

p. 9 - The FBI could have saved
President Kennedy's life!
William W. Turner
as told to Bruce Lee

ex-FBI agent charges:

Somewhere between Monday, November 11, and 12:30 p. m. on Friday, November 22, 1963, the Federal Bureau of Investigation bungled badly. The direct and tragic result was the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. I realize that this is a strong charge to make against our most famous and powerful federal law-enforcement agency. But the evidence I uncovered while making a private investigation in Dallas supports my belief that . . .

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“The FBI could have saved P

ON November 22, 1963, just a few hours after President John F. Kennedy was shot to death by Lee Harvey Oswald, I stood on Elm Street in Dallas, looking up at the sixth-floor corner window from which the assassin had fired the fatal shots. I was in Dallas because, as a private citizen, I sensed that there were too many questions left unanswered, too much information concealed. I went to Dallas because I felt that something had gone terribly wrong—that President Kennedy’s life might have been saved. As a former FBI agent of ten and a half years’ standing, I know FBI methods of investigation—and I decided to employ them on my own.

I had another reason for being in Dallas. I wanted the answers to two questions: 1. Are similar assassination attempts inevitable? 2. Is it impossible to prevent assassinations? I found the somber answer to both ques-



MARCH 1964

BY WILLIAM W. TURNER as told to Bruce Lee

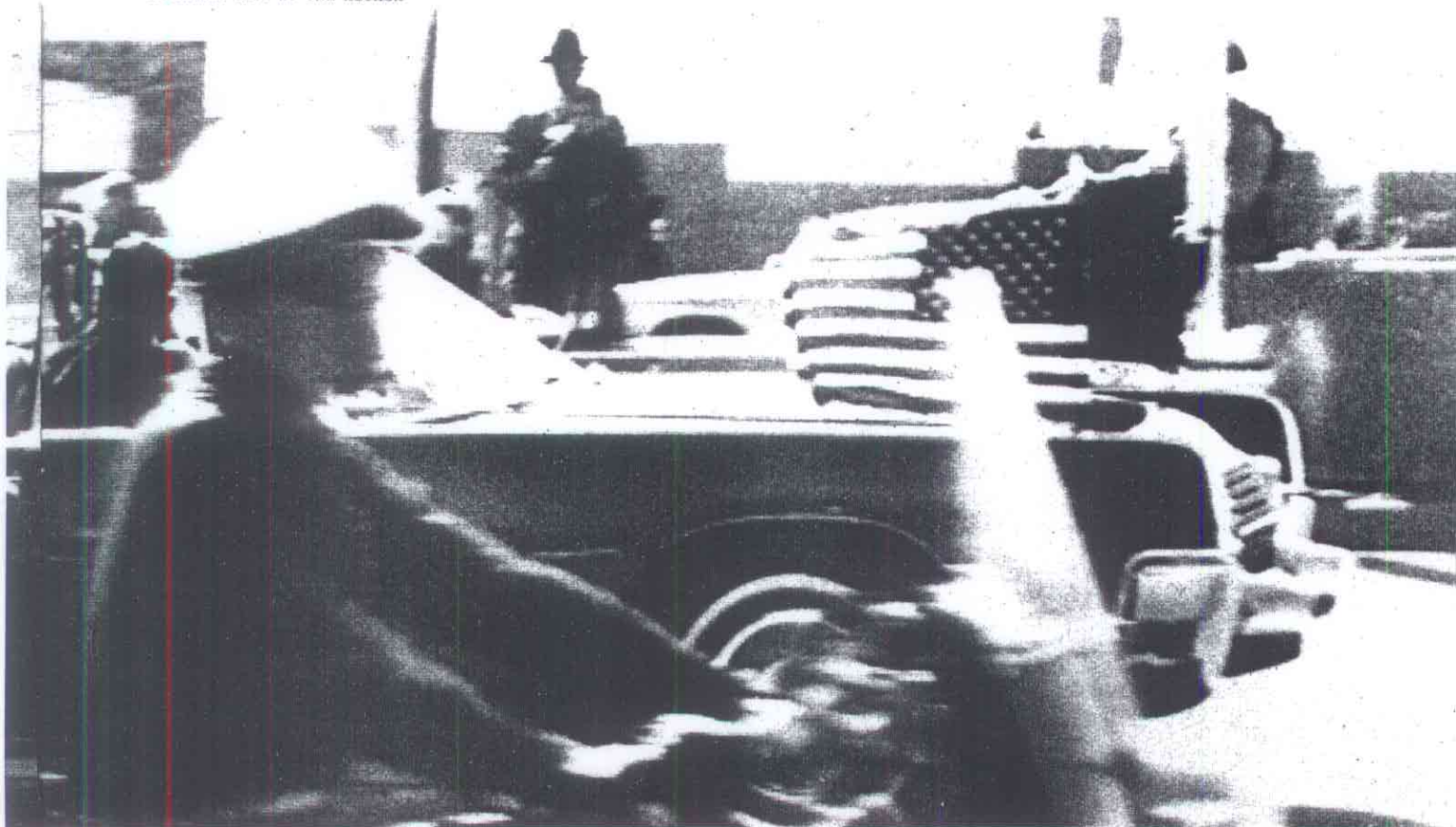
President Kennedy's life!"

