

The Truth is Too Terrible

by Fred J. Cook

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Since so much has been written about the Kennedy assassination, I shall tell here only about my own involvement in efforts to bring about a thorough investigation. Early in December 1963 I went to Washington on a magazine assignment, and I learned from a number of sources that many veteran newsmen were as concerned as I about the lightning fast wrap-up of the case.

One of my contacts, who had been talking to a CBS news executive, told me that the executive was deeply disturbed and frustrated. His team in Dallas, he said, had uncovered leads that seemed to require further digging, but had run into the stone wall of network indifference. No one was pursuing obvious leads, and the official investigations seemed concerned with proving the official version without looking into any discrepancies.

Two of the best national reporters on the scene, Richard Dudman and Ronnie Dugger, had expressed doubts about the lone-assassin verdict. They were suspicious, for example, about the unbelievable speed with which the Dallas police had radioed an almost perfect description of Oswald just ten minutes after the lethal shots had been fired. Unless there was a setup, this seemed miraculous in the midst of so much turmoil and confusion.

Also while I was in Washington, a friend of mine who was working as an investigator for a Senate committee and had close ties to the National Rifle Association led me to stumble upon another unexplained angle:

The Mannlicher Carcano that Oswald allegedly used to kill the President was one of the crankiest rifles ever invented; its bolt action most peculiar (as I later found out the one time I handled it). The old World War I Springfield, with which I had had a passing association in ROTC in college, had a smooth bolt action — you pulled the bolt straight back to eject the spent cartridge, then slammed it straight forward to seat a new charge. With the Mannlicher Carcano, which had been the principal weapon of the Italian infantry, the bolt had a squirreling action that slowed its rate of fire and sometimes got stuck, to the frustration of the marksman. This was later established during test firing that the Warren Commission conducted. Although only championship marksmen were used, one of them, even after practicing with Oswald's rifle, became so entangled with the squirreling bolt action that he could not get a shot off at all during one round.

This squirreling bolt was not the only defect of the weapon: the ammunition was equally recalcitrant. Bullets tended to swerve and swoop instead of speeding unerringly to their target. When Italian resistance collapsed at the end of World War II, hundreds of thousands of these balky guns fell into American hands, and we had an immediate use for them if they could ever be made to work properly. Communist guerrillas were threatening to overrun Greece; the Greeks opposing them,

whom we supported, needed arms. If the Mannlicher Carcano could be turned into an effective weapon, the vast numbers we had captured would be invaluable in the Greek civil war.

Nothing could be done about that awkward bolt action, but experts from the National Rifle Association and an Army ordnance team conducted extensive experiments at the Aberdeen proving grounds in Maryland. “And they came up with one of the most perfect bullets ever designed,” my source said. “It could be fired from the Carcano, and it would go straight to its target every time. That had a lot to do with chasing those Communist guerrillas out of Greece.”

And with the killing of our own president?

One skeptical marksman had written an article about his experiments with the Mannlicher Carcano. He had purchased a rifle just like Oswald’s, had bought the right ammunition for it, and then on the firing range, he found that shot after shot turned out to be duds; hardly any went straight to the target. When I returned to New York, I visited several Lower Manhattan gunshops and asked about ammunition for the Mannlicher Carcano. All I could find was the old Italian-made ammunition, deteriorated from age and unreliable at best; none of the shops had the American-perfected cartridges.

Carey McWilliams [editor of *The Nation*] was not enthusiastic about the trend of my researches. He checked out the bullet angle with the district attorney’s office in Dallas and was told (falsely, as it turned out) that Oswald had been using the original Italian-made ammunition. That was as far as Carey was willing to go just then.

President Johnson, the calculating political manipulator, had twisted the arm of Chief Justice Warren, persuading him to head a special commission to investigate the assassination. Norman Redlich, with whom Carey had been allied in civil-rights causes, was one of the senior counsels, as was Joseph A. Ball, whom Carey had known in California from law school days and for whom he had a great deal of respect.

“With Earl Warren heading the commission, this is going to be a thorough investigation,” Carey told me. “Nothing is going to be covered up. Let’s just wait until the commission has time to make its investigation and file its report.”

