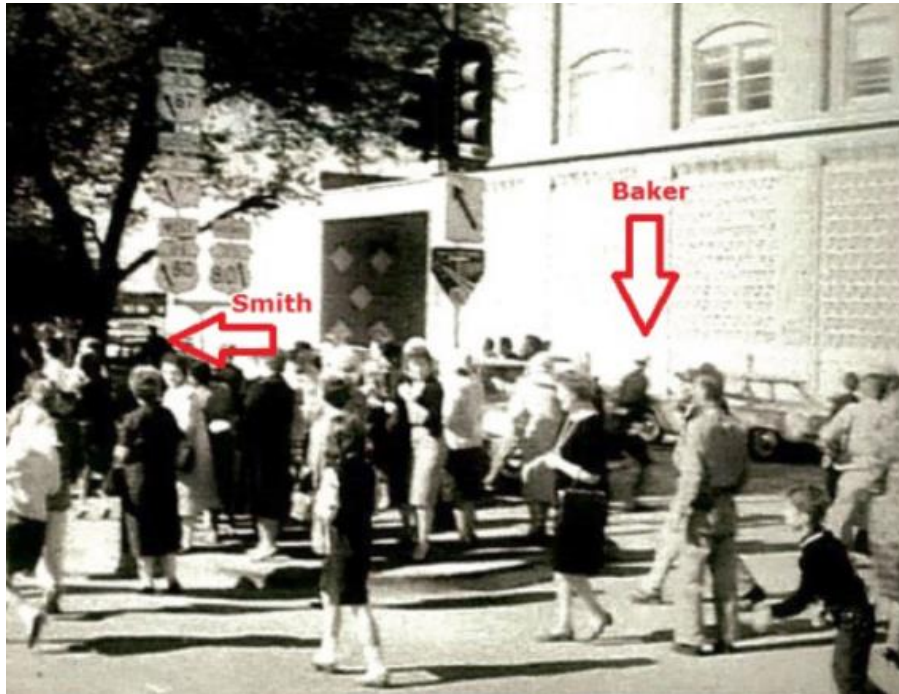


The Man Who Wasn't There: Were There Phony Secret Service Agents in Dealey Plaza?

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Officers Smith and Baker in Dealey Plaza moments after the shots were fired

Some witnesses said they encountered Secret Service agents in Dealey Plaza moments after the assassination. These reports continue to be the subject of much controversy. Why? Because it has long been established that no genuine Secret Service agents were on the ground in Dealey Plaza until later that afternoon. This fact suggests that phony Secret Service agents were in Dealey Plaza, and that they were there to help the assassins escape. David Scheim summarizes:

After the shooting, Dallas Police officer Joe M. Smith encountered another suspicious man in the lot behind the picket fence [on the grassy knoll]. Smith told the Warren Commission that when he drew his pistol and approached the man, the man "showed [Smith] that he was a Secret Service agent."

Another witness also reported encountering a man who displayed a badge and identified himself as a Secret Service agent. But according to Secret Service Chief James Rowley and agents at the scene, all Secret Service personnel stayed with the motorcade, as required by regulations, and none was stationed in the railroad parking lot [behind the grassy knoll]. It thus appeared that someone was carrying fraudulent Secret Service credentials - of no perceptible use to anyone but an escaping assassin. (Scheim 30-31)

Not only were there no Secret Service (SS) agents stationed on or behind the grassy knoll, but there were no FBI or other federal agents stationed there either. Officer Smith was not the only witness who encountered an apparently phony federal agent. Malcolm Summers ran to the knoll

moments after the shooting. He related the following in the 1988 documentary *Who Murdered JFK?*:

I ran across the--Elm Street to right there toward the knoll. It was there [pointing to a spot on the knoll]--and we were stopped by a man in a suit and he had an overcoat--over his arm and he, he, I saw a gun under that overcoat. And he--his comment was, "Don't you all come up here any further, you could get shot, or killed," one of those words. A few months later, they told me they didn't have an FBI man in that area. If they didn't have anybody, it's a good question who it was. (Anderson 14)

"Don't you all come up here any further, you could get shot, or killed...." -- the mystery Secret Service agent

Lone-gunman theorist Gerald Posner dismisses all reports of phony SS agents:

