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Seeing is Believing: the impact clearly shows the bullet did not come from behind but rather from right-front.

February 6, 2014

New York, New York USA

THE JFK ASSASSINATION:

THE BOB WILSON BOOK REVIEW OF 'INTO THE NIGHTMARE' AND INTERVIEW WITH AUTHOR JOSEPH McBRIDE



Bob Wilson

Joseph McBride's new book, 'Into The Nightmare' (Hightower Press, 2013) is a fine read for the seasoned researcher, or the interested newcomer. McBride had been a campaign worker for President John F. Kennedy and investigated the assassination that broke the hearts and killed the dreams of millions. With Prof. McBride's keen mind and extensive knowledge, his pen can record these events in a way the reader can easily grasp. The murder of Officer J.D. Tippit in Dallas on November 22nd, 1963, the day Pres. Kennedy was shot, helped to assure that Lee Harvey Oswald would be held in a climate of extreme bias, profiled as a cop killer. McBride clearly shows the evidence proves Oswald did not shoot Kennedy, or Officer Tippit on that day which altered the course of our history for the worse.

About the Author

Joseph McBride is an American film historian, biographer, screenwriter, and professor in the Cinema Department at San Francisco State University. McBride has published seventeen books since 1968, including acclaimed biographies of Steven Spielberg, Frank Capra, and John Ford. His most recent work is *Into the Nightmare: My Search for the Killers of President John F. Kennedy and Officer J. D. Tippit*, published in June 2013; this book, both epic and intimately personal, is the result of McBride's thirty-one-year investigation of the case. It contains many fresh revelations from McBride's rare interviews with people in Dallas, archival discoveries, and what novelist Thomas Flanagan, in *The New York Review of Books*, called McBride's "wide knowledge of American social history."

Before *Into the Nightmare*, McBride published *Writing in Pictures: Screenwriting Made (Mostly) Painless* (2012) and updated editions of his 1997 book *Steven Spielberg: A Biography* in 2011 and 2012. The American second edition of the Spielberg book was published by the University Press of Mississippi, which also reprinted his biographies *Frank Capra: The Catastrophe of Success* (1992; 2000) and *Searching for John Ford* (2001). McBride's other books include: *Orson Welles* (1972; 1996), *Hawks on Hawks* (1982), *The Book of Movie Lists: An Offbeat, Provocative Collection of the Best and Worst of Everything in Movies* (1999), and *What Ever Happened to Orson Welles?: A Portrait of an Independent Career* (2006).

His screenwriting credits include the movies *Rock 'n' Roll High School* and *Blood and Guts* and five American Film Institute Life Achievement Award specials on CBS-TV dealing with Fred Astaire, Frank Capra, Lillian Gish, John Huston, and James Stewart. He also was cowriter of the United States Information Agency worldwide live TV special *Let Poland Be Poland* (1982). McBride plays a film critic, Mr. Pister, in the legendary unfinished Orson Welles feature *The Other Side of the Wind* (1970-76). McBride is also the coproducer of the documentaries *Obsessed with "Vertigo": New Life for Hitchcock's Masterpiece* (1997) and *John Ford Goes to War* (2002).

McBride received the Writers Guild of America Award for

cowriting The American Film Institute Salute to John Huston (1983). He has also received four other WGA nominations two Emmy nominations, and a Canadian Film Awards nomination. The French edition of Searching for John Ford, *A la Recherche de John Ford*, published in 2007, was chosen the Best Foreign Film Book of the Year by the French film critics' association, le Syndicat Français de la Critique de Cinéma.

Born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, McBride grew up in the suburb of Wauwatosa. He attended Marquette University High School in Milwaukee, where he received a National Merit Scholarship, and the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and worked as a reporter for The Wisconsin State Journal in Madison before departing for California in 1973. A documentary feature on McBride's life and work, *Behind the Curtain: Joseph McBride on Writing Film History*, written and directed by Hart Perez, had its world debut in 2011 at the Tiburon International Film Festival in Tiburon, Marin County, CA, and was released on DVD in 2012.