I was still more skeptical and more impatient. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover was using every stratagem at his disposal to determine what the verdict of the commission would be. In a memorandum to Carey on December 3, 1963, I spelled out my doubts about the kind of report that would be produced. I was especially disenchanted with the composition of the commission, all solid Establishment types who could be almost guaranteed to uphold the Establishment view. Gerald Ford had long been noted in Washington as a strong FBI partisan; and as for Allen Dulles, I wrote: “Naming Allen Dulles to the commission was about as suspect a thing as could be done.” (Long after the commission’s work was finished, it would be disclosed that Dulles sat there silently, not letting any of his fellow commissioners know that his CIA had already entered into partnership with the Mafia in plots intended to kill Fidel Castro, certainly a vital bit of information.)

As for Hoover, referring to articles that had appeared in the press, I wrote that “the old authoritative leak system at which the FBI is especially adept was used. Day after day we were treated to stories that contained only a smidgeon of new information in their leads — stories that went on to point out that the FBI report, whose details nobody was permitted to know, concluded definitely and positively that Oswald was the killer; that he acted alone; that there was no conspiracy. By the time the public is permitted to get a peep at the FBI details that justify this

conclusion, the conclusion will have been so drummed into us, so thoroughly accepted, that it will be a bold man indeed — and where the hell does one find them today — who questions the details.”

This turned out to be an uncannily accurate forecast, for once the Warren Commission got organized it found its case — a case it was expected to accept — had already been made by the FBI. Some members of the staff resented the way in which they had been boxed in. But Carey’s faith in Earl Warren and the commission was unshakable. I could not move him. And since I had contracts for two major books that had to be finished not too many months down the road, I had to shelve my concern with the Kennedy assassination and get on with my work.

I have never seen an official report greeted with such universal praise as that accorded the Warren Commission’s findings when they were made public on September 24, 1964. All the major television networks devoted special programs and analyses to the report; the next day the newspapers ran long columns detailing its findings, accompanied by special news analyses and editorials. The verdict was unanimous. The report answered all questions, left no room for doubt. Lee Harvey Oswald, alone and unaided, had assassinated the President of the United States.

The chorus of acclaim impressed me. I watched television program after program. I waded through the massive columns of *The New York Times* — and even I was finally convinced. My earlier conviction that there must have been a conspiracy obviously had been wrong. The Warren Commission after months of investigation had found no trace of conspiracy, and all of the best news and editorial brains in the nation were hailing its conclusions. I accepted the verdict and turned to other things.

Two months later, left alone one evening with nothing else to do, I decided to take a closer look at the Report. I had purchased the Doubleday Edition, with an impressive foreword by the eminent attorney Louis Nizer. The television programs I had seen at the time the report was issued had left two vague, nagging questions in my mind.

The first stemmed from what I had heard in Washington the year before about the suspiciously fast description of the gunman. According to the report, these details had come apparently from Howard L. Brennan, a forty-five-year-old steamfitter, who had been sitting on a concrete retaining wall opposite the Texas School Book Depository at the corner of Elm and Houston Streets, where the presidential motorcade made a slow left-hand turn into Elm. Brennan told police that he had seen a man in the sixth-floor southeast window of the depository before the motorcade arrived and that he had seen him in the act of discharging his final shot.

The initial shot had been fired at 12:30 P.M.; the Dallas police description, according to the Warren Report, had apparently been based on Brennan’s almost instantaneous account to police. Brennan had described the gunman as white, slender, about 165 pounds, 5 feet 10 inches tall, in his early thirties. Oswald was white, slender, about 150 pounds, 5 feet 9, twenty-four years old. It was a fantastic match. I wondered whether it was possible.

The sixth-floor window of the sniper’s nest had been only partially open; the room behind it was dark, unlighted; cartons had been piled up behind the window as a screen, and one had been placed on the window ledge as a gun rest. Was it possible that, from 120 feet away, gazing up at what must have been a shadowy figure against this dark background, Brennan could have come up with a nearly letter-perfect description of Oswald?

