

# 'Executive Action': 10 Years After

By Tom Zito

Ten years after the assassination of John F. Kennedy a semi-fictionalized movie thriller is about to be released, concluding that his murder was planned by a group of powerful industrialists.

"Executive Action," scheduled to open at seven theaters here on Nov. 14, is based on a novel of the same name by Donald Freed and Mark Lane. Lane once served as attorney for Lee Harvey Oswald and wrote "Rush to Judgment," a book arguing Oswald's innocence and proposing a conspiracy theory for the assassination.

Dalton Trumbo, author of the antiwar novel "Johnny Got His Gun" and imprisoned and blacklisted for his refusal to testify about alleged involvement with the Communist Party, wrote the screenplay. Burt Lancaster, the late Robert Ryan and Will Geer play conspirators.

"I really think this film is going to appeal to a young audience," producer Ed Lewis said. Lewis also produced "Seven Days in May," another political thriller.

"They'll be fascinated by the way real people are mixed with fiction. In that sense it's sort of a new kind of movie, on the line of 'Z'. We don't pretend to know exactly who did what to whom. But we basing the film either on reported facts or things we've documented ourselves.

In fact, we're going to hand out an eight-page pamphlet to everyone who comes to

see the film. It will serve as a back-up reference on most of the major points we make in the film.

"The conclusion we come up with is that there couldn't have been just one assassin. The historical facts to back a conspiracy theory are all there. Kennedy had just closed 52 military bases and signed the test ban treaty with the Soviet Union. A lot of industrialists were upset by that."

The film was shot almost exclusively in southern California, "largely as an economy measure," Lewis said. A few silent sequences were filmed in Dallas. Close-ups of the late President came from newsreel footage, and in long shots a double was used. The independent production cost about \$600,000, according to Lewis. Shooting was completed three months ago.

The film had originally

been the idea of actor Donald Sutherland, according to Lewis.

"He commissioned Freed and Lane to write the screenplay about three years ago. He tried to get backing, but then abandoned the project because he felt the script was too sensational to get financing.

"I took over about 18 months ago. After a lot of consideration both Burt and Dalton agreed to work on the film. Then I had to work hard to come up with backers. Dalton substantially

rewrote the script. Now there's nothing sensational about it except the conclusion. This is a very serious work."

Of the timing of the release, Lewis said, "I'm embarrassed that it's coming out on the 10th anniversary of the assassination.

"But look," he added, "I'm not going to be afraid to exploit this. The more people who see the film, the more I'll feel we've accomplished something."