The Interview:

1. Who was Officer J. D. Tippit? What was his standing in the Dallas Police Department?

Officer Tippit, who was thirty-nine, was an obscure eleven-year veteran of the Dallas Police Department at the time of his death. He was a former cotton farmer who grew up in East Texas. He had never received a

promotion on the police force because he was not well-educated and was weak on written tests and because he suffered from what we would now call Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) from his U.S. Army service in World War II. That caused him to have trouble looking people in the eye, which fellow officers and others warned could be a problem. It could indeed have been a fatal flaw when he met his ambush on East Tenth Street. As a longtime friend and fellow officer, Morris Brumley, told me of Tippit, "I don't think he met people real well. He was real quiet. He wouldn't say shit if he had a mouthful."

Tippit earned only \$494 a month from his police work but owned two homes. So he worked part-time security guard jobs that put him in the milieu of Dallas area rightwingers and anti-Castro Cubans. His own political views were mostly kept quiet or not much developed, although he was known to be conservative. But he worked at a diner that many rightwing political figures frequented and was run by a member of the John Birch Society, Austin Cook. Tippit also was a security guard at a movie theater run by Manuel Avila, who reportedly "ran all the organized Hispanic prostitution in Dallas" (according to Dallas researcher Bill Pulte) as well as having connections with anti-Castro Cubans, the CIA-involved network CBS, and U.S. government propaganda operations. So Tippit moved in a political milieu that was bitterly opposed to President Kennedy and his policies. Not long before his death, Tippit evidently came into some money and, according to his father, Edgar Lee Tippit, bought him a pickup truck as well as a new station wagon for himself.

2. Was there anything strange about Tippit's career in the military prior to his career in the Dallas Police Department?

Tippit's wartime training and service as a paratrooper spooked him. He saw some combat in the final days of the war in Germany, when his army unit took heavy casualties. He also was a light machine gunner. As his father told me, after the war J. D. "was nervous, I would call him. There were many who came back wild. The war ruined a lot of people's nerves. It took several years before J. D. settled down. He had it pretty rough as a paratrooper, jumping out of planes. His nerves was shot for a few years." There have been vague rumors that J. D. Tippit was courtmartialed, but no actual evidence of that has surfaced. Some of his military file is unavailable

or apparently has been destroyed. The army had a fire in its St. Louis records center in 1973 that destroyed many military records from the war. What is certain is that J. D. Tippit was affected psychologically by the war, as many veterans are, and that he had unusual skill with firearms. His father told me J. D. was an excellent shot. A psychological test of Tippit shortly after he became a policeman displayed several disturbing tendencies, including, "His grip on reality is below the average. Errors of judgment may be expected." And yet the department kept him on, which tells you something about the DPD.

3. Was there any reason to believe that J. D. Tippit knew Lee Harvey Oswald or Jack Ruby prior to 11/22/63?

There have been many such allegations about Tippit knowing Ruby but no proof of a prior connection. A well-known story about the two of them hanging out at Ruby's Carousel Club with Oswald shortly before the assassination is almost certainly a myth. But there is a fair amount of smoke surrounding a possible Tippit-Ruby connection, so there could have been some fire. What is most suggestive is that Austin Cook, who owned the diner where Tippit worked for most of the last three years of his life, knew Ralph Paul, the shadowy Dallas underworld figure who bankrolled Jack Ruby's clubs with little apparent return for his investments. Paul had bought out the business interests of Cook in a restaurant he owned with a partner, the Bull Pen, before it was reopened elsewhere and Cook kept the old place, renaming it Austin's Barbecue. Through that connection, Ruby and others could have become aware of Tippit, who worked his security job at Austin's in uniform and carrying a weapon. Ruby seemingly knew everyone involved in the case, and Cook was renowned for being friendly with many people in Oak Cliff and other parts of Dallas, including some important law enforcement figures and even the far-right General Edwin Walker, who has been suspected of involvement in the assassination.

4. Can you describe the movements of Tippit on 11/22/63? Is there any pattern to them that leads you to any suspicions of what Tippit was doing that day?

I spend a great deal of my book *Into the Nightmare* tracing his movements that day as microscopically as possible. From shortly after the 12:30 p.m.

assassination until the time of his death at about 1:09 p.m., Tippit was seen behaving oddly in suburban Oak Cliff. The last twenty-four minutes of his life saw him staked out at a gas station watching the viaduct from downtown and then racing off and stopping a driver of a car to see if he had someone hiding in his back seat. Tippit was next seen at a nearby record store on Jefferson Boulevard hurrying in and commandeering a phone. He made a call but evidently did not reach his party. He dashed off and was shot minutes later. These events, by the way, are not mentioned in the Warren Report.