I had doubted Brennan’s ability and had tested my doubts. I walked around New York streets, looking up at lighted fifth- and sixth-floor windows in which men were working. Even in these

circumstances, only a portion of a man's body would be visible; and I found I couldn't tell how tall the men were or what they looked like. Yet the commission had accepted Brennan's description, despite the physical difficulties involved. Brennan's accuracy was difficult to explain, unless Oswald had been pointed out to Brennan in advance — but that is something we will never know.

Next, I turned my attention to a second question that had been nagging me. Texas Governor John Bowden Connally, Jr., who had been riding on the jump seat in front of the President, had been struck by a bullet that entered his back, passed downward through his chest, exiting below his right nipple, then passing through his right wrist, which had been in his lap, and finally inflicting a wound in his left thigh. The Warren Commission had concluded that the first shot fired by the sniper had entered "the base of the back of his [the President's] neck, had passed through his neck and had continued downward," wounding Connally. In other words, both the President and Connally had been wounded by this same bullet.

Connally told a clear, cogent, convincing story. He said he had been familiar with guns all his life, and he had instantly recognized the first shot as a rifle shot. He knew it had come from behind him; he had turned his head to the right in the direction of the book depository; then he had started to turn to his left, trying to get a look at the President, when he himself was hit and collapsed in his wife's arms. In shock, he never heard the final, fatal shot that tore off the top of the President's head, but he was positive that he had been wounded not by the first shot that had hit Kennedy but by a second, separate shot.

Connally's calm, step-by-step, explicit recital had the ring of complete truth. Why, then, I wondered, had the Warren Commission discounted this best possible eyewitness evidence? Why had it insisted so strongly that Governor Connally *had* to be mistaken? To answer these questions, I hunted in the report's index and went directly to the sections dealing with Connally and the commission's interpretation of the shot sequence. It took me perhaps an hour, and I found the Warren Commission Report — so wholly accepted — falling to pieces in my hands.

The key, I quickly discovered, was [the film of the assassination taken as it was happening](#) by amateur photographer Abraham Zapruder with his 8mm movie camera. Zapruder's camera took 18.3 frames a second; so, by numbering the frames, it could be determined just how many seconds elapsed between shots. The sequence seemed to show that the President could not have been hit before frame 210, when he disappeared momentarily behind a Sternmons Freeway sign. When he emerged into view again at frame 225, his hands were just beginning to jerk upward toward his throat, a movement that was completed by frame 227. Yet at this time, the film showed, Governor Connally was facing forward, face serene; it was simply impossible to believe that his whole body had already been furrowed by a nearly lethal bullet.

Connally showed no visible reaction until frames 231-34; expert witnesses before the Warren Commission held that he could not have been hit after frame 240. Now another factor, firing speed, had to be added to the equation. The commission had determined that the fastest trigger finger in the FBI could not get off shots from Oswald's Mannlicher Carcano in less than 2.3 seconds between shots. On the basis of no evidence whatsoever, the commission had rationalized that Oswald, no champion marksman, could match the fastest gun in the FBI, but even this did not solve its problems with the lone assassin thesis. Even assuming that the President had been hit at the earliest possible instant, at frame 210, there would have had to be another 42 frames before the lone gunman could have gotten off the second shot at frame 252. But [the Zapruder film showed that Connally had been wounded much earlier](#), no later than frame 240 — and so not even the fastest gun in the FBI could have gotten another shot off by that time. The whole lone-assassin theory foundered on this time rock, and the only way of resurrecting it was to theorize, as the Warren Commission had, that the

first shot that hit the President must also have wounded Governor Connally.

But this was theory; this was rationalization; this was not hard judgment based on solid facts as everyone had supposed. As soon as I found this flaw, I saw that the report throughout was a tissue of rationalizations in which the most credible testimony (as in the case of Connally) had been discarded because it did not fit the lone-assassin hypothesis, and the most suspect word was accepted as valid and ultimate truth because it did.

I felt the hair prickle on the back of my neck with excitement at this discovery, and I hurried upstairs to my typewriter to start writing a memorandum tearing at the guts of the Warren Report. And that was the beginning of my trouble.

