

DEALEY PLAZA REVISITED

By LANCER

The recent release of the Oliver Stone movie "JFK" has sparked the latest round of controversy surrounding the assassination of the late president. Although there is nothing wrong with skepticism, Stone strains credulity with his implicit argument that "rogue" elements of the CIA operated in collusion with maverick generals in the U.S. military and other nefarious agents. The seemingly implausible aspects of the much-ridiculed Warren Commission are partly to blame for this type scurrilous speculation. The "single-bullet theory," for one, has been riddled with so many holes that it is inevitable people will start looking for more "plausible" solutions. Feeling their rational judgment to be blunted by the apparent impossibility of the Warren Commission's claims, people begin to use their imaginations. At first glance, there is compelling evidence to support claims of multiple gunmen and conspiracy cover-ups. Indeed, the scenario set forth by the Warren Commission is so unlikely in parts that it is more unbelievable than some of the less extravagant conspiracy theories. After all, it requires a certain amount of naive complacency to accept the official version unquestioningly. But there are also instances where the truth is being concealed; not by shadowy figures with dubious connections, but by conspiracy theorists like Stone. A cardinal axiom of Stone's thesis is that the third shot -- or in Stone's view, the sixth -- was fired from the grassy knoll, mortally wounding the president in the head. This impression is generally formed by viewing the raw visual data on the Zapruder film, and by less substantive claims of eyewitness accounts and various -- though ultimately indeterminate -- attempts at photographic analysis. However, a shot fired from this position does not correspond with evidence of minute lead fragments found embedded in the interior windshield of the presidential limousine; a fact which unequivocally ascribes a rearward trajectory to the fatal bullet. Also, if a bullet was fired diagonally from the right and to the front of the president, then one would expect it to explode out of the left posterior portion of the skull, not the right anterior, since a wound of exit is larger than a wound of entry. Of course, any true conspiracy theorist would sidestep this logic by dismissing the evidence as suspect, just as the validity of the "magic bullet" discovered in Connolly's stretcher at Parkland is disputed. But I would suggest that the heavy-handed planting of a practically pristine

bullet betrays an obtuseness that falls far short of the subtle manipulation of lead particles to create the delicate, random effect of the windshield evidence. In short, any conspirators who would be dumb enough to insert a bullet, conspicuously unscathed, and minus only two percent of its mass into the assassination puzzle would lack the imagination or subtle sensibility needed to achieve the desired effect. Such individuals -- so sorely lacking in aesthetic refinement -- would likely have used a sledgehammer on the windshield. A more tenable position to come out of the conspiracy quagmire stems from the assertion made by governor Connolly (who, ironically, does not believe there was a conspiracy) that the bullet which passed through him did not go through the president first. Once again, the Zapruder film appears to bear this out, as there is approximately a two-second delay between their visible reactions to the bullet. People who adhere to the findings of the Warren Commission are fond of saying that Connolly had a "delayed reaction" to the bullet. If this is true, then is it not equally possible that Kennedy also had a delayed reaction? In which case, the time elapse between the two impacts increases from two to four seconds; thus increasing the likelihood of separate shots. Ultimately, it is the larger question -- of whether or not Kennedy had enemies more capable than Oswald -- which plays the determining factor in assessing the viability of a conspiracy theory. Once you accept the central thesis that Kennedy had enemies more formidable than Oswald, the question of one or two shooters becomes strictly academic.