What Tippit was doing that morning, before the assassination, remains somewhat confusing. He was said to have had a meeting with fellow policeman and neighbor Bill Anglin in a restaurant, but the evidence indicates they actually talked by phone that morning, as Anglin told a reporter that same afternoon. Tippit was said by his wife, Marie, to have gone home for lunch, but her accounts over the years exhibit various discrepancies that leave some reason to doubt the entire story. And there is sketchy evidence of a stop Tippit may have made in Oak Cliff at 12:17 p.m. to investigate a shoplifting, but the documentation is questionable, and the time he supposedly spent there is suspiciously brief. If the two latter events actually happened, Tippit would not have been able to be in Dealey Plaza at the time of the assassination, but if those two events did not happen, he could have been downtown. He was certainly unusually busy in the last twenty-four minutes of his life.

5. Can you speak a bit about the ballistics in the Tippit killing?

The ballistics evidence in the case, like most of the other evidence in the Tippit killing, is a mess. Oswald's alleged pistol could not be linked to a bullet removed from Tippit at the hospital. Three other bullets were entered into evidence only much later and also could not be linked to the "Oswald revolver." Witness and police accounts near the time of the shooting said an automatic weapon was involved. Four cartridges entered into evidence and said to have been discarded by Oswald while he was fleeing were of two different brands. The Warren Commission's Firearms Panel found that the cartridges had been fired in the alleged Oswald revolver but that they could not be related to the bullets. Sergeant Gerald Hill said when he arrived at the scene, he was shown four shells lined up closely on the

street. Officer James Leavelle, the lead detective in the Tippit case, whom I interviewed, also said he was shown those shells, but the official story is that the shells were found later by two witnesses in the grass. The shells admitted into evidence were not marked at the scene, but the Warren Report relies solely on those shells to make the case that Tippit shot Oswald. Leavelle admitted to me that “we had a little problem with the ballistics.”

The Tippit murder was never properly investigated by the DPD, the FBI, the Warren Commission, et al, and if Oswald had been brought to trial, it would have been hard for the DA's office to get a conviction of him on either murder. There was a dearth of credible eyewitnesses against him in both cases as well. Some of those who identified Oswald as a man fleeing the Tippit scene were coerced or identified him when he stood out obviously in lineups, beaten-up, disheveled, and protesting his innocence.

6. A plot to frame Lee Oswald would tighten if it looked as if he shot Tippit. Can you please speak to this?

That could have been the motive for having Tippit lured cynically into an ambush and shot while Oswald was known to be in the neighborhood, even if several blocks away. The police did pour into the area, diminishing their presence at the scene of the assassination, because, as Detective Leavelle told me, “What some people don't realize is that when a police officer gets killed, that takes precedence over the shooting of the president, because that's close to home.” Then when Oswald was arrested for the Tippit killing, initially not for the murder of the president, the traditional police and public animus against an alleged copkiller kicked into effect. One of the most absurd pieces of illogic that keeps cropping up in this whole case is that, as Vincent Bugliosi claims in his book *Reclaiming History: The Assassination of President John F. Kennedy*, “Even without all the independent evidence proving that Oswald killed Kennedy, it was obvious that Oswald's murder of Tippit alone proved it was he who murdered Kennedy.” Although this does not follow logically, it works on people's emotions.

On the other hand, Tippit's murder may have been a more integral part of the assassination scenario, if Tippit himself had been involved at Dealey Plaza. I explore the possibility, which is not provable but for which there

may be some evidence, that Tippit could have been “Badge Man,” the man in the Dallas policeman’s uniform who was photographed firing a weapon at Kennedy from the Grassy Knoll. If Tippit was Badge Man, his death could have been planned to help cover up what happened, as was the case with Oswald’s murder two days later. The plan may have been to murder Oswald at the theater on Friday shortly after Tippit was killed. Then the police and other authorities could have claimed the whole case was wrapped up in an hour and a half, as some people actually have tried to claim.

