennedy's neck wound at least as far back as frame 192 in Zapruder's film, well before the President vanished behind the highway sign. But efforts to establish an early hit got nowhere. First there was the Zapruder film itself, which shows the President still waving cheerfully as late as frame 206 (p. 40), just as he disappears behind the sign. The clincher was the Commission's discovery that at frame 192, and for some time before and after, the assassin's line of vision from the Texas School Book Depository building was obscured by a tree.

This was discovered during a slow-motion, on-the-scene re-enactment of the crime. It was staged by the FBI, using a Secret Service follow-up limousine in place of the presidential Lincoln and FBI sit-ins for the presidential party. Early one morning in the spring of 1964, Elm Street in Dallas was sealed to traffic and the car was pushed slowly down the road. It was halted at every point where its position matched a frame in the Zapruder film. Up in the sixth-floor window of the School Book Depository building, another FBI man sighted through the scope on Oswald's rifle, to which he had attached a movie camera. Every time the car stopped, the FBI cameraman snapped a picture. The result was a sequence of still pictures that matched every Zapruder frame but taken from Oswald's presumed point of view.

When the Commission saw the FBI re-enactment film, it was at

once obvious that the tree, looming large in Oswald's telescopic sight, was crucial for fixing the earliest point at which the President would have been hit. The FBI frame in which Kennedy went under the tree corresponded with Zapruder frame 166. The FBI frame in which the President rode out clear of the tree and became a target for Oswald corresponded to Zapruder frame 210. It seemed most unlikely to the Commission that the President could have been hit as early as Zapruder 166—because Kennedy was still waving at the crowd more than two seconds later in frame 206. Nor did a hit seem likely around Zapruder 186, when for a fleeting instant Kennedy flashed across the assassin's line of vision through a parting in the foliage. And it seemed even less likely—though still possible—for Oswald to have fired blindly through the tree when he had a long stretch of clear road ahead of him.

Studying the FBI film, the Commission concluded that the earliest moment the President was hit was in Zapruder 210. By then, Kennedy was already well behind the highway sign in Zapruder's film and only 1.3 seconds away from the moment Connally claimed he was hit—too close in time for the assassin to have fired twice.

Having virtually ruled out an early hit on President Kennedy, the Commission was forced next to consider what is potentially the most damaging single argument against Connally's account of the crime: what happened to the bullet that hit the President?

According to the official autopsy report on the President, Kennedy was wounded by a bullet that pierced the base of his neck in back and exited from his throat below the Adam's apple. Since it struck no bone in the President's neck, it could hardly have been deflected and flown out of the car. It did not bury itself anywhere in the car. "One of our most impressive pieces of evidence," says Specter, "is the FBI report on an examination of the limousine. It concludes that no part of the car's interior was

struck by a whole bullet."

The only remaining place the bullet could have logically gone was into Connally. The FBI film shows that he sat directly beyond Kennedy in the assassin's line of fire. As Specter sums up the Commission's case, "Given the trajectory from the Book Depository window, the autopsy, about which I have no doubts, and the FBI

report on the limousine: where, if it didn't hit Connally, did that bullet go? This is the single most compelling reason why I concluded that one bullet hit both men."

As Specter describes it, the Commission arrived at its single-bullet theory by the elimination of possible alternatives. This is a risky procedure in any court of law since no one can be sure he knows all the alternatives. But there is some evidence to back up the theory. The path traced by the bullet through Connally's chest, according to careful measurements made for the Commission, is directly in line with its path through President Kennedy's neck, which suggests that the same bullet wounded both men. Nevertheless, the measurements are not finally conclusive, since any slight difference in the assumed posture of either the President or Connally would upset the calculations.

Specter interprets the Zapruder pictures differently from Connally. To follow his reasoning, look back to the sequence reproduced in the previous pages.

Specter, like Connally, was fascinated by frame 230 (p. 45), but for different reasons. "First of all," he says, "it looks to me as if his face is wincing, indicating a probability he's been hit. Now look at that wrist. You don't see it from frame 223 to 228 [pp. 40-41]. Kennedy's hands are up, grasping for the throat, but Connally's are down, at least until frame 229. But his wrist is very clear in 230. I would like to make two points. First, we're pretty sure from the medical evidence that when Connally was hit, his right wrist was down in his lap. The alignment of holes strongly indicates it. How else could a bullet travel a straight path through his back and chest

emerging just below his right nipple, pass through his right wrist and end up in his left thigh?

"Secondly, in frame 230 the wrist is too high to be hit and throughout the rest of the sequence—all the way until Connally collapses—that wrist stays raised. I am convinced that that wrist has been hit before it comes into view in frame 229. When it was hit, his hand was probably forced forward and down. But you never see that happen; and I say you don't because by 230 the wrist has already been hit, and that hand coming up

been hit before it comes in frame 229. When it was hand was probably forced and down. But you never happen; and I say you because by 230 the wrist has been hit, and that hand is a natural reflex action.

But doubts still remain sees Connally wincing in LIFE's photo interpreters looks unharmed, as does himself. Nor is there any evidence, despite Specter that Connally's right hand his lap when he was hit; the illustration published Commission to show C