Knowing that I was challenging a verdict that was considered almost as holy as the Bible, I spelled out the firing sequence and the evidence of the Zapruder film in great detail. My memorandum ran some seven pages. Once it was finished, I was confronted with the problem of what to do with it. I knew Carey McWilliam's views, but I also felt that *The Nation* was the only magazine with sufficient independence and nerve to print the kind of article I wanted to write. In hopes that my reasoned analysis would persuade Carey, I sent him the memorandum.

There followed three weeks of silence. Then Carey rejected the idea, telling me that he and others could find no flaw in my reasoning, but *The Nation* didn't want to criticize the Warren Report. I gathered that he was influenced by one overriding fear: if the assassination proved to be the work of a conspiracy, it might start another irresponsible witch-hunt comparable to that of the detested McCarthy era.

I didn't agree. The most credible evidence seemed to me to point to a conspiracy; and if conspirators could get away with murdering a president as popular as Kennedy, there was no guarantee that they would not repeat the deed any time a leading politician's program posed a threat to their interests. Still, everywhere I encountered opposition. My literary agent, Barthold Fles, shuddered when he read the memorandum. Like Carey, he could find no flaw in it, but he had difficulty believing it. "You may be right, Fred," he told me, "but I wish you wouldn't do this." I told him I felt I had to, and I wanted him to try for publication. Reluctantly, he raised the issue with Peter Bittner, then my editor at Macmillan. "Oh, my God," Bart reported Peter's saying, "Fred has exposed the CIA, the FBI, and the military-industrial complex. All he needs now is to attack the Warren Report!"

On the domestic front, I was also getting a lot of flak. Julia had never questioned my writing decisions, but she did now. "Why don't you just forget it?" she asked. "Kennedy is dead, and nothing can be done about it." I explained my fear that an evil, dangerous precedent might have been set. "Well, who are you to challenge the Warren Commission?" Exasperated, I snapped, "Well, God gave me a brain to reason with, and just plain common sense says they were wrong. It's like adding two and two and getting six. *It just doesn't make sense. Goddamn it!*"

We never agreed, and I continued to press Bart Fles. He showed the memorandum to *Esquire*, but *Esquire* had already assigned Dwight Macdonald to write an assassination feature — an article, as it turned out, that was filled with philosophical words adding up to nothing. *True* magazine had run articles on the controversy arising from Abraham Lincoln's assassination, so I'd hoped it would prove receptive for my story. *True* weighed my little bombshell for almost a month, but finally decided it wouldn't go ahead because, well, who knew what might happen by the time the magazine got out? An editor at *Playboy* had expressed some interest in my writing, so my suggestion went there. There was another month's delay, and back it came with an excuse similar to *True*'s. No one

could find anything wrong with my analysis, but no one was going to publish an article based on it either.

I took the memorandum back from Bart and decided to see if I could do something with it on my own. Finally, in summer 1965, I sent it off to Edward J. Keating, then the editor of *Ramparts*. Silence. Then, about 10:30 on an August night, just as my wife and I were about to set out on a three-week vacation we'd planned for some time, the telephone rang. Keating had studied my memorandum, he said; he had shown it to others; everybody agreed the analysis was solid. Could I turn it into a blockbuster article for *Ramparts* for the December issue? There went our vacation.

Little did I know I was about to get the worst double-cross I have ever had from a publisher. *Ramparts* agreed in a letter to Bart Fles to pay \$1000 for my article. Keating sent me a number of sensible editorial suggestions, which I accepted. The December 1965 *Ramparts* did not include my piece. We queried. When January and February came and passed, we protested. Then in March 1966 *Ramparts* made the incredible claim that it had never agreed to publish the article in the first place — this despite the fact that I had in my files a flier the magazine had sent out in the fall soliciting new subscribers and promising it would have among its upcoming exposes “Fred J. Cook’s massive re-evaluation of the Warren Commission Report on President Kennedy’s assassination.” Finally, in April, 1966, after holding the article in cold storage for six months, *Ramparts* made me a token payment of \$500 and returned the manuscript.

