

The Warren Commission on the assassination of John Kennedy concluded that he had been hit by two of three bullets fired by Lee Harvey Oswald from the sixth floor of a building behind the President's car. The Commission determined that there was no conspiracy, that Oswald acted alone in killing Kennedy and that Jack Ruby acted alone in killing Oswald.

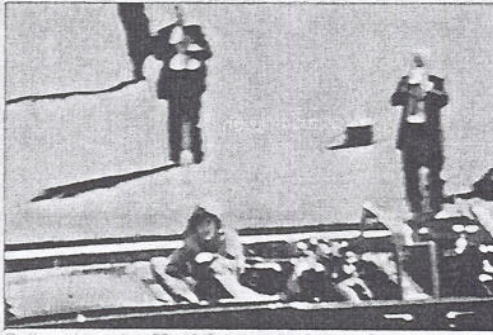
In 1966 the Gallup and Harris polls found that two-thirds of the American people disbelieved the Commission's findings. Their scepticism was buttressed by the work of early critics of the Commission's methods, notably Edward Jay Epstein who established that the 26 volumes of evidence did not in fact prove Oswald's guilt. But in all the time since then, the alternative—a conspiracy—has never been proven, despite enormous efforts by committed opponents of the Commission.

Until Watergate their work seemed to be arousing less interest. A member of Congress from Texas has called for the inquiry to be reopened on grounds that the Warren Commission's work was manifestly unsatisfactory. National magazines are full of new articles raising the old doubts. There is an Assassination Information Bureau, doing a brisk trade in lectures on the killing for 750 dollars a time, and a young man named Robert Groden is getting a lot of publicity by showing around the country his blown up, slowed down and strung-out version of the famous film of the assassination taken by Abraham Zapruder from near the grassy knoll where, some theorists believe, one of the 'conspirators' was hidden.

There are two basic kinds of conspiracy theorists working on Kennedy's assassination. On the one hand those who are concerned mainly to point up the deficiencies of the Warren Commission and to press for a new inquiry, and on the other those who, like Robert Groden, use those deficiencies to point accusing fingers at their own particular *hôte noir*. Groden's is the CIA. Other favourite targets are Texas millionaires, alarmed at Kennedy's supposed liberalism, and Cuban exiles furious at what they saw as Kennedy's betrayal during the Bay of Pigs and the Missile Crisis. And on May 6 President Ford was asked at a Press conference if there was any connection between allegations that the Kennedy White

## THE DAY OF THE CONSPIRATOR

Doubts about the assassination of President Kennedy almost 12 years ago have grown rather than subsided in the wake of the Watergate scandal. Theories about a second, third or even sixth assassin proliferate as never before, and the Rockefeller Commission on the CIA felt bound earlier this year to look into some of them. Here William Shawcross describes some of the questions which are now being asked, and on the next pages, using frames of the famous Zapruder film of the assassination not before published in this country, he looks at one theory, and at the evidence for and against it.



Dallas, November 22, 1963: seconds after the President is shot

House ordered the CIA to kill Castro, and the assassination. He was non-committal. Castro would, of course, have had to be extraordinarily foolish to attempt such revenge.

Perhaps the best example of the first kind of theorist is Harold Weisberg, who lives outside Washington and has devoted the last 12 years to analysing every scrap of information available on the case. He has produced four books of his own and is now filing suits under the new Freedom of Information Act—which prevents the government withholding information except on strictly limited grounds of national security—for further government documents. He has, he says, obtained startling spectrographic evidence which proves that the Warren Commission's ballistic findings are rubbish. And last year he obtained from the National Archives the transcript of a secret session of the Warren Commission on January 27, 1964—called to discuss the rumour that Oswald was an FBI

agent. The former evidence has yet to be documented in public but the transcript and the fact that it was hidden so long does demonstrate why so many Americans find it easy to distrust the Commission's work.