tions—yes. However, future Presidents should have a better chance to survive than did John F. Kennedy in Dallas.

Shortly after the President's murder, I was sitting by the desk of Dallas police officer T.F. Moore, who had been assigned to take all telephone calls relating to the assassination. I particularly remember one call. After Moore hung up, he turned to me. "The guy says we got the wrong man," he said sarcastically. "He says he'll let us know who really did it—later!"

Moore's bitter remark haunted me. It still does. Perhaps Americans are blaming the wrong man. Not that I have the slightest doubt that Lee Harvey Oswald fired the bullets that killed President Kennedy and wounded Texas Governor John Connally. My investigation confirms that Oswald was indeed the assassin, and that he killed on his own; there was no plot by

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The author, William W. Turner, was formerly employed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation for 10½ years. He was assigned to FBI offices in five cities and received three letters of commendation from FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. On November 30, 1960, Turner requested a transfer from his post in Oklahoma City. This was refused, and Turner was subsequently dismissed from the service. He is now suing for reinstatement.

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"The FBI could have saved President Kennedy's life!"

left-wingers, right-wingers or the crime syndicate.

But I honestly believe that Lee Harvey Oswald could have and should have been stopped. Based on my own law-enforcement experience, I think he was probably aided by jealousy and a lack of cooperation and communication between law-enforcement agencies. This is what I mean by blaming the wrong man. Essentially, what I am asking is: How and why was a man such as Oswald allowed to run loose when the President was in Dallas—and who let him run loose?

Like almost every metropolitan police department, the Dallas police have what they call a "nut box"—a file of cranks and crackpots who have tried to blow up something or who have mailed a rattlesnake to somebody. Most are harmless. A few are dangerous. Lee Harvey Oswald's name was not in the Dallas police's "nut box."

It was, however, in the files of the FBI's Dallas office. In fact, I soon learned that a Dallas FBI agent had especially interviewed Oswald only ten days before the assassination. I discovered that two FBI men (I know their names) had originally talked to Oswald's mother in an attempt to locate him in Dallas. She told them where he lived and they interviewed him. Oswald's landlady, Mrs. Ruth Paine, also reports that FBI men twice visited Lee Oswald's Russian-born wife during the month of October. Mrs. Paine, who speaks Russian, served as interpreter during both interviews.

The FBI agents assured Mrs. Oswald that her husband's new job at the Texas School Book Depository "would not be endangered" by them. So they did know where Oswald worked. What's more, the FBI agents told Mrs. Oswald the interview was merely a routine check, because Russian emigrants like her were often blackmailed by the Soviets, who threaten to harm their relatives if they refuse to do this or that. Oswald was not present during either FBI visit. But Mrs. Paine said that he knew about them and worried about them.

I also learned that the FBI eventually did give the Secret Service a "risk list" of people the Bureau thought might harm the President. But Oswald's name was not on it. This fact has since been confirmed by (Continued on page 86)

FBI knew about Oswald's trip to USSR, his pro-Castro boasts, his sick mind, his skill with rifle—but never told Secret Service.

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the FBI headquarters in Washington.