After over a year of struggle, I was more angry and frustrated than I had ever been. In desperation, I sent the article off to Carey McWilliams. Though I knew his views, I hoped that once he saw the finished product he might have a change of heart. Another month-long silence ensued. Then I read in one of the gossip columns that Edward J. Epstein had written a book, *Inquest*, a critical look at the Warren Report that was about to be published. I called Carey’s attention to the item, warned him that time was running out and that if he ever intended to do anything with my article, he had to get a move on. So finally he did. *The Nation* published the article in two installments, [June 13](#) and [June 20](#), 1966, more than a year and a half after I had first proposed it. The editors prefaced it with a disclaimer that this was just my view.

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Soon after the publication of my Warren Commission articles, there came a series of strange events in startling succession. I reported on the first of these in a letter to Carey on July 13, 1966. Bart Fles had received a cablegram just the previous Friday from a Japanese magazine that wanted to purchase rights to my Warren Commission articles; the matter was “urgent,” the cablegram said, and an immediate reply was necessary. We accepted the offer in a cablegram that same night.

The next day, Saturday, Fles received a second cablegram: the magazine had called the deal off without explanation of any kind. “I’d like to be able to read the State Department cables on that one,” I wrote Carey.

Next a devious attack was made on me in my own favorite publication, *The Nation*. A concerned Carey telephoned me one afternoon, saying he had an article written by a professor who reported that the Warren Commission had never seen the X-rays and photographs taken of the President’s body at the autopsy because the Kennedy family had prohibited the use of this basic evidence. Carey wanted to know if it was all right with me if he ran the piece. I said I had no

objection; I certainly didn't have any exclusive rights to everything about the Warren Commission; and if he had a good legitimate article from someone else, he should run it.

When I saw the article in the July 11, 1966 issue of *The Nation*, I blew my stack at Carey for the first time ever. The legitimate point of the article that Carey had mentioned to me was there, buried deep in the body of the piece. The whole approach, the whole tone, however, was slanted to ridicule critics of the Warren Report. The article was filled with snide references to me and to Vincent Salandria, a Philadelphia lawyer for the American Civil Liberties Union and one of the first critics of the report, and it was speckled with lines like: "Has it come to this, then — the doctors' word against the word of Cook, Epstein, Salandria, et al.?"

The rapidity with which the attack had been made — only twenty-one days had elapsed after my second *Nation* article — indicated to me that it must have been hatched almost the instant my articles appeared, and I began to smell a rat. Why Carey hadn't caught the odor, why he hadn't exercised rudimentary editorial judgment, I'll never know; but I was so furious I wrote a reply and delivered an ultimatum: unless Carey printed my answer to the academic character word for word, I would never write again for *The Nation*. The author of the back-stabbing exercise that so infuriated me had announced that he was going to withdraw from the ivy halls, become a full-time free-lance writer, and produce a book that would silence all critics and vindicate the Warren Commission. In my reply, I pointed out that I knew how extremely difficult it was to make a living by free-lance writing. I didn't believe it could be done by someone who hadn't established a broad reputation in the field, and I was convinced that the man who had done the job on me must be privately financed by some government agency like the CIA.^[1]

There never was a rebuttal to this accusation. A couple of reactions came from other sources: from Tom Katen, who had been a professor at Monmouth College, in West Long Branch, New Jersey, and Vince Salandria. Their feeling was that, once the report was exposed and the assassination issue raised, agencies were going to have to take out after somebody. They had both met the back-stabbing author of *The Nation* article and asked him why he had gone out of his way to take such vicious potshots at me. He told them that he had done it "for that very reason" because he wanted to discredit me in my own forum.

Katen and Salandria also told me about the reaction of Allen Dulles during a tape-recorded session with students at a California university. The students had copies of *The Nation* expose and asked Dulles about it. "*The Nation*?" Dulles exclaimed — and then he went off into a fit of hyenalike laughter. The students, grim-faced, began to press him about aspects of the assassination, and Dulles abruptly broke off the exchange, remarking that if they didn't have anything better to discuss, he was going to bed.

