Amid controversy over the Warren Report, Governor Connally examines for LIFE the Kennedy assassination film frame by frame.

DID OSWALD ACT ALONE?

A MATTER OF REASONABLE DOUBT

FRAME 230

From the film:
A key moment in the controversy

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In the kitchen of his ranch house near San Antonio, Governor John Connally of Texas (right) ponders over crucial evidence in the tragic crime to which he was witness—and enemy—three years ago. He is studying enlargements of the famous movie taken by Abraham Zapruder, a bystander, on that fatal day in Dallas when President Kennedy was assassinated and Connally himself severely wounded. Connally's testimony and the evidence of the Zapruder film are basic to the question now being more and more loudly raised: was there a reasonable doubt that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone assassin?

The significant area of doubt narrows down to one point: Were Kennedy and Connally hit simultaneously by a single shot, or were they hit by the same bullet? If so, there was probably only one assassin. Or—as Connally and many others maintain—were the two men hit almost simultaneously by separate bullets? If so, there must have been a second assassin.

The question haunted the Warren Commission in its investigations into the death of President Kennedy. In the ten months of its existence the Commission heard and presented its conclusions on the following pages. Those findings are now being challenged by critics whose arguments have created widespread doubt about some of the Report's key conclusions.

The critics have little new evidence, nor do they claim to. They base their dissent on the Commission's own 377 volumes of evidence which, the critics claim, do not bear out the Commission's own conclusions and sometimes flatly contradict them. They are particularly aroused over the Commission's evaluation of John Connally's testimony.

Testifying before the Commission, Connally insisted—as he does today (p. 68)—that he heard what he instantly identified as a rifle shot. As he was turning to look at the President, he felt a second shot hit him. When the Commission ran off the Zapruder film for him, the governor identified certain frames as ones during which he believed he had been hit. The moment he selected was at most 1.3 seconds after the earliest moment when Kennedy, according to the Commission, could have been hit. Experts have proved that the murder weapon could not be fired any faster than once every 2.3 seconds. If the Commission is right about the timing of the first bullet that hit Kennedy, and if Connally is right about his own wound, Oswald could not have had time—in 1.3 seconds—to fire a second shot at both Kennedy and Connally.

The governor's testimony shook the Commission. Three of the seven members expressed doubt that the single-bullet theory had been proved. A separate FBI report on the assassination also maintained that Kennedy and Connally had been struck by different bullets. But in the end the skeptical majority signed the Report, which— for reasons summarized on page 480—states that Connally must have been mistaken; that he and the President were probably hit by the same bullet and that in any case this question was "not necessary to any essential findings of the Commission."

This last statement shocked critics. Early this month, at LIFE's request, Governor Connally looked at the disputed frames from the Zapruder film once again. This time he got more than just the screen showing that the Commission had given him. He was also given enlargements of every frame, which he could examine in detail under a magnifying glass. Ever since he testified before the Warren Commission the governor had kept silent, preferring to let the Report speak for itself. But as he examined the individual frames he was able to see and recall a number of significant details that he had missed in the Commission showing and had never brought up in his testimony. These confirmed in his mind what he had previously told the Commission—that he had been hit by a second bullet. What he saw and said is presented on the following pages.
The Commission said Kennedy and Connally were hit behind the sign: between **HERE**
Of all the witnesses to the tragedy, the only unimpeachable one is the 8mm movie camera of Abraham Zapruder, which recorded the assassination in sequence. Film passed through the camera at 16.6 frames a second, a little more than a 20th of a second (.056 sec.) for each frame. By studying individual frames one can see what happened at every instant and measure precisely the intervals between events.

On these pages and the next, the significant passages of the film are reproduced, frame by frame, the numbers printed on them, counted in sequence from the beginning of the film, are those used by the Commission to identify the frames. On the left side of each frame the sprocket holes and the light-struck areas around them can be seen.

The disagreement between Governor Connally and the Commission arises over how to read the Zapruder pictures. Of the three bullet strikes—the President's neck wound, the Governor's wounds, and the President's head wound—only the mortal blow to the President's head is easy to mark on the film. It occurred in the 31st frame and is not shown here because it does not bear on the controversy. The two earlier hits are harder to pin down. President Kennedy, according to the Commission, was out of Zapruder's sight behind a road sign when the first bullet hit him in the neck, and the film seems to confirm it. He was out of sight for 1.9 frames—one second. No one can say for sure in which of them he was hit.

Governor Connally, according to the Commission, was hit at the same time as the President—and therefore also out of view. Connally testified to the Commission that it happened otherwise: "I heard a noise which I immediately took to be a rifle shot. I instinctively turned to my right . . . but I did not catch the President in the center of my view. . . . Failing to see him, I was turning to look back over my left shoulder . . . but I never got that far in my turn. I got about in the position I am now facing you, looking a little bit to the left of center, and then I felt like someone had hit me in the back."

