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A1-11 8 pages

Dear Roland,

(When Dick Blair spelled your name to me, he put two "l's" in it. Which is right?).

The enclosed manuscript is a copy of what I wrote in the late 1970's. I cannot remember the exact year, and since the file has been transferred gradually from my first computer to my sixth (!), the file date is meaningless!

All of the footnotes are ones I added just in the last few days -- after I talked to you and Dick Blair -- since I didn't want to change the original file.

I will try to get the edge-printed frames you requested.

If there is anything else you would like me to do, or any other people you might like me to contact, feel free to call me, or E-Mail me at PMChamber@AOL.com.

Sincerely,

Phil Chamberlain

Received June 1997
PC

THE ZAPRUDER FILM

After over 15 years, I don't remember Fred's call letters, nor even his last name. But thanks to him, and Ham radio, I was probably one of the first people in the world to hear that John Kennedy had been shot. I had taken my wife to lunch and was just returning to work (at the Kodak Processing Laboratory) when a voice came in on my mobile ham radio -- "This is K5____. Is anybody there?" I knew I just had a minute, but I picked up the microphone and answered, "This is K5KEO".

Fred came back with "I'm at Parkland -- just brought my wife back to work, and all hell has broken loose over here. Kennedy and Connally have both been shot!". I answered, "Yeah, ha-ha, sick joke!". Fred shot back, "No, I'm serious! There are cops, FBI, and medics running all over the place! -- Oh! they're making me move. Talk to you later." With that we both signed off and I made a dash for the office.

As I ran through the building, I yelled to people in the halls that I thought JFK had been shot. In the office I turned on the radio to KRLD, and heard only its regular program, called my wife, Nan, at work to tell her what I'd heard, and then just sat and listened nervously, wondering if it were really true. When the first announcement came, it was, as I recall, a short break-in, to say that "some kind of incident has occurred during the JFK motorcade." But it quickly snowballed into full-fledged coverage, with reports both locally from KRLD and nationally from CBS, confirming that the shooting had, indeed, occurred.

Friday afternoons are the slowest time of the week in a film processing plant. I imagine every portable radio in the place was turned on, with groups of people listening -- in the darkrooms, break area, etc. Even so, when the announcement came that Kennedy was dead, I tearfully called the receptionist and had her announce it over the PA system. I had the processing machines shut down, and practically all work stopped. (I was the Production Supervisor of the Kodak lab, but the manager was on vacation, so I was in charge at the time). People were in little groups throughout the plant -- somber, some choked up -- trying to realize that

the President of the United States had been assassinated, and even then remarking how terrible it was that it had happened in Dallas. Mostly, I think we were numbed, and listened to the radio without much conversation.

I don't remember the exact time, but I think it was about 2:30 when the receptionist, Marilyn Brandon (now Marilyn Jennings), called me and said, "There's a Mr. Zapruder here in the lobby, who thinks he might have pictures of the shooting". The lobby was on the second floor, almost next to my office, so I quickly walked out and met Mr. Zapruder.¹ He was a heavy-set man, bald on top, with an arc of black hair around the edges. He wore a dark suit, was carrying his camera bag, obviously nervous, and said "I'm not sure what I've got, but I think I was taking pictures when the shooting happened". It was much later that it sunk in that Zapruder didn't realize at the time he was taking pictures that there was a shooting. He was simply taking pictures of the motorcade, and though he heard the shots, and saw the motorcade roar off, since he was looking through the view-finder of the camera, he didn't know what had happened until he heard it on the radio -- and wasn't sure what he had pictures of! But he did have a spool of 8mm Kodachrome film, and somewhere on it, were the pictures he made of the motorcade.