Sometime later in that summer of 1966, I got a late-night telephone call from Vince Salandria. He was in Boston, where he had just had a debate with my *Nation* back-stabber. Salandria was excited. "Fred, I told him that you had accused him of being a CIA front — and he did not deny it. He did not deny it!"

After the debate, Salandria said, he and his opponent had a long, private bull-session. "He's a very disturbed person," Salandria told me, "and I wound up feeling sorry for him. He has a lot of conflicts within himself, and he finally admitted that he knows we are right, but he said: 'The truth is too terrible. The American people would never be able to stand it.' In the end, however, he said he was not going to write the book." And he never did.

I got another strong personal indication from inside the Warren Commission itself that there

were those who thought the critics could be right. In late July, 1966, over a telephone hookup, I did battle with Burt W. Griffin, who had been an assistant counsel to the commission and is now a judge, on Harv Morgan's Cleveland "Contact" show.

Griffin did his best to defend the report. He ridiculed my conclusion that a shot, or shots, had come from the grassy knoll overlooking Dealey Plaza at the right front of the motorcade. There was some exceptionally hard evidence, as well as the wounding of a spectator by a bullet splinter, to indicate shots had come from this direction. Griffin insisted that the first shot that hit the President had followed the downward trajectory necessary to wound Governor Connally. I told him what an expert pathologist had told me, and he conceded that if the one-shot, multiple-wound theory was invalid, the commission's whole lone-assassin case had to fall by the wayside.

Interestingly, it seemed to me, he admitted that there might have been too much haste in closing out the conspiracy angle. Warren had been impatient, he said; the commission was being pressured to get out a fast report; proof of conspiracy wasn't easy; and if anything had been overlooked, Griffin thought it was due to this impatience.

We discussed the very real possibility that Oswald had been an FBI informer. A Dallas deputy sheriff had told a reporter that he knew this was so; the Warren Commission had been thrown into a flap by what Warren called "this very disturbing" rumor — but the whole matter had been dropped on J. Edgar Hoover's word that Oswald hadn't been on the FBI payroll. Harv Morgan asked Griffin the direct question: Did he think Oswald was connected with the FBI? Griffin replied that he thought no one was ever going to know. I asked him if this wasn't a pretty horrible admission: here we had a very popular president assassinated — and we weren't going to be permitted to know about such an important link if it existed? "I am just stating a fact of life," Griffin said. He added that he was certain that if anyone from any of our great federal agencies had been involved, the record would have been covered up so thoroughly that no one could ever find out.

After the radio program was over, Griffin asked to speak to me personally. "I admire what you people are trying to do," he told me, "but I have to tell you that you're not going to get anywhere." He thought, he said, that the critics were performing "a public service" because he hoped that if anything like this happened again — and he prayed it wouldn't — "it certainly never ought to be investigated in this way."

Harv Morgan was as surprised as I was. "Fred, did you hear that?" he exclaimed after Griffin had gone. "My God, did you hear that!"

I wrote some additional, minor articles about the assassination and the Warren Report during the next few years, and in 1968 I joined the Committee to Investigate Assassinations formed by Bernard Fensterwald, Jr., a Washington attorney who had served as a counsel to different Senate committees. I had met Bud when he was chief counsel for Senator Edward Long, of Missouri, in an investigation into official invasions of privacy, an inquiry that was aborted after some of the federal agencies being investigated leaked stories to the press about the senator's receipt of legal fees from his private law firm, which was connected with the Teamsters.

Leaving government service, Fensterwald decided to devote his time to probing assassinations not just that of President Kennedy, but also the 1968 slayings of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert F. Kennedy. The "lone-gunman" solutions of each had raised just as many questions as the assassination of the President. Bud's convictions stemmed in part from a personal encounter with the rabid Radical Right in Dallas. As the principal aide and speechwriter for Senator Estes Kefauver, he had accompanied Kefauver to Dallas during the 1960 presidential campaign. Kefauver had made a

rousing speech in support of John F. Kennedy's candidacy. Afterward, a high police spokesman told Bud, "You know we have some pretty fanatical people here, and I think it would be a good idea if you and the senator didn't stay in town overnight, but left right away."