The Commission's general counsel, Lee Rankin, said: "We do have a dirty rumour that is very bad for the Commission, very damaging to the agencies that are involved in it and must be wiped out insofar as it is possible to do so by this Commission." The question was how; one member, Hale Boggs, asked another, former CIA Director, Allen Dulles, about CIA practice:

Boggs: "The man who recruited him would know, wouldn't he?"

Dulles: "Yes, but he wouldn't tell . . ."

Boggs: "What you do is . . . make our problem utterly impossible because you say this rumour can't be dissipated under the circumstances."

Dulles: "I don't think it can unless you believe Mr Hoover, and

so forth and so on, which probably most of the people will . . . I think Mr Hoover would certainly say he didn't have anything to do with this fellow." To many conspiracy theorists such a statement infers that Hoover lied when he denied Oswald was an agent.

If the methods of the Warren Commission provide grounds for reasonable doubt, the more recent work of the Rockefeller Commission was a conspiratorialist's dream. The Commission had no mandate to investigate the assassination but in February this year the comedian Dick Gregory came bearing photographs of three tramps arrested near the grassy knoll in Dallas just after Kennedy was shot. One bore a passing resemblance to Howard Hunt and another to his Watergate co-burglar, Frank Sturgis.

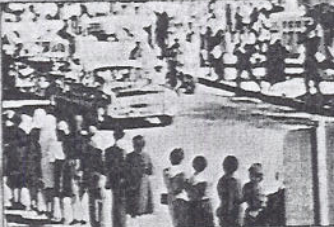
They had long ago been published in the *Yipster Times*, a paper of uncertain accuracy, as proof of CIA participation in the assassination; in 1963 Hunt was still employed by the Agency. Almost every Washington journalist interested in the story had examined and rejected the photographs, but the Rockefeller Commission jumped at the opportunity Gregory gave them to study the allegations of CIA involvement. Why? To conspiracy theorists it was obvious. Gerald Ford was a member of the Warren Commission and Rockefeller's counsel, David Belin, had also worked for Warren. The photographs gave them an ideal chance to attack all theories of conspiracy.

A lot of the Commission's work was thorough but its section on the Kennedy assassination went some way to justify the theorists' predictions. The Commission used the excuse of the tramp photographs not only to exonerate Hunt and Sturgis (a very reasonable thing to do) but also to try and prove that Kennedy could not have been killed in any other way than the Warren Commission described—by shots all fired from behind by Lee Harvey Oswald. In one sense they made the same sort of logical leap of which some theorists are so fond. Hunt and Sturgis were not involved, therefore there was no conspiracy. Some of their conclusions seemed more convincing—though not to Groden and other theorists. The trouble with the whole argument is that each side has a dogmatic position—there *was* *was* *not* a conspiracy—towards which facts have to be lured. It's exhausting to watch, almost impossible to listen. ➤

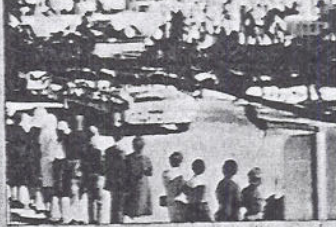




133 JFK's Lincoln enters Elm Street. Governor Connally in front. School Book Depository is up left.



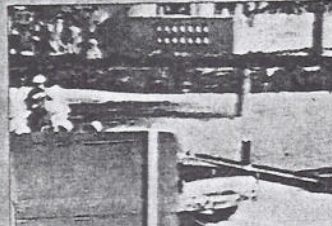
153 Just over a second later, JFK has been waving, his right arm is now on the door; all is normal.



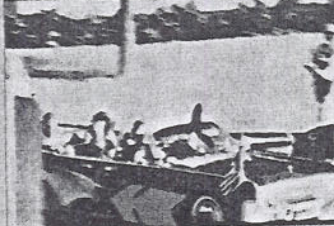
157 Groden claims frames are missing here; neither Warren Commission nor Time Life acknowledge it.