Connally: 'I haven't been hit yet'...
...Connally chooses a point nine frames later and says he
Governor Connally believes, as nearly as he can judge it, that the bullet struck him in the 23rd frame. This is at least nine frames and one-half second later than the Commission says he was hit. He might, Connally admits, possibly have been hit a frame or two earlier but no more. "Having looked at frames 233 to 235," he said to Lipan, "I can begin to see myself slump in 234. The slump is very pronounced in 235. I am hunched. It looks as if my coat is pulled up more. I am elongated. I don't think there's any question that my reaction to the shot begins in this time sequence."

Nor is there any question in Connally's mind where the shot came from. It was from behind him, from the direction of the Texas School Book Depository building. The bullet was there in frame 233, it exited in frame 235, and the doctors who treated Connally at Parkland Hospital made their entrance wound a small, neat hole typical of an entrance wound. It shattered a rib, ripped open a lung, and exited through a large gaping hole in the governor's chest just below his right nipple. The bullet then crashed into his wrist, probably the back of it, tore several muscles in his arm, and exited through the front of his wrist to finish its course in the governor's left leg, a few inches below the knee.

Connally vividly remembers the jolt of the shot. It felt, he told the Commission, "as if someone doubled his fist and came up behind you ... and with about a 12-inch blow hit you in the back, right below the shoulder blade." He did not notice that his wrist and leg had been injured until much later, when he was in the hospital.

After frame 235 and for the remaining nine frames of this excerpt from the Zapruder film, the other characters of the drama seem to be almost in a state of suspended animation. Kennedy still clutching his throat, Jackie gazing at her husband with an expression of uncomprehending surprise, the Secret Service men and the police staring stolidly ahead as if nothing had happened. But Connally in this last half second or now starts reacting dramatically to his wound. In frame 236 his mouth is open and he starts to turn around. In frame 237 his left shoulder suddenly buckles as he starts toward the limousine door.

Throughout his ordeal, the governor claims today, he knew exactly what was happening to him. "I knew it," he told the Commission, "when I looked down and I was covered with blood; and the thought immediately passed through my mind that there were either two or three people involved." He remembers hearing Agent Kellerman in the front seat of the limousine say, "We've got to get out of here fast." He was still conscious a moment later when he heard the shot that killed the President.

For a closer view of key moments in the assassination evidence, turn the page for enlargements of details in the Zapruder film.
Clear of sign, Connally is unhurt, he says

The pictures on these pages are magnifications of key frames of the Zapruder film shown in this previous sequence. Here in frame 223 Connally is out from behind the highway sign (left) which still conceals the President. It is probable, says the Commission, that the President has been shot and so has Connally. The governor recalls that at this point he was turning to his left, trying to see the President.

Kennedy, emerging from behind sign, is wounded

In frame 225, a ninth of a second after frame 223, the President also emerges, his hands rising toward his head. Connally shows no dramatic change. One commissioner asked Dr. Robert Shaw, who operated on Connally, whether so long a delayed reaction was possible.

"Yes," said the doctor, "but in the case of a wound which strikes a bony substance such as a rib, wound in the reaction is quite prompt."
Kennedy clutches his throat. Connally says he still felt nothing
Still calm five frames and .22 second later, Connally sits in front of the stricken President with the fingers of his right hand—the one supposedly shattered at the wrist—one third second or more before stopping the grip of his left hand. Dr. Charles Gregory, who operated on Connally's wrist, thinks it conceivable that Connally could have kept hold of his hat after being hit. But in reviewing the film, Dr. Gregory told Lee: "If the President had been hit by the same bullet that hit the President, I would expect to see him thrust forward much sooner."
Connally reacts to the bullet that hit him

In this enlarged detail of frame 236, Connally is now reacting to the bullet. This is one ninth of a second later than frame 234, which Connally marks as the moment he was hit. It is two thirds of a second since Kennedy began responding to his neck wound, and this raises an important question: is it likely that Connally would have had a delayed reaction to the hit while Kennedy's reaction was all but instantaneous? In frame 236, Connally's mouth has flown open, his right shoulder sagging, but he still appears to be holding on to his hat with his right hand, which is now to his right and level with the top of the car door. In frame 242, one third of a second
His shoulder buckles, he starts to slump

and later. Connally is caving in. His right shoulder has slumped dramatically. The change can be seen best by noting the red patch behind him which was identified as a bunch of red roses lying on the seat next to Mrs. Kennedy. In #242 the roses are only barely visible behind Connally's right shoulder. In #242 much more of the roses can be seen, showing that Connally's shoulder has been jerked downward and perhaps also forward by the impact of the bullet. His head has stopped around to the right and his mouth seems to be forming a cry, perhaps the exclamation that his wife heard him utter soon after he was hit: "My God! They are going to kill us!"
Mrs. Connally: 'I heard a second shot and saw him hit'