Why was Oswald's name omitted? Here's why, in the words of an FBI spokesman, as quoted in the *New York Times*, December 10, 1963:

"There was nothing in the world in his background to indicate he was going to do anything like this. There would have to be some reason (to keep him under surveillance), and the only reason in his case was: Was he a spy or saboteur? In Oswald's case, there was absolutely no indication whatsoever he was an agent. . . . (Keeping him under surveillance) would have been a terrifying waste of manpower."

The FBI official added that once the Bureau had determined to its satisfaction that Oswald was neither a spy nor a saboteur, it had fulfilled its statutory responsibility. This, too, is from the December 10 issue of the *New York Times*.

If this explanation satisfies you, it does not satisfy me!

A man does not have to be a spy or a saboteur to endanger a President's life. And in my estimation, the "terrifying waste of manpower" occurred when the FBI, after uncovering vital material about Oswald, failed to inform the Secret Service, which bears direct responsibility for protecting the President from bodily harm.

What did the FBI have on Oswald? Plenty. Enough, I believe, for his name to have been put on that "risk list"! In its thick file on Oswald, the FBI had all the pertinent information on his erratic behavior: his attempted defection to the Soviet Union; his record in the U.S. Marines (including his marksmanship); his correspondence with the New York headquarters of the pro-Castro Fair Play for Cuba Committee, and his overt left-wing activities in New Orleans.

Furthermore, when the FBI interviewed Oswald—with, I assume, the knowledge of the home office in Washington—the FBI knew that Oswald had gone to Mexico City in the hope of getting a visa to enter either Cuba or Russia. (Both countries turned him down.) So the FBI knew where Oswald lived; it knew where he worked; it knew that he could shoot well; it knew he had a long, bizarre record of involvement with Marxist groups.

But, despite all this derogatory information, at 12:30 p.m., on Friday, November 22, Lee Harvey Oswald was free to poke the barrel of his rifle out of the window, center the President in his telescopic sight, and squeeze off three shots.

Of course, once Oswald was in that window, there was nothing the FBI or the Secret Service could do. But that is not the point. The point is: Should he have been free to be in that window? Did the FBI really fulfill its obligation to John F. Kennedy? President Lyndon B. Johnson's appointment of a distinguished commission to investigate the assassination is a good start. I only hope the panel does more than just read the FBI's report on the crime. I hope it takes a hard look at how the FBI conducted itself before November 22—what it did and did not do.

As I went about my private investigation in Dallas, I used FBI techniques to find out what went wrong. I concentrated on the three agencies involved: the FBI, the Secret Service and the Dallas Police Department—all charged, in one way or another, with

protecting the life of the President.

The assassination of John F. Kennedy did not just "happen." It was the final link in a chain of events that began years ago. Month by month, another danger flag was flown—but apparently each one was either ignored or downgraded by law-enforcement officials.

"We had no record of any sort on Lee Oswald," Captain Glen King of the Dallas police told me. "There is no particular reason we should. Oswald did not appear to carry out any activity in the Dallas area which would bring him to our attention."

This is true. Yet there is a bulky dossier on Lee Oswald. The FBI has it. It dates back three years, and it is crammed with details about Oswald's activities. It was started at the urging of the State Department's security unit, and it was reviewed and brought up to date every 30 days during 1962 and 1963. Here, the FBI did its duty.

But then it was announced that President Kennedy would visit Dallas. "The Secret Service followed its normal precautions for the President's visit," a friend in a federal agency told me. "If the Secret Service was given any information on Lee Oswald, it must have been with the notation, 'There is nothing to indicate that he is a threat.'"

My friend was only partly right. As I subsequently discovered, the Secret Service got no information on Oswald. And here is the key to the tragedy. The FBI had a file, but its contents were kept secret. Nobody knew about it.

How does the Secret Service figure in all of this? The Secret Service is the agency directly responsible for guarding the President. But the Secret Service numbers only 400 men. Of these, 58 are detailed to protect the President. They go everywhere he goes. They are not investigative agents, however. Their job is not to ferret out subversives. They are protection specialists—bodyguards.

In Dallas, on or about November 11, 1963, Secret Service agents carefully inspected the President's parade route. This is standard procedure for them. They want to know what they will be up against. The route from the airport to the Dallas Trade Mart, where President Kennedy was scheduled to speak, covered about 11 miles. I retraced the route myself.