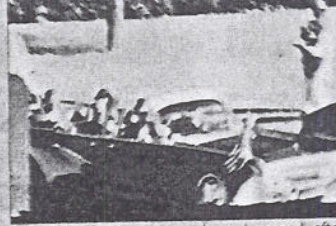
189 Groden believes the point from behind but...



212 JFK's head is still visible; Groden believes a second bullet hit at frame 218 (car then hidden).



224 Car emerges and passes an open umbrella by the road sign. This was a signal, says Groden.



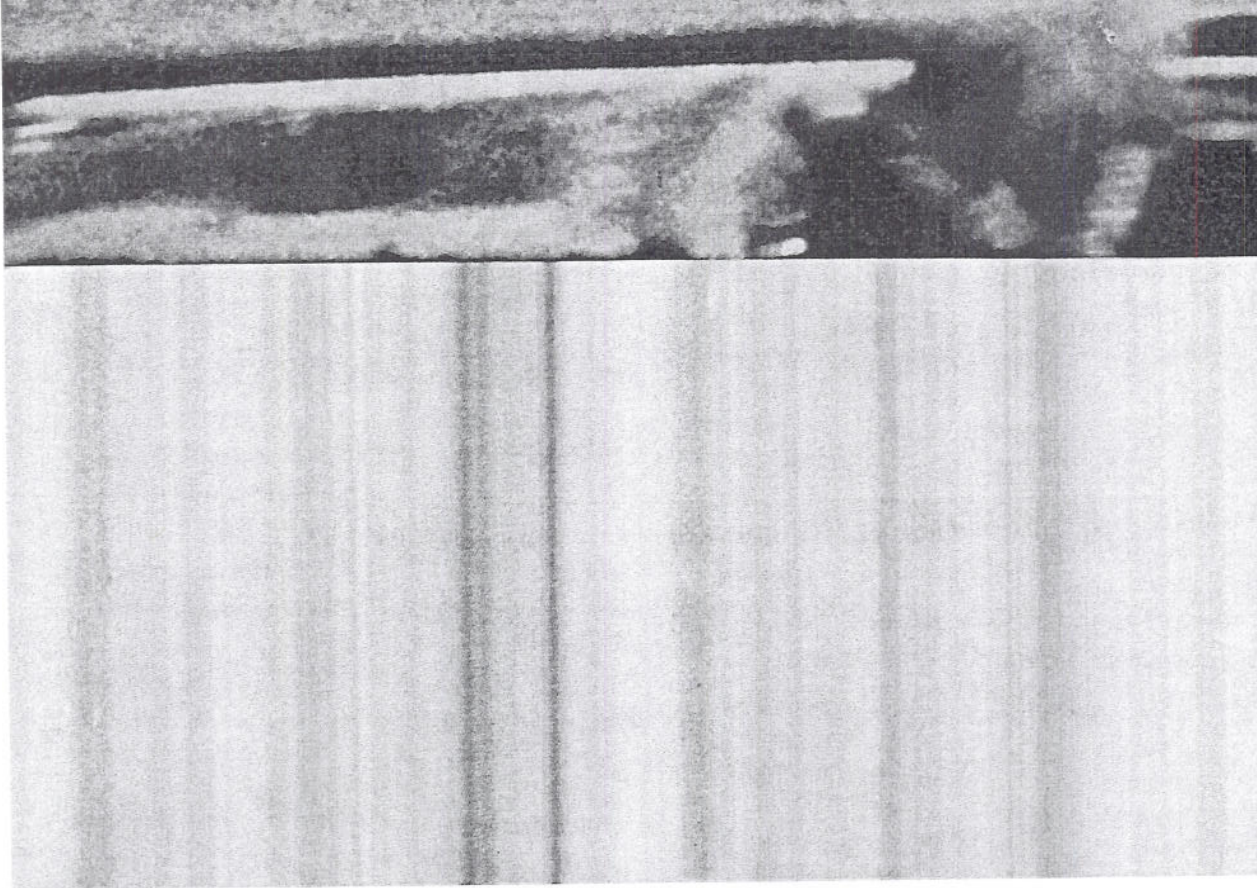
225 JFK clutches throat, about 1/2 second after Groden believes a bullet entered from the front.