Outside the Depository, some witnesses later claimed they ran into Secret Service agents. Since there were no Secret Service agents at Dealey until 1:00 P.M., when Forrest Sorrels returned from Parkland Hospital, could that mean that somebody was impersonating Secret Service agents, indicating a conspiracy? Most of the witnesses later admitted they were mistaken. And immediately after the assassination, different groups of law enforcement officials (most of them having been there to watch the motorcade from nearby government buildings) spread out in Dealey Plaza--they included Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) agents, postal inspectors, officers from the Special Service Bureau of the Dallas Police, county sheriffs, IRS agents, and even an Army intelligence agent. . . . The author has reviewed the 1963 badges for the above organizations, and found that several look alike. Any of those law enforcement officials could have been confused with Secret Service agents. (Posner 269)

I find this explanation inadequate for a number of reasons. For one thing, the various "spectator" government agents mentioned by Posner could not have reached the parking lot behind the grassy knoll so quickly after the shooting; none of them could have been there in time to be encountered by Officer Smith. Furthermore, although Officer Smith did not specifically say so, it seems reasonable to infer from his testimony that the man he met identified himself *verbally* as an SS agent--I doubt that the man merely held up his badge and said nothing. In addition, Posner does not address the fact that Officer Smith himself later became suspicious of the man he had seen, nor does Posner mention Smith's reasons for doubting the man's identity.

Explained Officer Smith:

He looked like an auto mechanic. He had on a sports shirt and sports pants. But he had dirty fingernails, it looked like, and hands that looked like an auto mechanic's hands. And afterwards it didn't ring true for the Secret Service. At the time we were so pressed for time, and we were searching. And he had produced correct identification, and we just overlooked the thing. I should have checked that man closer, but at the time I didn't snap on it. (Summers 50)

Former Dallas Police Chief Jesse Curry stated in 1977 that the man encountered by Officer Smith "must have been bogus." Said Curry,

I think he must have been bogus-- certainly the suspicion would point to the man as being involved, some way or other, in the shooting since he was in an area immediately

adjacent to where the shots were--and the fact that he had a badge that purported him to be Secret Service would make it seem all the more suspicious. (Summers 51)

As for Smith's account, Posner notes that Smith said nothing about encountering an armed federal agent in his 11/22/63 affidavit (Posner 259). But this is understandable, since Smith had no reason at the time to think it was unusual or noteworthy that an armed federal agent would be stationed on the grassy knoll.

Posner further notes that "no one else saw" the man Smith said he encountered. However, even if no one else saw the man, this does not prove Smith's account is false. Nor can we be absolutely certain that no one else saw the man. The most that can be said is that is no known report is available that another witness saw him.

Often overlooked in discussions on phony SS agents in Dealey Plaza is the disturbing account of Sergeant D. V. Harkness, (Posner, for example, does not even mention it). Sergeant Harkness went to the *rear* of the Texas School Book Depository Building within a few minutes of the assassination. When he arrived there, he encountered several "well-armed" men dressed in suits. These "well-armed" men *told* Harkness they were SS agents (Hurt 110-111). It is not hard to understand why the presence of the armed, well-dressed men at the rear of the Book Depository did not make Harkness suspicious. Police officers were beginning to seal off the area, and just six minutes after the shooting Harkness himself identified the Depository over the radio as a possible source of gunfire. The problem, of course, is that the men encountered by Harkness could not have been legitimate SS agents, nor is it credible to suggest that Harkness somehow "misunderstood" what they said to him.



Dealey Plaza

The building in the red square is the Texas School Book Depository. The area in the red circle is the grassy knoll, the picket fence (obscured by trees), the pergola on the knoll, and the parking area behind the knoll.

Did Officer Smith Encounter a Real Secret Service Agent?

In 1995, Chris Mills, in his article "The Man Who Wasn't There" in the December 1995 issue of *The Assassination Chronicles* (pp. 58-62), argued that Officer Smith encountered a real Secret Service agent. Mills believes that Secret Service agent Thomas "Lem" Johns was the man encountered by Officer Smith. I realize that Mills believes that if his theory is correct, it constitutes evidence that Johns believed shots came from the knoll. However, I have several problems with Mills' theory that the man whom Officer Smith encountered was a real SS agent. Here are the main problems with I see with Mills' claim:

