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Reporter's Notebook

Dan Rather Returns To the Assassination

By BILL CARTER

The CBS News program "48 Hours" had several reasons for breaking with its usual format to examine, as it will tomorrow night, what Dan Rather calls the "mangrove swamp" of questions that still surround the assassination of John F. Kennedy.

Certainly the fascination with Oliver Stone's movie "J. F. K." was the major reason. That fascination led to another New York Times/CBS News survey on the assassination. It revealed what Andrew Heyward, the executive producer of "48 Hours," called startling results: Of those polled, 77 percent said they believed that people besides Lee Harvey Oswald were involved in the killing. And 75 percent said there was an official cover-up in the case.

The telephone poll of 1,281 people, conducted Jan. 22 to 25, has a margin of sampling error of three percentage points.

But another reason CBS News decided to take up a topic it has addressed in three previous documentaries was the intense personal interest of Mr. Rather. He has been covering the Kennedy assassination since Nov. 22, 1963, when he reported the news that the President was dead.

"I wanted to do this show as

much as I've ever wanted anything in my career," Mr. Rather said in an interview last week. He said he began pressing CBS executives to return to the assassination story as early as last fall after he saw an early draft of the "J. F. K." script.

Mr. Heyward said the purpose of the special edition of "48 Hours" was "to inform, not to convince." The show will look at five areas of the case, from the mechanics of the shooting itself to Oswald's movements that day in Dallas, to his murky background. It will also examine some of the prevailing conspiracy theories, and Mr. Rather will interview Mr. Stone.

The film maker has criticized Mr. Rather for CBS's previous conclusion that Oswald was probably the lone assassin. Mr. Rather questions the movie's premises, although he says, "It was skillfully done."

But he did mention that he believes there are three essential films on the assassination theme, lumping "J. F. K." with the openly fictitious films "The Manchurian Candidate" and "Executive Action."

CBS News says the earlier documentaries showed that Oswald almost certainly shot at the Presi-

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dent from the Texas School Book Depository that day. It will rely on some of that previous work tomorrow night. But Mr. Heyward said this show was mostly new reporting.

It is not likely to be CBS's final word. Mr. Rather said he considered the assassination story still open and thought more information would come out, particularly if the official files on the case are opened. Mr. Stone has demanded this, and Mr. Rather supports the demand.

"Long after Oliver Stone has gone onto his next movie and his next movie, long after a lot of people who have been writing about this now have stopped, I'm going to keep coming on this one," Mr. Rather said.