The first five miles took me through residential areas where, the Secret Service learned, the crowds would probably be comparatively sparse. There were few tall buildings and the streets were broad, so the crowds could not press too close to the Presidential car. Routinely, the Secret Service arranged to seal off highway overpasses when the President was due to pass under them, and the agents also insured that cross-traffic at intersections would be blocked, so that the President's car would always be moving. Thus he would not be a "sitting duck."

Then the motorcade would travel along Harwood Street, which is lined with stores and small office buildings. From Harwood, it would make a turn onto Main Street and proceed through downtown Dallas. The Secret Service men shuddered when they saw Main Street. To them, it was a fearsome canyon of buildings 30 and 40 stories high. Thousands of office windows stare down on Main Street.

"We fear high buildings more than

anything," a Secret Service agent said. "There can be a sniper in any window of any building. And what can we do about it? Very little."

After 12 blocks, however, Main Street changes. There is an abrupt transition to cheap hotels, pawn shops, warehouses and wholesalers. A block to the south, and running parallel to Main Street, is Commerce Street. At 1312½ Commerce Street is the Carousel Club, owned by a man named Jack Ruby! The dingy buildings near the end of Main Street are mostly only two or three floors high; the tallest, the Maurice Hotel, stands five stories.

The Secret Service classified this area as relatively safe. "If we get past the downtown section," one agent said, "we should be all right."

To reach the expressway that leads to the Trade Mart, the motorcade had to make a Z off Main Street—a right turn and one block along Houston Street, then a left turn and one block along Elm. On one corner of Elm and Houston is the county jail. Diagonally across from the jail on another corner of Elm and Houston is the Texas School Book Depository, a neat, clean, six-story brownstone unit.

Lee Oswald, crouching in a sixth-story window of the Texas School Book Depository, had two chances to shoot—when President Kennedy's car approached his window head-on, and when it turned the corner and drove away from his building. As I rode in the back seat of a car toward the building, I realized why Oswald hadn't shot the President as his car approached. People riding in the front seat and in the jump seat would partially or even totally block the President's figure. Oswald waited until the car turned the corner. Then he had an unobstructed sighting at the President's back. It also may be that Oswald knew that Secret Service men riding in the Presidential procession always scanned windows. In Dallas, six Secret Service agents rode in a car behind the President, doing just that. Perhaps Oswald guessed that when the motorcade turned onto the Expressway approach, the Secret Service men would subconsciously relax, deciding they were safe, and neglect to scan the windows they had just passed.

The Dallas police worked closely with the Secret Service, assigning men to block intersection cross-traffic, to re-route traffic, to form a cordon on the street and watch for disturbances in the crowds on the sidewalk. Like the Secret Service, the Dallas police has no jurisdiction over investigating subversive elements. As one detective inspector told me: "Our file on subversive elements in Dallas is unsubstantiated rumor and gossip. Any information we believe to be substantial is referred immediately to the local FBI office."

Nevertheless, I learned that the Dallas police *did* give the Secret Service the names of a few prime crackpots, and that, as a result, the Secret Service *did* assign a tail to those crackpots on November 22. But they were not subversives, so the name of Lee Oswald was not included.

I learned that there were only a handful of people in Dallas-Fort Worth who properly could be labeled bona fide Communists. In San Francisco, by comparison, there are about 200; in New York, more than a thousand. Dallas is a city that leans to the right.

The point is that a Communist in Dallas would be easy to spot. I asked one attorney what would happen if a Communist sympathizer scattered leaf-

lets or mounted a soapbox in Dallas. "He'd probably get the hell beat out of him," the attorney answered.

"By whom? The people on the street?" I asked.

"No, by the police," the attorney replied.

So Lee Harvey Oswald, the avowed Marxist, prudently transferred his political activities to New Orleans. Thus the Dallas Police Department had no record on him. But the New Orleans police had. And they turned it over to the FBI.

The FBI has jurisdiction over subversive activity in three categories: 1) Violation of laws, such as the Smith Act, which covers conspiracy to advocate the violent overthrow of the United States government; 2) Violation of the Espionage Act of 1917, which covers the gathering by theft, within our domestic limits, of military or industrial material and its transmission to a foreign country against the best interests of the U.S.; 3) Sabotage.

