

Under 'Miscellaneous'

By Tom Zito

In 1966, three years after the assassination of John Kennedy—so the story goes—a Life magazine laboratory technician found himself low on cash. He decided a bootlegged print of the fabled Abraham Zapruder footage of the killing might bring a quick influx of money.

The 40-second film clip had been sold days after the assassination for use in the magazine, which printed color blowups of several frames. For exclusive ownership of the film, Life paid Zapruder \$25,000, which he donated to the family of J. D. Tippit, the Dallas patrolman slain by Lee Harvey Oswald.

This week a classified ad in The Wall Street Journal offered "one of the world's most wanted historical col-

lector's items for sale to the highest number was answered by a person bidder." A call to the Rochester, N.Y., identifying himself as Dick Snowden, who was offering "a copy of the Zapruder film."

Snowden said the film had been bought "by a D.C. attorney in 1966 from a California man who had gotten it from a Time-Life lab technician." He referred to the Washington man simply as "Clarence" and refused to reveal his identity.

At his apartment in Southwest Washington yesterday morning, Clarence McKee told two Washington Post reporters that he was in fact owner of the Zapruder film copy. He confirmed Snowden's statement that the film had

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The ad for the Zapruder film, listed under "business opportunities" in Wall Street Journal.

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been flown to Rochester last Sunday on an American Airlines flight, insured for \$45,000.

"Washington is too hot a place to handle this kind of transaction," explained McKee, who said he had graduated from Howard University Law School last year, but had failed his first attempt at the New York bar examination. He said he had worked as a legislative assistant in several Capitol Hill offices during and after his student days.

"Snowden heard about the film through a mutual friend of ours," McKee said, "and he convinced me we could make some money on it. I listened to him and I liked the way the kid's mind worked." McKee refused to say from whom he had bought the film or how much he had paid.

A 21-year-old student scheduled to graduate from New York's Alfred University in June, Snowden told a caller he expected the film to bring "at least \$30,000." "If you don't have that much money yourself, you should try to get a little group together," he advised. "That's why I ran it under 'business opportunities.'"

Larry Krug, president of the American Political Items Collectors, said yesterday that the film "would be extremely valuable to a number of Kennedy specialists who easily might spend more than that amount of money. A figure of \$30,000 doesn't surprise me in the least."

Time-Life, however, has different ideas on the value of the film.

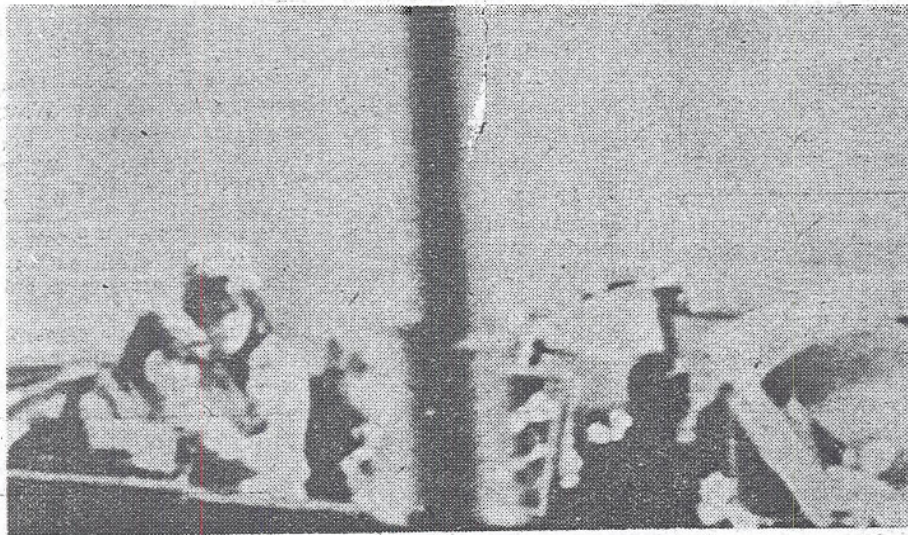
"We own it outright," said Helen Zeiller, a sales representative in charge of the Time-Life picture agency. "Any print of the film, other than the two in the National Archives, are in violation of our copyright and therefore illegal. If anyone tries to sell a print our lawyers are going to go after him as fast as is humanly possible."

McKee said he was undaunted.

"I spent a couple of weeks looking through my law books," he said, "and I just don't think that selling this thing is going to be illegal."

There are no easy answers to the questions surrounding the legality and authenticity of the film, or even its actual existence.

But there is no question that the classified item is intriguing.



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A frame from the Zapruder footage in which President Kennedy slumps over, mortally wounded.