1. I find Mills' explanation of Smith's statement about the man's clothing to be unconvincing. Mills simply dismisses the statement, partly on the basis that it was made 15 years later, "by which time Smith was well aware of the controversy his original statement had caused." What is Mills saying here? That Smith embellished his story because he knew how much controversy his original account had caused? But would not Smith have therefore watered down the account, instead of adding troubling features to it? In essence, Mills is saying that either Smith's memory was egregiously mistaken or he deliberately embellished his story.
2. Mills goes on to note that Officer Smith did not mention that the man was wearing a sports shirt in his WC testimony. This omission proves nothing. Smith recounted in his testimony that he had seen other law enforcement officers in civilian clothes, i.e., not in their normal attire, right after the shooting. So, at the time, Smith could have assumed that the man was an SS agent in casual civilian clothes, and thus would have had no reason to mention that the man was wearing a sports shirt (and sports pants). And what about the fact that Officer Smith also said the man was wearing sports pants? Mills does not address this point.
3. Mills deals with Smith's recollection that the man had dirtied hands by suggesting that Johns had dirtied his hands between exiting the car and allegedly meeting Smith ("on the fence, dusty cars, etc."). But would Johns' hands have become so noticeably dirty that Smith would describe them as "hands like a mechanic"? This statement implies that the hands were quite dirty, with dirt or grease readily visible on them. In addition, no evidence exists that Johns jumped over the picket fence to get behind it, assuming he was ever behind the fence at all. (In fact, no evidence whatsoever exists that Johns went behind the fence.) Would the fence have been *that* dirty anyway? And why would Johns have touched any cars? Even assuming he casually put his hands--not just one hand, but both hands--on a few cars, were these cars so dusty that they could have dirtied someone's hands to the point that they would be described as looking like a mechanic's hands? Would Johns' hands have been markedly dirty after hurriedly jumping the fence and then touching a few cars? This seems improbable.

"The logical assumption is that Agent Johns showed up for duty that morning properly cleaned and groomed. After all, he was about to participate in a presidential motorcade."

4. It should also be pointed out that Smith noted that the man's fingernails were dirty as well. It is this kind of specific detail that, in my opinion, gives Smith's account to Summers the ring of truth. And, if the mystery man was Agent Johns, how could he have so dirtied his fingernails that they would be noticeably dirty to a policeman during a brief encounter? The logical assumption is that Agent Johns showed up for duty that morning properly cleaned and groomed. After all, he was about to participate in a presidential motorcade. The idea that he would have reported for duty with noticeably dirty fingernails strikes me as unlikely. Could he have dirtied his fingernails

during the motorcade? It is hard to see how he could have done so, since all he was doing was riding in a car. Even assuming that he touched a dirty seat or something, would that have so soiled his fingernails as to make them visibly dirty? Such a scenario is improbable.

5. Mills suggests that Wiegman and Johns were behind the picket fence at the same time. But Wiegman said nothing about going behind the fence. Instead, his account strongly indicates that he and Agent Johns were near or behind the end of the western wall of the pergola. Also, Wiegman did not say anything about Johns being challenged (or even approached) by a police officer, nor about Johns' then producing Secret Service ID in response; and Smith, in turn, said nothing about an unknown man (i.e., Wiegman) being next to or near the man he challenged.

6. When Wiegman stopped filming and ran down the knoll to reach his car, Johns might have already been on the street (see Trask 374). Said Wiegman, "When I came back down the hill Lem Johns didn't have a ride and I said, 'Come on, get in our car. Here it is.'" This statement seems to imply that when Wiegman came back down from the knoll and approached his car on the street, Johns was already nearby. If such was the case, are we to believe that Johns just happened to come down from the knoll in time to be near the road when Wiegman approached his car?

7. However, one could also read Wiegman's account to mean that Johns accompanied Wiegman back down the slope. We know from Wiegman's account that he and Johns were fairly close to each other when they were near or behind the end of the western wall of the pergola. It is not illogical to suppose that Johns followed Wiegman down the hill and that Wiegman then offered him a ride in the camera car.



The concrete pergola on the grassy knoll



Part of the picket fence on the grassy knoll, with the Triple Underpass to the left

8. If Agent Johns had been in the parking lot, presumably he would have been in the act of searching, and this action would have been obvious to anyone who saw him. Why, then, would Officer Smith have even approached him? Moreover, Johns was wearing a coat and tie, which makes it even harder to understand why Officer Smith would have approached him if he had been the man in question.