Lee Oswald found his place in FBI files because, conceivably, he could fall into any—or all—of these categories.

In each of the three categories, the FBI has the responsibility of obtaining information. It has long been FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover's contention that the FBI is not in the business of evaluating the information it gathers, but simply turns the facts over to other agencies for appropriate action.

In Dallas, therefore, the FBI district office had the obligation of handing over to the Secret Service any and all information on anybody who might constitute a threat to the President. By J. Edgar Hoover's own definition, the FBI was not supposed to evaluate Oswald as a potential threat, but merely to provide Secret Service agents with its file and let them decide what action if any, was necessary.

When I was an FBI agent, I was stationed in Seattle a few weeks before then-President Eisenhower was due to arrive. Our office received a memorandum notifying us of the dates of the visit and instructing us to contact informants or other logical sources for any indication of untoward activity resulting from the announcement of the visit.

An informant might say, for example, "George McKlutchbutt always hated Eisenhower, and I heard him say just yesterday, 'Maybe this time I'll do something about it.'" Or we might learn that someone previously engaged in anti-government demonstrations suddenly left town the day the announcement of the President's visit was made, stayed away several days, then quietly returned. The FBI agent is expected to interrogate that individual, find out where he went, whom he talked to, and exactly where he planned to be on the day of the President's visit.

Each agent then types a report of his findings and gives it to the district officer in charge. He, in turn, submits it to Washington. FBI headquarters in Washington is then expected to give the information to the Secret Service so it can act to neutralize the potentially dangerous individual the district FBI bureau uncovered. It is within the Secret Service's power to isolate that individual—jail him, if necessary—for whatever period is required to safeguard the President.

However, the information received in Washington is not always disseminated properly. There is historical evidence of this. In 1945, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police told the FBI about an atomic scientist named Klaus Fuchs

who, the Mounties suspected, was a Russian agent. But the FBI took no action. In one of the greatest feats of espionage in recent history, Dr. Fuchs then stole vital A-bomb secrets from Los Alamos. And in 1960, the FBI collected damaging information about Beron F. Mitchell and William H. Martin, who worked at the National Security Agency. Again, the FBI failed to alert anyone. Mitchell and Martin first fled to Cuba and then to Russia, where they provided information that compromised U.S. secret codes throughout the world.

The FBI's file on Lee Harvey Oswald was begun shortly after the day in October, 1959, when Oswald appeared in Moscow to renounce his American citizenship and request Russian citizenship. State Department Security agents in Moscow immediately investigated this defector and passed on their report to other interested national agencies—including the FBI. When Oswald changed his mind and applied for re-admission to the United States, the State Department advanced him \$480 to help finance his return home with the Russian woman he had married. When Oswald relocated in the Dallas-Fort Worth area in early 1962, the State Department turned its reports on him over to the FBI for continued scrutiny.

There are approximately 30 FBI agents in the Dallas district office. One agent was assigned the Lee Oswald case. I know his name, but I cannot possibly blame him. In the first place, he no doubt did a comprehensive job—FBI agents in the field are skilled, dedicated men—and the responsibility probably rests with his superiors.

Once Oswald was in its territory, the Dallas office of the FBI began adding its own reports to the file. The method was routine. The Dallas agent's first move was to obtain a national check on Lee Oswald. The agent worked with Washington, D.C., on this, through the State Department, through the FBI fingerprint division, through the CIA, and through any other agencies that might have Oswald's name on file.

Of course, it was learned that Oswald had served in the U.S. Marine Corps. The FBI's next move was obvious: Obtain Oswald's service record. In his service jacket was the information that Oswald had qualified as a marksman with guns. In it was more startling information: A military investigation had resulted after Oswald had written John Connally, then the Secretary of the Navy, that he (Oswald) would "employ any means" to get even for what Oswald felt was an unjust dishonorable discharge from the Marines.

Then the Dallas FBI agent checked Oswald's criminal or credit references, and his background in general. It was learned that a New York psychiatrist had examined Oswald and concluded that he was "disturbed and potentially dangerous." The FBI also learned of Oswald's misdemeanor arrest in New Orleans (he was fined \$10 for distributing pro-Castro leaflets), and of his association with the Fair Play for Cuba group.

