

Ex-officer suspects he chased '2nd gun'



Tilson points out path he says suspect took along triple underpass embankment.

Dallas News staff photo by Steve Ueckert.

By EARL GOLZ

An off-duty Dallas policeman says he chased the car of a second man he believes could be involved in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and hopes telling his story publicly for the first time may "help when they re-enact it Sunday" in Dealey Plaza.

Tom G. Tilson Jr., now 59 and retired, said his experience seconds after Kennedy was shot could be an indication to the House Assassinations Committee that not all shots came from a 6th-floor window of the Texas School Book Depository.

From that window, with a bolt-action Italian military rifle, Lee Harvey Oswald was accused of firing two bullets that struck Kennedy in an open-top limousine below.

THE WARREN COMMISSION said Oswald traveled by taxicab after the shooting from downtown to his boarding house in Oak Cliff. He then armed himself with a pistol, which he used minutes later to shoot police officer J.D. Tippit, the commission concluded.

Tippit was covering Tilson's beat that day while Tilson was off work, he said. Three days later, Tilson was a pallbearer at Tippit's funeral.

Tilson, who served 27 years before he retired as a detective five years ago, said it was shortly after 12:30 p.m. Nov. 22, 1963, when he and a daughter, Judy, were going to pick up another daughter who had been watching the presidential motorcade at Main and Houston streets.

Tilson's car was turning east onto Commerce Street from Industrial Boulevard when he heard via his police radio that Kennedy had been shot, he said.

"AND I SAW all these people running to the scene of the shooting," he said. "By that time, I had come across under Stemmons. Everybody was jumping out of their cars and pulling up on the median strip.

"But here's one guy coming from the railroad tracks. He came down that grassy slope on the west side of the triple underpass, on the Elm Street side. He had a car parked there, a black car. And he threw something in the back seat and went around the front hurriedly and got in the car and took off.

"I was on Commerce Street right there across from it, fixing to go under the triple underpass going (east) into town. I saw all of this and I said, 'That doesn't make sense, everybody running to the scene and one person running from it.'"

TILSON SAID he sped up Commerce to Houston Street and looped around west on Main Street to pass back under the triple underpass. By that time, the black car had gone west on Commerce to Industrial, where it was waiting to turn left.

The car went south on Industrial, onto the Dallas-Fort Worth Turnpike and eluded him, Tilson said, but he got the license number.

He said he telephoned the police homicide bureau with the number and a description of the driver and car, "but they never contacted me or did anything about it." He didn't know who took his information and didn't keep the paper on which his daughter wrote the license number.

City police radio logs for that day do not reflect any alert for the vehicle that Tilson says he pursued.

"HOMICIDE WAS THAT WAY," Tilson said. "If you didn't have a big white hat on, they didn't even want

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"Here they were solving this case, here they arrested a suspect (Oswald) in one day and cleared up the murder of a president in one day. Man, that was really a super-duper police department.

"They didn't want to have to look for anybody else, and they didn't even want to know about it, really. They wanted to clear up the case. Who else could do better?"

Tilson said the Warren Commission never contacted him.

HE DESCRIBED the man he saw leaving the west side of the triple underpass as wearing dark clothes and with a stocky build — about 5-foot-9 and weighing 185 to 190 pounds.

Tilson's daughter, Mrs. Judy Ladner, recalls the chase but is not certain her father's car got close enough for her to write down the license number of the speeding car.

"I know there was a man," Mrs. Ladner said. "Seems like I saw him right before he was getting into the car. I think that was about the same time daddy told me to try to get the number down. But by then, we were past (the car) and we couldn't get a good view of the number. . . .

"I was trying to listen to the police calls. And I remember him saying, 'Try to write. Write this down,' or something. And I grabbed a pen."

SHE SAID THAT SECONDS before she saw the fleeing man, the presidential limousine had just sped past his car parked on the grass at the north side of Elm Street near the west end of the underpass. Kennedy had been hit seconds earlier by shots in Dealey Plaza — on the other side of the underpass — and the limousine was turning onto Stemmons Freeway toward Parkland Memorial Hospital.

About an hour later, the Dallas County sheriff's radio asked all deputies to be on the alert for a car whose license number was obtained from an "anonymous" source.

Minutes later, the car was stopped by police in Fort Worth, which was the direction the Tilson suspect's car was headed. However, the 1957 Ford stopped in Fort Worth was green and white, not black, as described by Tilson.

THE SUSPECT arrested in Fort Worth was questioned by FBI agents and released that day after Oswald was apprehended. He said he had driven 100 miles to Dallas from his home in Ranger, Texas, to visit an old army buddy in Mesquite but didn't find him home.

Rather than fighting the heavy traffic after arriving in Dallas about 10:30 a.m., the man from Ranger decided to stay and watch the motorcade, he told authorities.

Although the timing was right, Tilson said he didn't think the 21-year-old Ranger suspect was the man he chased toward Fort Worth. At 5-foot-4, the young man was about 5 inches shorter and at 130 pounds, about 60 pounds lighter than Tilson's suspect.