Governor John Connally and his wife, Nellie, studied the Zapruder film and the enlarged pictures in the kitchen of their Presidio ranch house outside of Floresville near San Antonio. Connally sat to his left, just as she had in the presidential luncheon on Nov. 22, 1963. As he watched the film sequence in which he says he was struck, the governor put down the magnifying glass and sat back, elbows on his knees, head tilted forward, his eyes staring at the floor. And then, he had been commenting on each photograph. Now he paused to sum up the key moments:

"Between the time I heard the first shot and felt the impact of the other bullet that obviously hit me, I sensed something was wrong, and said, 'Oh no, no, no.' After I felt the impact I glanced down and saw that my whole chest was covered with blood."

The governor and Mrs. Connally are absolutely convinced that their memories of that day are absolutely accurate. In fact, they feel that their memories of that day are absolutely accurate.

Mrs. Connally's recollection is as vivid as her husband's. "As far as I'm concerned, there was only one appearance before the Warren Commission, the one before John."

Mrs. Connally was covered with blood. "I started to look around, saw a sheet on the floor, and then, I heard the second shot that hit John."

Mr. Connally says he has never read any of the Warren Report, not even his own testimony before the Commission. "I lived that day. My being wounded was only an incidental part of it. The bullet was going, our President. Unless there's some purpose to be served, I don't want to fan the flames."

Mrs. Connally collapsed, in frame 312. 2 3/4 seconds after he was shot, the elevator collapsed. In frame 312, the President received his fatal head shot.

"And that's why I know every second of what happened in that car until I lost consciousness. When I heard that first shot and was starting to turn to no right to see what had happened, Nellie saw the President's hands reaching for his throat. I started to look around over my left shoulder, and somewhere in that recollection I was hit."

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Rebuttal by the protagonist of the one-bullet verdict

The Warren Commission, in its
report on the assassination of President Kennedy,
reached the conclusion that a single bullet, fired
by Lee Harvey Oswald, struck the President in the
forehead and that Oswald fired from the Texas
School Book Depository. The Commission's
determination was based on what they believed
was overwhelming evidence.

However, John F. Kennedy's close
ally, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy,
was not convinced by the Commission's
decision. He requested that a special
investigation be conducted to
examine the evidence further.

Boston Herald, a prominent newspaper,
later published an article
claiming that the Commission's
decision was biased and
incomplete. The article
highlighted the Commission's
failure to consider certain
key pieces of evidence that
opposed the onl bullet theory.

The Commission's lawyer,
F. Lee Bailey, responded to
these claims in an article,
arguing that the Commission's
decision was based on
solid evidence and that the
one bullet theory was supported
globally. Bailey claimed that
Oswald was the only person
who could have fired the bullet
that hit President Kennedy.

 Bailey asserted that the
Commission considered
a wide range of evidence,
including eyewitness accounts,
photographs, and medical
reports. He stressed that
the Commission's conclusion
was reached after a
thorough and objective
investigation.

Bailey emphasized that the
Commission had considered
questions such as:
- Oswald's movement and
position at the time of the
assassination
- The trajectory of the
bullets
- The nature of the wounds
on the President
- The possibility of multiple
shots

He argued that the
Commission's decision was
not influenced by
political considerations
but was based on
objective evidence.

Eventually, the Commission's
report was published,
and the evidence presented
in the article by Bailey
was reviewed. The
Commission's findings
remained largely unchanged,
and the one bullet theory
was accepted as the official
version of the events.

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The single-bullet theory, as set forth in the Warren Commission's report, is based on the assumption that the President was hit by a single bullet that entered his neck and exited his skull, causing fatal wounds. However, there are several points of contention that challenge this theory:

1. **Evidence Discrepancies:** The Commission's report stated that the bullet that went out through the President's neck was the same bullet that entered his neck. This is challenged by the fact that the wounds were not consistent with a single bullet trajectory.

2. **Texas School Book Depository:** The Commission concluded that the bullet fired by Lee Harvey Oswald came from the Texas School Book Depository. However, evidence has been presented that suggests the shooter was located elsewhere.

3. **Multiple Wounds:** The Commission's report stated that the President had only two wounds, one in the neck and one in the head. However, other wounds have been discovered, challenging the single-bullet theory.

4. **Witness Testimony:** Multiple witnesses have testified that they saw multiple shots fired, contradicting the single-bullet theory.

5. **Geographic Consistency:** The single-bullet theory relies on the geographic alignment of wounds and the trajectory of the bullet. However, this alignment has been challenged by experts.

The Commission's conclusions have been widely debated, and the case for the single-bullet theory has been extensively challenged. The evidence in support of this theory has been questioned, and alternative theories have been proposed. The case for the single-bullet theory remains a subject of ongoing debate and investigation.