Bud had relayed the warning to Kefauver, who inquired, "Do we have enough bourbon?" Bud assured him the liquor cabinet was well-stocked, and Kefauver agreed to the change of plans, saying, "All right, then, let's go."

Fensterwald's hope in forming the committee was that it would be able to keep the assassination issue alive, help to mold public opinion, and bring enough pressure on public officials to force a genuinely thorough investigation, and several members of the committee worked extremely hard toward this end. I remember especially Mary Ferrell, of Dallas, a legal secretary and one-time secretary to a governor of Texas. She collected and analyzed every scrap of material pertaining to the President's assassination; she even had a separate air-conditioned room built on her home to house [the collection](#), which remains probably the most thorough in the nation. Yet an orchestrated campaign was mounted in books and magazine articles to label all who questioned the validity of the Warren Report mere "scavengers" who were out to make a fast buck by preying on the trauma of the American people. No propaganda campaign was ever more vicious or more untrue; some of those engaged in the research spent thousands of dollars of their own money, almost bankrupting themselves in the process.

Yet the door of the media remained firmly closed. *The New York Times*, with one of the best journalistic staffs in the nation, ran a month-long investigation into the bona fides of the Warren Report. When it was all over, the *Times* deep-sixed the whole project. The paper's attitude became obvious in 1971 when its op-ed page included an essay by David W. Belin, one of the Warren Commission counsels, upholding all the findings of the report — and, at the same time, it refused to print a responding letter from Fensterwald. The op-ed page is supposed to be a free forum in which opposing points of view can be discussed — but not where the Warren Report was concerned.

One of Fensterwald's arguments merited attention. He pointed out that Police Chief Jesse Curry, who had been in charge of the Dallas force when the President was assassinated, had developed serious doubts about the validity of the Oswald case. He had described these in a small book, *JFK Assassination File*, in which he had disclosed that scientific tests had not shown what they would have to have shown if Oswald had fired a rifle: after such a firing, powder residues are left on the cheek of the gunman. These may be detected by analysis of a paraffin cast. The FBI had made such a test of the side of Oswald's face, but had failed to find any residues. The Bureau had argued ambiguously that such tests were not always infallible — so the Warren Commission had disregarded the evidence. There was, however, a more sophisticated and infallible test: neutron activation analysis. The FBI, as Fensterwald pointed out, had performed this test — and had failed to find any trace of residues that would show Oswald had fired a rifle. This negative finding, which seemed, as Fensterwald wrote, to show that "Oswald did not fire a rifle on November 22," was what had shaken the faith of Police Chief Curry in the Warren Commission verdict. But it did not make any difference to the *Times*.

The efforts of the committee continued for years. Gradually, I devoted less and less time to it, mainly because I had a freelance living to make and couldn't make it if I didn't stick to the typewriter. Finally, in 1976, partly as a result of the committee's efforts, a Congressional committee was appointed to investigate the assassinations of President Kennedy and Dr. King. Unfortunately, the probe became snarled at the outset with personality conflicts, and it never did get itself on the track. The internal wrangling gave dubious members of Congress the only excuse they needed to scrimp on funds and cut the inquiry short. However, through acoustic tests the committee did

establish that a fourth shot had been fired from the grassy knoll overlooking Dealey Plaza, as I and many other critics of the Warren Report had contended.

The findings of the Congressional committee were forwarded to the Department of Justice for further action; but, if the experience of the past is any criterion, they can be expected to rest in peace in Justice — forever.

Notes

1. It was just some kind of intuition. I did not know at the time, none of us did, that the CIA was financing and sponsoring the publication of somewhere in the neighborhood of 1000 books that were being brought out in the United States as if they were the products of independent scholarship. This activity — totally illegal since the CIA had been specifically barred in its charter from domestic activities — did not become public knowledge until the mid-1970s investigations of our intelligence agencies. Even then, the CIA refused to identify any of the writers, books, or publishers it had helped finance; and efforts since that time to obtain such vital information under Freedom of Information actions have been barred in the courts. The result is that we do not know to this day the full extent and insidiousness of the CIA's brainwashing endeavors.