9. Confronted with the fact that Agent Johns said nothing in his report (or later) about being challenged behind the fence by a police officer, Mills suggests that Johns omitted this event because he was embarrassed over having become separated from Vice President Johnson and/or because his actions indicated he believed shots came from the right front. But why would Johns

have remained silent in subsequent years when Warren Commission critics repeatedly and loudly pointed to Smith's encounter as evidence that a phony SS man was stationed on the knoll? And, was Johns alive during the House investigation? If so, given the attention that Smith's encounter received during that inquiry, would not Johns have come forward to clear up the matter then? If Johns had been the man Smith saw, one would think that Johns would have shared this historic fact with at least a few of his closest friends and family, and, if this were the case, surely one of them would have long since disclosed this information by now.

10. The Select Committee investigated Smith's story and determined that no SS men were behind the picket fence at the time of the encounter (Blakey 101).

11. From my reading of Smith's and Wiegman's accounts, I seriously doubt that Johns could have been in the parking lot behind the grassy knoll at the time Smith encountered the man with dirty hands wearing a sports shirt and sports pants.

12. Mills assumes that Johns could have been the man seen by Officer Smith because Johns does not appear in certain photos of the knoll. However, the photographic record of the knoll during the time in question is neither continuous nor complete. Agent Johns could have been just out of sight a little farther north on Elm Street. Or, he could have been behind the end of the western wall of the pergola. Wiegman's account clearly indicates that he saw Johns in this general area, either near the end of the wall or just behind it--or both, for that matter, though obviously not at the same time (Trask 372-373). But, this account is a far cry from getting Johns in the parking lot, much less getting him there in time to be seen and then challenged by Officer Smith.

"Officer Smith's encounter with the mystery man appears to have occurred at roughly the same time that Wiegman saw Agent Johns near the end of the western wall of the pergola."

13. Mills' theory appears to be refuted by the photographic evidence. Photos and film footage taken by Wiegman, Malcolm Couch, and Richard Bothun, for example, indicate that Wiegman's press car left the plaza --with Agent Johns in it-- no more than 60-70 seconds after the final shot, and possibly as early as 45-55 seconds afterward (see Trask 156-157, 374-376, 426-427). Bothun photo 4 was taken about 30 seconds after the last shot. In it we see Wiegman pointing his camera at an oncoming patrolman, Clyde Haygood. This was *after* Wiegman had filmed the Newmans and the Hesters (Trask 157). Wiegman stopped filming a few seconds later. Then, about 15-20 seconds after that, Wiegman raced to catch his car after running down the grassy slope toward another woman who was lying on the ground (Trask 374).

14. So Bothun photos 4 suggests that Wiegman's car left the plaza about 50-65 seconds after the shooting. In the Couch film we see what appears to be Agent Johns and newsman Tom Atkins running to the street to catch a ride, and Johns is seen to vault over the trunk of Wiegman's camera car (Trask 425-427). When did Couch capture this scene on film? Approximately 45-65 seconds after the last shot was fired. In short, Johns did not have enough time to do all the things required of him by Mills' theory. Richard Trask has reached the same conclusion, as Mills candidly acknowledges in a footnote.

15. To judge from the available evidence, Officer Smith encountered the mystery man--again, keep in mind, in the parking lot behind the knoll--about 25-40 seconds after the shots were fired. Smith indicated the man was already among the cars when he saw him (Summers 50). Not only was the man already there, but the man apparently did not rush off right after the encounter, as

Johns would have had to do in order to catch his ride with Wiegman. If the man had suddenly run off, one would think Smith would have mentioned this in his WC testimony or in his interview with Summers.

16. After the man showed Smith what appeared to be Secret Service identification, Smith continued to search among the cars. The logical implication is that the man remained in the parking lot for a while. In addition, it stands to reason that the mystery man did not suddenly arrive to the parking lot just a few seconds before Officer Smith saw him, since one would suspect that Smith would have mentioned this as well. In other words, it seems reasonable to assume that the man was in the parking lot well before Smith began to search around the cars.

17. Additionally, Officer Smith's encounter with the mystery man appears to have occurred at roughly the same time that Wiegman saw Agent Johns near the end of the western wall of the pergola. The parking lot was a good 40 feet from this area (the pergola) and was separated from it by the picket fence.

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See also "The Agent on the Grassy Knoll" by Debra Conway
<http://www.jfklancer.com/knollagent/>

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