7. Can you please tell us about your interview with J. D. Tippit's father, and what you learned from that?

Edgar Lee Tippit, whom I interviewed in December 1992, was a sharp and vigorous ninety-year-old man who had never before been interviewed about his son or about his murder. I found Mr. Tippit helpful and frustrated that the case had never been solved; he moved me by saying, “I hated so bad” the fact that Oswald was murdered before he could stand trial. “I didn’t want him shot. We need to find out what did happen. Oswald, we all know there was something to the back of him. There had to be. I mean, Jack Ruby killed him to stop him talking. He never did have a chance. That had to be why he was killed.” Mr. Tippit gave me many insights into his son’s personality. And he informed me that another Dallas policeman had come to Marie Tippit shortly after the assassination and told her what had happened to J. D.

According to Edgar Lee, this is what he learned: “They called J. D. and another policeman and said he [Oswald] was headed in that direction. The other policeman told Marie. . . . The other boy stopped -- he would have got there but he had a little accident, a wreck. They both started, but J. D. made it. He’d been expecting something. The police notified them Oswald was headed that way.” The second officer, according to Mr. Tippit, “said if he hadn’t been stopped, he was closer to this place [the shooting site on East Tenth Street] than J. D. was, and he’d have been [instead of] J. D. there and he’d have gotten it.” Others had speculated since 1963 that J. D. Tippit may have been pursuing Oswald, but this report from Mr. Tippit was crucial information that advanced the case. It jibed with the other

information I and others found about Tippit's movements in the last minutes of his life and about the movements of other officers in the vicinity.

The key piece of the puzzle Mr. Tippit provided helped clarify his son's role, which by definition was conspiratorial, since Oswald's identity was not officially known to the DPD at the time of that pursuit. I found that the DPD knew well who Oswald was and probably had been keeping him under surveillance and perhaps also using him as an informant. Oswald did not realize he was being set up as the patsy by the CIA and the DPD until it was too late. I believe that the other policeman who was involved in the pursuit and went to Marie Tippit to tell her about it was William D. Mentzel, the officer actually assigned to that district (Tippit was four miles out of his assigned patrol district). According to Mentzel's widow, Arydce, "Bill told me how bad he felt about Tippit's death. He felt like Tippit had died for him, since he was killed in my husband's district." And when I interviewed former Dallas County District Attorney Henry Wade in January 1993, he lent further corroboration to this account of an earlier than officially acknowledged pursuit of Oswald, telling me, "Somebody reported to me that the police already knew who he [Oswald] was, and they were looking for him."

8. The housekeeper at Lee Oswald's rooming house said that a patrol car pulled up and honked, presumably as if they were looking for Lee. What do you surmise was going on here?

That is one of the most suggestive incidents in the aftermath of the assassination. It's been theorized that Tippit could have been one of the officers in the car who honked at the rooming house around 1 p.m., when Oswald briefly was inside. But the time seems to conflict with Tippit's other activities stopping the car on West Tenth Street and trying to make a phone call at the record store on Jefferson Boulevard. So some other officer may have been trying to signal Oswald. But who was doing the signaling and why remain a mystery. The next credible sighting of Oswald was at the Texas Theatre, where an employee saw him not long after 1 p.m. (although the official story is that he did not enter the theater until about half an hour later). Whether Oswald was hoping to be met by a contact who could have helped him escape, or whether he was hiding out trying to evade detection and figure out his next move, is still a matter of conjecture. Having police accomplices would be further evidence of conspiracy, but what Oswald's

relationship would have been with them adds to the mystery surrounding his movements. The now well-documented fact that there were two people using Oswald's identity, and that both may have been seen in Oak Cliff in that time period, compounds the confusion. See John Armstrong's massively researched book *Harvey & Lee: How the CIA Framed Oswald* for more on that question.

9. Were there any strange deaths or intimidation of witnesses in the Tippit killing?

Not only have there been many mysterious deaths of people connected with the events of November 22, 1963, there has been a particularly strong concentration of violence surrounding witnesses and possible perpetrators in the Tippit killing. Many witnesses reportedly lived in fear as a result. This is suggestive of the critical importance of this unsolved crime. Warren Reynolds, a witness who wouldn't identify Oswald as a man he saw running from the scene of the crime, was shot in the head but survived and changed his story to implicate Oswald. Domingo Benavides, the closest witness to the killing of Tippit, also refused to identify Oswald as the killer, but he changed his story too after his brother was murdered. One of the men I point to as among the strongest "persons of interest" in the Tippit killing, a hoodlum named Darrell Wayne (Dago) Garner, who was connected with Jack Ruby, died at age thirty of an alleged heroin overdose in Louisiana in 1970. In his obituary, Texas newspaper editor Penn Jones reported, "Garner repeatedly told [New Orleans District Attorney] Jim Garrison that [DPD Homicide Captain] Will Fritz in Dallas had threatened Garner's life." Garner was the prime suspect in the Reynolds shooting, and the Ruby stripper who served as his alibi for that crime quickly wound up dead, allegedly by suicide in the Dallas City Jail two hours after being arrested.

