

Bill Slocum

Secret Service Murdered In Cold Type

NEW YORK — Do you get the feeling that John F. Kennedy is being re-assassinated?

Certainly the United States Secret Service, which died a little to a man when JFK was killed, is being murdered in cold type by William Manchester.

The Secret Service is charged with protecting the life of a President of the United States. In certain long-recognized conditions their job is impossible.

The perfect conditions for assassination are a man who is willing to die to kill a President (Oswald), a man who is a crack shot (Oswald), and altitude (sixth floor of the Texas Book Depository).

The Secret Service never had a chance.

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MANCHESTER HAS constantly made the Secret Service look bad and the service, sadly, had nobody around to object to the man's prose on the grounds of either tactlessness or inaccuracy.

For instance he gave the strong impression that the Secret Service partied when it should have been protecting. In his first installment he told of Secret Servicemen staying up late in a night club and drinking. I would say he was right there. I've stayed up late with Secret Servicemen in night clubs. And drank.

But while we were relaxing other Secret Servicemen were about their assigned duties. Secret Servicemen are human. They work so many hours, they play so many hours, they sleep so many hours.

So, in the case of the relaxing Secret Servicemen I suggest Manchester didn't entirely know what he was writing about. Or did not choose to write all he knew.

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IN HIS SECOND installment Manchester says that the agents "closest" to Kennedy were too old for their work. They were respectively 54 and 48 and their reflexes weren't fast enough to take advantage of the five seconds between shots, he claims.

These men were not the agents closest to Kennedy. They were in the front seat of a big car. Agents on the running boards were closer. I suggest that Manchester doesn't know anything about reflexes or he would know that age is important but is no guarantee of either slow or fast reflexes. Nor is youth.

Manchester's statement that five seconds existed between shots is at best a guess and it is the longest period of time I have heard estimated.

Manchester points out that the first Secret Service action that developed came when agent Clint Hill sprinted from the second or back-up Secret Service car. That is precisely as it should have been. In case of trouble Secret Service agents attached to the Presidential car are instructed to stay there. They are to use their bodies to intercept bullets if necessary. Or possible. Aid is to come from the back-up car. As it did.

Manchester is appalled at the confusion he says existed at the hospital among agents. Confusion and anguish are often indistinguishable. Particularly from 1200 miles and several months.

The truth is that every Secret Service man on the Presidential detail would have given his life to save the President.

* No agents on running boards of JFK car. See Altgens photo.