And in any continuing security investigation of an individual, such as Oswald, it is a rigid rule that his place of residence and employment be verified at least once every 30 days. Usually, this is a "pretext" check. The agent will telephone and say, "Mr. Oswald?" If the reply is "Yes," the agent pretends to be a vacuum cleaner salesman or some such. He has what he needs to know. He knows Lee Oswald still lives at that address.

In such cases, unknown to the general public, the FBI also asks the Post Office Department to establish what is termed a "mail cover." All incoming first-class mail to Oswald would be recorded, along with all return addresses. Thus the FBI would be quite aware that Oswald corresponded with the Fair Play for Cuba headquarters in New York, that he had volunteered to serve as a double-agent by infiltrating anti-Cuba groups and reporting on their activities to the Fair Play organization. Unfortunately, the mail-order rifle which arrived at a post office box under an alias escaped the "mail cover." The post office had no way of connecting Lee Oswald with the man who rented the box under an assumed name.

As the file grew, Lee Harvey Oswald became conspicuous even among the most active Communists. It seemed that no one could miss the danger flags. To the credit of the Dallas FBI agent assigned to investigate Oswald, he did indeed spot the flags. And when Oswald returned last October 5 from his sudden trip to Mexico City, where he had applied in vain for a visa to enter either Cuba or Russia, the Dallas agent was right on top of the situation. As required by Bureau procedure, he wrote to Washington for permission to interrogate Oswald, explaining his reasons and purposes. Permission was granted. Sometime during the last week of October, the agent questioned Lee Oswald about the trip.

His reasons for so doing were obvious. 1. The visit of President Kennedy to Dallas had already been announced. 2. Lee Harvey Oswald, active agitator, defector and demonstrably unstable emotionally, apparently had set up the classic escape route from the United States through Mexico. 3. Oswald had the motivation, the accessibility—his new job at the Texas School Book Depository building which overlooked the traditional parade route through Dallas—and the marksmanship to pose a threat to the President. The FBI in Washington had this much to go on: Here comes the President, and right in his path is a man known as an enemy of what our government stands for, a man with a record of extreme leftist activities and erratic emotional behavior. In my opinion, only one course of action could be indicated: On November 22, when President Kennedy was to be in Dallas, Lee Harvey Oswald should have been under the strictest surveillance—if not locked up. At the very least, all law-enforcement agencies should have been notified. But, as indicated, FBI information often does not get around.

As a result, the Dallas Police Department did not even know Oswald existed—let alone that he posed a dangerous threat on the Presidential route that the police were detailed to patrol. Dallas traffic patrolman W. E. Barnett can testify to that. Barnett was posted directly in front of the Texas School Book Depository building on November 22. This is the story Barnett told me: "When the motorcade made its turn and started toward the freeway, I heard a sharp cracking noise. At first I thought it was some joker shooting off a fire-cracker. Within three seconds, there was another report. I looked behind me, up at the roof of the book building. But I saw nothing. "Then there was a third shot, again within three seconds, and I saw the President slump, shot. I was certain the shots had come from high up in the building. So I sprinted toward the rear of the book building to cut off any escape route from the back of it. "Why the back? In law enforcement, identification of the suspect is all-important. If the sniper was a stranger, he would try to escape out the back. If he was an employee and went out the front with the crowd, he always could be identified through routine investigation later. I was certain the sniper was a stranger. It seemed obvious that if he'd been a building employee with enough motivation to assassinate the President, the police would have been informed about him."

Clearly, the FBI had told the Dallas police no more about its explosive file on Lee Oswald than it had told the Secret Service.

The Secret Service is trained to recognize exactly such danger flags as flew over Oswald. His motivation was clearly apparent—his sympathies toward Marxists were no secret. He belonged to pro-Castro Cuban groups who are more extreme in everything they do than any "mother" organization. As an employee at the book building, he knew that it provided a vantage point from which he could, if he chose, endanger President Kennedy. My Dallas investigation discovered that in Oswald's room was a map of the city on which was marked the parade route. On the map were two Xs. One was at the Trade Mart. The other was about three miles from the airport, at an intersection of two roads in a modern shopping area. I rode to that intersection to see why it was marked. On the four corners were a bowling palace, a hamburger stand, a gasoline station and a row of low stores. Oswald would have had a clear view of the motorcade from any of the corners that provided either a front or back shot. However, none of the buildings was high-rise. There is no doubt in my mind that he had first planned to kill the President from this corner—probably because it would be loosely guarded and he could escape more easily—but he wouldn't be high enough to aim and shoot accurately.