227 Groden believes second time by another...

## THE GRODEN THEORY

The frames on these and the following pages show the vital shots from the Zapruder film as suggested by Robert Groden (see page 22), who believes that at least six shots were fired by a number of marksmen.







missing here; neither  
e Life acknowledge it



189 Groden believes the first shot was fired at this  
point from behind but missed. Warren disagrees



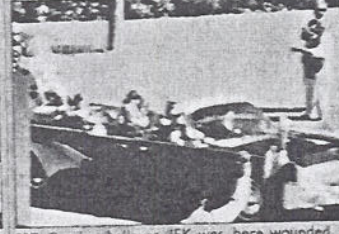
206 The car passes behind a road sign; only the  
President's head is visible at this moment



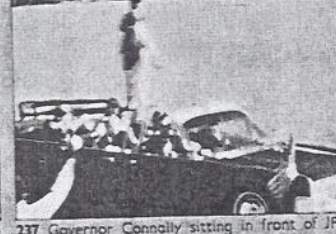
207 Warren says first shot was probably fired at  
frame 210; Groden says 208-211 are missing



about 1/4 second after  
entered from the front



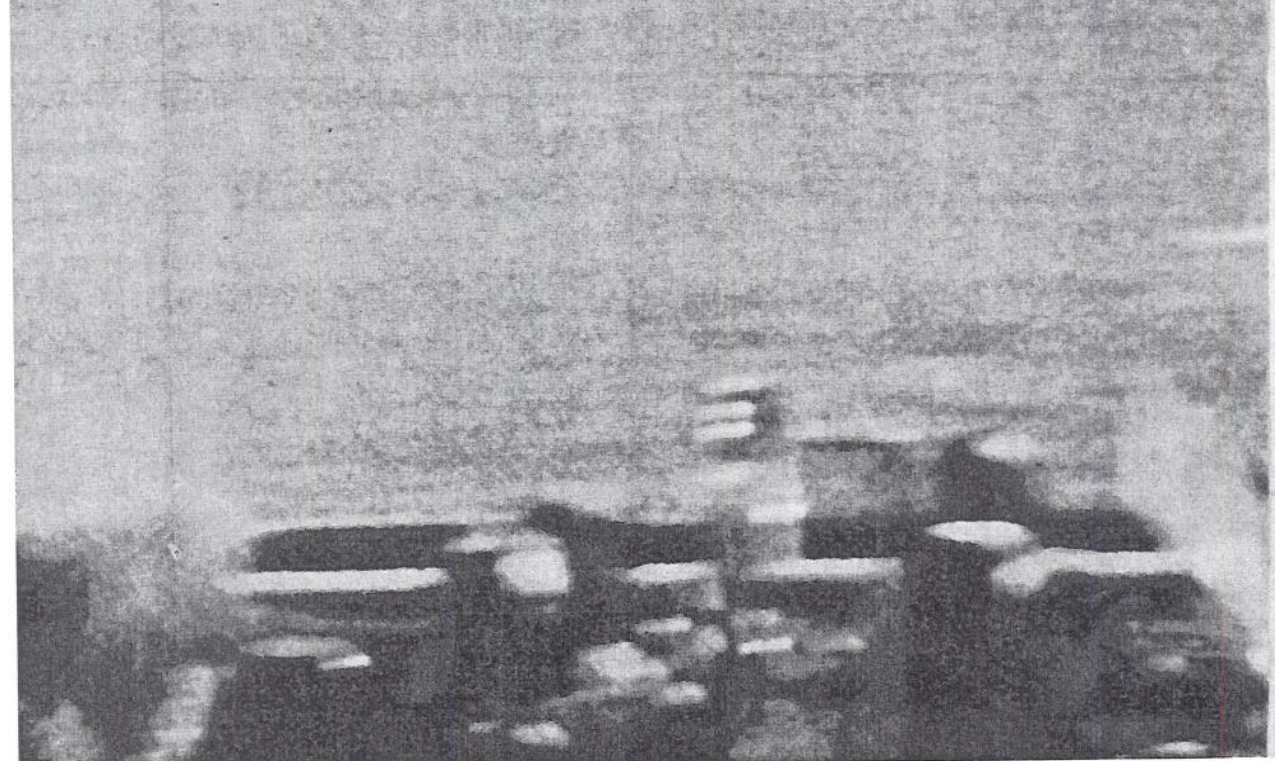
227 Groden believes JFK was here wounded a  
second time by another bullet fired from behind