Another person I regard as a key suspect in the Tippit killing, Dallas Police Officer Harry Olsen, a Jack Ruby associate who was involved in an auto accident around that time, was fired by Chief Jesse Curry in December 1963 and moved hastily to California with his girlfriend, Kay Coleman, another Ruby stripper. Olsen and Coleman on the night of the Kennedy and Tippit murders had spent hours in a parked car with Ruby egging him on to kill Oswald. Dallas Police Officer Roscoe White, who has been named by

some people as a possible shooter of both Kennedy and Tippit, died in a 1971 industrial fire at his workplace. Acquilla Clemmons, a key witness to the immediate aftermath of the Tippit murder, identified two men involved in that crime, neither of whom resembled Oswald. She said she was threatened by the Dallas police if she talked. This brave private citizen kept giving interviews about what she saw, and after being interviewed by Mark Lane and Emile de Antonio in 1966 for their documentary film *Rush to Judgment*, she was never seen again.

10. Do you think that Tippit had some role in the plot to kill JFK?

Tippit was at least involved in the conspiracy to frame and capture or kill Oswald, as I mention above. Whether he had some other involvement, such as being a possible shooter in Dealey Plaza, remains to be proven. Some people have claimed that Tippit's death had nothing to do with the assassination, that it was a random event or was caused by his adulterous affair with a waitress at Austin's Barbecue, Johnnie Maxie Witherspoon, whom I interviewed at length. But my close study of the events surrounding his death rules out causes not relating to the assassination conspiracy. His murder has been called the "Rosetta stone" of the entire case. Those were the words of Warren Commission junior counsel David Belin, who meant them in a different way, but I believe what Tippit was doing that day helps unlock some of the hidden meanings of the case. My three decades of research contributed to a deeper understanding of Tippit's role, even if parts of it still remain mysterious.

11. How did you become involved in doing this research, and what drives you to fight for the truth?

I was a volunteer for John F. Kennedy in his 1960 Wisconsin presidential primary campaign, when I was twelve, and I met him three times, once when he was president. My most prized possession is a letter from him in May 1960 thanking me for my work on his campaign. Like many other people, I was inspired to want to pursue a career in politics because of him. Those ambitions were destroyed when my candidate was murdered and the government made it clear it did not want to solve the case. I became a writer instead. I found I could not let the subject rest. My interest gradually deepened, and I began studying the case seriously in the late 1970s.

Kennedy's unsolved murder, and the catastrophic events that followed it, caused me to understand that our democracy was imperiled, if not destroyed, by what happened in Dallas. I knew from the first day in November 1963 that it was not the work of a crazed lone gunman, although my recognition of that faltered for a while after the Warren Report was released in 1964.

Over the years, I realized that no subject could be more compelling or urgent, and that I owed it to the memory of President Kennedy and his valiant battle with the most violent elements of our society to try to make my own contribution, as much as I was capable of doing, to solving the crime. I eventually launched my own investigation in 1982, and it led to the publication of *Into the Nightmare* last June. My investigation will always continue. I use as an epigraph to the book these haunting lines from my favorite poet at the time of Kennedy's death, T. S. Eliot: "We shall not cease from exploration/ And the end of all our exploring/ Will be to arrive where we started/ And know the place for the first time."

Joseph McBride is the author of seventeen books, including, most recently, a December 2013 reprint edition of his classic 1982 Howard Hawks interview book *Hawks on Hawks*. McBride is an internationally recognized film historian who has published acclaimed biographies of Frank Capra, Steven Spielberg, and John Ford, as well as three books on Orson Welles. McBride is a professor in the Cinema Department at San Francisco State University. To learn more about the author, click here: <http://www.josephmcbridefilm.com>

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