Dan Rather of CBS, in his book "The Camera Never Blinks", states that "...we helped arrange for Eastman Kodak to process the film. This job had to be done by the best equipment. It had to be done fast. And it had to be kept confidential.". This was not so. At the time Zapruder came to Kodak, even he didn't know if he had pictures of the event, let alone Rather. Zapruder was alone, and gave every

¹ A Mr. Lewis also came to the laboratory that same afternoon, with 35mm pictures, allegedly, of the assassination. Dick Blair's remembrance of Mr. Lewis description comes close to matching my remembrance of Mr. Zapruder! In this case, I am pretty sure. I am correct, since I spent several hours with Zapruder. The Dallas 6th Floor Museum seemed surprised, or un-believing, that I didn't remember Mr. Lewis. I think what happened was that I was "wired-in" to Mr. Zapruder and let the Service Dept. handle anyone else who came in.

indication that he had come to the lab on his own volition, not because of urging by someone else.²

The Kodachrome machines had not been down long enough to require a new process check or "OK for customers' film", and although it was very unusual for us to start up a machine for one roll of film, we soon had Zapruder's film spliced into "leader" and started into the machine, with our best processor and inspector both in the machine room.

Kodachrome film took something over an hour to process, so for the next long hour, we waited, chewed our knuckles, and wondered what the film would show. Zapruder told us he had a little dress-manufacturing business in down-town. He was a very casual amateur photographer, had decided at the last minute to see the motorcade, and took his camera almost as an afterthought.

When the film finally left the drying cabinet and wound up on the take-off assembly, we transferred it to a projection spool, and a group of about 15 of us -- Zapruder, me, the process men, Dick Blair of our Customer Service Department, and other staff people -- headed for our little conference room, where we had set up an inspection projector.

Regular 8mm film (this was before the days of Super-8) was actually 16mm wide, but with twice as many perforations on the edges as the full 16mm product. Before return to the customer, it was slit down the middle, and the two halves spliced together end to end. The inspection projector was used to spot-check processed films for quality, especially for scratches or physical problems, just as quickly as they came off the machine. It ran about twice as fast as normal 16mm projection speed, and was used for both 8 and 16mm. So when 8mm was projected before it was slit in two, there were four individual frames on the screen -- with the two frames on the left side upside down! -- and it ran at four times normal speed!

² Apparently Zapruder had gone to TV station WFAA first, and they had urged him to bring the film to us.

We had no idea where the pictures would be in the roll. It started off with pictures of Zapruder's family or friends, and like most amateur photographers, he sheepishly apologized for them. And then came the pictures. Fortunately, they were right-side-up, on the right-hand side of the screen. Even at the high speed, we could see the results, including the infamous frame where the top of Kennedy's head was blown off. And then nothing but blank film, where Zapruder³ had run off the rest of the roll to take it out of the camera.

Zapruder said, "Let's look at it again", at which point I made one of my better decisions of the day. Since it is always possible that film will jump the sprocket in a projector, putting sprocket holes in the pictures -- or that a piece of foreign material will lodge in the projector gate, scratching the film, I took the spool off the projector, handed it to Zapruder, told him it was now in his possession, and that there would be no charge for the processing!

His next question was, "Can you make some copies?" We did not have the equipment to duplicate movies, so we called the Jamieson Film Laboratory, and asked them if they could duplicate unslit 8mm Kodachrome. They said that yes, they had the duplicating printer, but that they did not have any duplicating film perforated for 8mm. (Kodachrome film was made in three types in those days -- Daylight, Type A for pictures under Tungsten light, and Duplicating Film. Duplicating film was a special finer-grain, low-contrast film, designed to give better quality copies, and was not available to the public). Our only alternative was to make the copies on Type A camera film, recognizing that they would not be of the best quality, and that Jamieson would have to guess at the color balance to use in their printer. So we gave Zapruder two rolls of Type A Kodachrome⁴, and sent him off for Jamieson's.

³ Actually, Dick Blair wound off the rest of the film and removed it from the camera.

⁴ In 1997, some 35 years after the event, I think I remember Zapruder's saying, "Can you make a copy of this?", and when I reviewed the possibilities and said "Yes", his saying,

Less than an hour later, he was back with the two rolls of film, and a man he introduced as his partner, who was also his attorney. Once again we started a processing machine. It was now 5:30 or so. My wife had come over after work, and a little group of us sat in our smoking area-coffee shop while we waited for the processing. Zapruder was very nervous -- repeatedly mopping his brow. His suit by now was rumpled and creased. The partner was very quiet and businesslike. We all thumbed through magazines, made small talk, drank coffee, but mostly just waited.