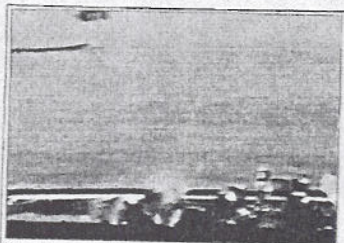
237 Governor Connally sitting in front of JFK  
shows signs of a hit; his cheeks puff out. All agree



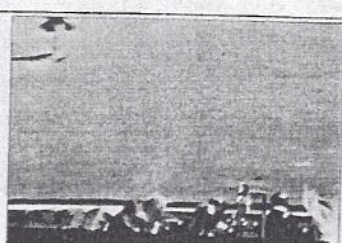
312 The frame before fatal shot(s). One from  
behind (Warren); another from front (Groden)



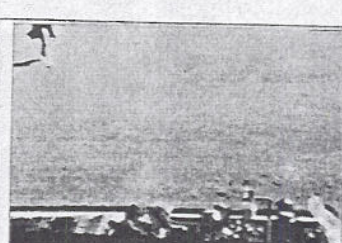




313 JFK's head jerks forward as bullet strikes (This frame forms background to previous pages)



314 His head jerks back - shot again from front (says Groden); a muscular spasm (says Warren)



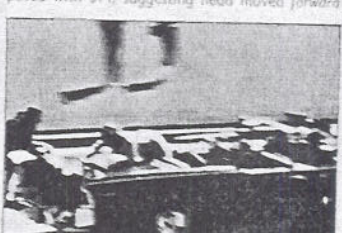
315 In the Warren version, this frame was transposed with 314, suggesting head moved forward



345 Jackie turns and begins to climb on to the boot of the Lincoln which is still moving slowly



367 Secret Service Agent Clint Hill jumps on to the bumper of the still slowly-moving car



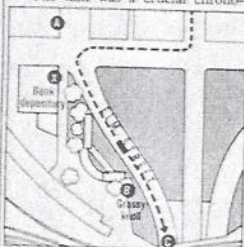
371 About three and one-sixth seconds after JFK's head disintegrates, the car is accelerating away

"It was an awful thing and I loved the President, and to see that happen before my eyes - his head just opened up and shot down like a dog - it leaves a very, very deep sentimental impression with you; it's terrible."

Thus Abraham Zapruder, Dallas dress manufacturer, described filming Kennedy's assassination.

On November 22, 1963, Zapruder stood near the grassy knoll on Elm Street, Dallas, to film the presidential motorcade on his Bell and Howell 8mm. camera. From the moment that JFK's Lincoln turned slowly under the Texas School Book Depository until it sped out of sight - about 22 seconds in all - Zapruder kept the camera running.

The film was a crucial chrono-



The motorcade route. Groden puts marksmen at points A, B and C. According to the Warren Commission Oswald fired from point X.

meter to the Warren Commission in buttressing its conclusion that just three shots were fired at the President, all of them by Lee Harvey Oswald from the sixth floor of the Depository, behind the President's car. The Commission found that one shot "most probably" wounded first Kennedy then Governor Connally, another missed entirely and the third blew out the President's brains. Critics of the Commission have made their own analyses of the film to try and show that, on the contrary, there must have been more than one assassin and that JFK was shot from the front as well as the rear. Several of them say Oswald was in no way involved.