Finally, if the Secret Service had been given the FBI's Oswald file, it would have learned that Oswald had the physical equipment and experience to make a Presidential assassination. This may serve as a psychological deterrent, as it has with kidnapping and mail robbery. 4. Don't publicize a President's route in and out of a city. It makes things too easy for potential assassins and too hard for the Secret Service. 5. Most important, establish a small, permanent federal commission that would insure proper cooperation and communication between agencies such as the FBI and the Secret Service by making unannounced spot checks. In particular, I would empower this commission to guarantee the FBI when necessary, to guarantee that FBI information is made available to other agencies immediately concerned. What good is the investigative skill of the FBI if the information it collects is not fully utilized?

The Dallas Police Department's homicide report is the saddest document I have ever read: "Victim—Kennedy, John F., white, male, American, age 47 (sic), President of U.S." Millions of Americans feel a personal loss in the death of President Kennedy. I feel it even more keenly, I think, because I believe we lost him unnecessarily. I feel sure that if the FBI hadn't bungled badly, John F. Kennedy would be alive today. And that, to me, is the real tragedy of Dallas. * THE END

For years, there have been recurring rumors of rivalry between the FBI and the Secret Service. But to me, as a former FBI agent, they are more than rumors. Sooner or later, I believe the whole story will come out. It is beginning to already. The December 10 New York Times daily cited these rumors of inter-agency jealousy and even asked both the FBI and the Secret Service for comment. Both organizations denied the reports—"For publication," the Times said. "There has been excellent cooperation

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with all the other agencies," said Bureau III Peterson of the Secret Service. "They got their job, we got our job," said an FBI information officer. "When they get information (in the FBI jurisdiction), they give it to us. We report information on anybody who has threatened the President." Granted, Lee Harvey Oswald did not threaten the President. Thus the FBI did not report him to the Secret Service. "You can't pass everyone," an FBI official explained. "Take a city like New York. There are thousands of people in this (Oswald's) category." But why take a city like New York? Are there thousands of people in Lee Oswald's category in Dallas? All my previous contacts with the men of the Secret Service convince me that they would have stepped in to neutralize Oswald—if only they had had the information they have now. But as we have seen, the Secret Service knew nothing about Oswald. In this respect, I believe the FBI was negligent. I also reached one other melancholy conclusion in Dallas. Whatever the motivations, there will be future attempts to assassinate a President of the United States. There will be other men as fanatical or unbalanced as Lee Harvey Oswald. And the future assassin will find ample opportunity, as other assassins have in the past. All Presidents are vulnerable to attack, whether they take brisk walks along the street, play golf or ride in motorcades. The thousands of windows that overlook a Presidential procession cannot all be sealed. The millions of people who view a President during his term of office cannot all be checked. But there are additional precautions that will give future Presidents a better chance of survival from a sniper's bullet. These are my recommendations: 1. Veto any Presidential appearance in an open car; use the bubble-top at all times. Request the President to wear a bullet-proof vest any time he is to appear in public. A vest would not save some future President, but it might save President Kennedy, but it might save some future President. 2. Make an attempt on a President's life a federal offense so the national agencies can prosecute. This may serve as a psychological deterrent, as it has with kidnapping and mail robbery. 3. Make an attempt on a President's life a federal offense so the national agencies can prosecute. This may serve as a psychological deterrent, as it has with kidnapping and mail robbery. 4. Don't publicize a President's route in and out of a city. It makes things too easy for potential assassins and too hard for the Secret Service. 5. Most important, establish a small, permanent federal commission that would insure proper cooperation and communication between agencies such as the FBI and the Secret Service by making unannounced spot checks. In particular, I would empower this commission to guarantee the FBI when necessary, to guarantee that FBI information is made available to other agencies immediately concerned. What good is the investigative skill of the FBI if the information it collects is not fully utilized?

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