This time, we slit and spliced the films⁵ and put them on regular 8mm projection spools, and once again trooped to the conference room -- this time to see the film at normal size and speed, and several times, if we wished! Those of us in the lab realized that the duplicate was soft, or fuzzy, compared to the original, but really of good quality, considering the circumstances. As we watched with a confused mixture of emotions, Zapruder commented on the film, and I particularly remember his saying, "Look, you can see where I jumped as I heard the shots". And sure enough, the camera jumped three times as Zapruder was startled by each shot, even though he hadn't realized at the time what they were or what was happening. We cringed when JFK's head exploded -- and guessed even then that Jackie was trying to pick up a piece of his skull or brains from the back of the convertible. Other than Zapruder's commentary, no one else talked much.

"Can you make two?". Perhaps he asked for three. Dick Blair, who actually got the film from the Service Department replacement supply, remembers it as being three rolls of film. Apparently three copies are, or were, in existence, so Dick is correct.

⁵ In mid-1997, there was some question as to whether any of the copies were slit, but I am almost positive that we viewed it as stated here, and as related below, with the FBI agents.

Zapruder and his partner left shortly after we finished, and that was the last time I saw Abraham Zapruder, though not the film.

Although our processing plant did not normally work on week-ends, we had decided to have people on standby, just in case there were other pictures to be processed. (For the next two weeks, we put notices in all our outgoing films, offering free processing for any films people had that might have been taken during the assassination).

Early on Saturday, two FBI agents showed up, with one of the copies of the Zapruder film. I don't know how they were aware of the existence of the film, or how they obtained the copy. Erwin Pattist⁶, who was then the Quality Control Supervisor, and I set up an Kodak Analyst projector, that runs both backwards and forwards, can stop to examine individual frames, etc.⁷ For nearly an hour we ran the projector as the FBI agents counted the frames between Zapruder's flinches at each shot, cursed the street sign that obscured the view during a crucial moment, exclaimed as the bullets impacted -- and like us, theorized about what Jackie was doing, almost climbing out onto the back of the car. The agents were very professional, commenting on the deployment of the security agents along the motorcade route, etc. That was the last time I saw the Zapruder film.

Our standard charge for opening the laboratory on a week-end was \$1000 for Saturday and \$1500 for Sunday. We processed, and examined, two other films that week-end -- one on Saturday and one on Sunday. One was submitted by UPI and the other by AP, I believe -- although it may have been a television network. One was a movie, and the other 35mm Kodachrome still pictures. I don't know who the amateur photographer was in either case, since they brought to us by

⁶ Now deceased, unfortunately, as are most others who were there. If anyone is interested in testing the memory of other individuals, the time is getting late!

⁷ Apparently the Analyst projector was a 16mm projector. As stated above, I'm pretty sure we were doing this in 8mm, so it must have been another projector.

the news agencies. In any event, neither seemed to show any evidence of any shooting or other activity. We never received another film for special processing (and we never charged anyone for those two days!).

Abraham Zapruder has been gone for quite a few years. His original film, first sold to Time-Life publications, was used by them in major stories about the assassination (although for a number of years the one "gory" frame was not published!). I believe the original was eventually returned to Zapruder's family in 1975. In his book, Dan Rather states, "in editing the film for use as still pictures, Life lost one frame", and goes on to comment about its loss, at least implying that it has never been recovered. I have no way of knowing whether or not a frame from the original actually was lost. I do know that there were two⁸ Type-A copies that contained all the frames from the original film.

You know, I wonder what ever became of those two Type-A copies??⁹

⁸ OK, three!

⁹ The Sixth Floor Museum in Dallas quizzed me quite carefully about whether there were two or three copies. I think I maintained there were only two, but I must have been mistaken. I believe that three copies have been accounted for.