Zapruder said: "I heard the first shot and saw the President lean over and grab himself," but the Commission decided the first bullet was fired at or near frame 210, when the car was behind the road sign. Till then the line of fire from the sixth floor of the Depository down Elm Street would have been obscured by a tree. Either this, or the second shot, said the Commission, went through the President's neck, out of his throat, into Connally's back, shattered his fifth rib, passed through his right wrist, smashing bones, and finally stopped in his left thigh. The bullet was found on Connally's stretcher in almost perfect condition.

Critics of the Commission maintain that this 'superbullet' theory is manifestly absurd but that it was crucial to the Commission's "Lone Assassin Oswald" theory. Oswald, said the Commission, used a Mannlicher Carcano 6.5mm. rifle which, according to FBI tests, could fire only one bullet every 2.3 seconds - or every 41.4 frames of Zapruder's film. Between frames 210 and 234, when Connally appears to be hit, Oswald could have fired only once. Therefore the same bullet wounded them both.

Nonsense, say the critics, no bullet could have done all that and survived intact. And, furthermore, the time between the bullet being fired and Connally reacting - about 1.3 seconds - is too long. The answer must be that two different bullets hit each man, from two different guns.

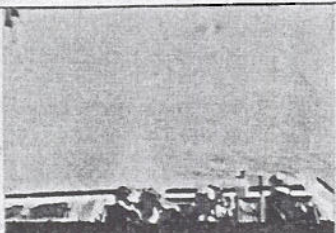
Until recently the whole film has not been publicly available. Zapruder rushed it off to Kodak in Dallas, had three copies made, gave two to the Secret Service and sold the third to Time Life. The chains of custody of the prints are almost impossible to establish; Time Life apparently damaged their copy while enlarging it and four frames, 208-211, seem to be missing. Life magazine declined to publish the more gory frames.

Recently, a young film editor named Robert Groden has been

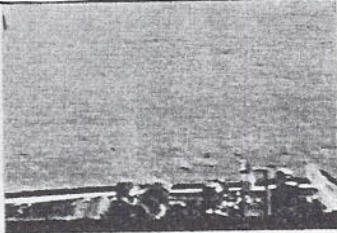
touring the States with his own version of the film. He claims that this shows that as many as six shots were fired, and that there were at least four assassins. The first shot, at frame 189, he says, missed; the second, at about frame 218, was fired from the grassy knoll in front and right of JFK, entered his throat and lodged in his neck. At frame 227, half a second later, JFK is hit again in the back and his body is pushed forward. Then Connally is hit separately. And then, after almost five seconds, Kennedy's head is blown apart by two bullets, one - frame 313 - from the rear which pushes his head forward, the next - frame 314 - from the front which forces it back.

The Warren Commission agreed that the fatal shot hit Kennedy at about frame 314 - but they believed there was only one, from behind. On the basis of evidence published by the Warren Commission and of the allegations made by Groden and others, a panel of experts appointed by the Rockefeller Commission decided unanimously that the Warren findings were correct. Kennedy's head was forced back, they said, by a "neuromuscular reaction". One of them also gave the opinion that the explosion of the brain tissue outward and upward from the forehead would have forced the head back by a "jet effect".

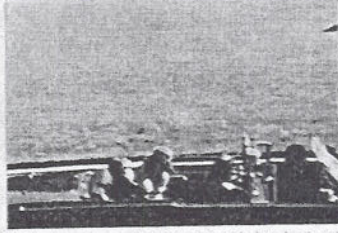




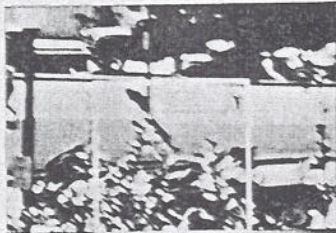
316 The upper part of the President's body jerks backward at this moment—as if forced



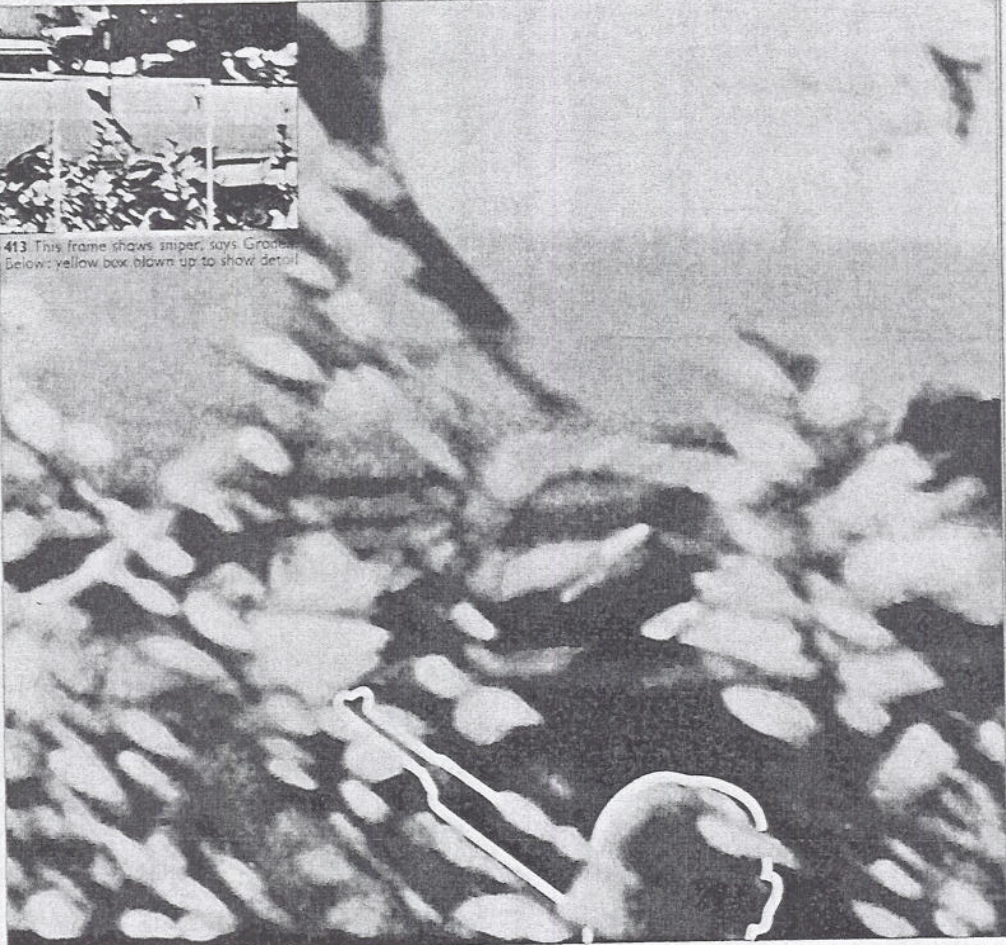
317 The President begins to collapse towards his wife Jackie who is sitting beside him



321 Jackie begins to move towards her husband as he falls towards her, fatally wounded



413 This frame shows sniper, says Groden. Below: yellow box blown up to show detail



413 Zapruder pans after the car. In this frame, says Groden, can be seen the head of a fourth assassin who is holding a rifle. Absolute non-

sense, says the Rockefeller Commission; it's just shadows which disappear 1/2 second later; and anyway, what assassin would hide in a small

bush just five feet in front of sightseers like Zapruder? He is hiding beyond the bush, says Groden, behind a small wall, about 14 feet from Zapruder