

## THE RAMBLER MAN

One wouldn't consider it much of an obituary. A life reduced to eleven paragraphs in The Dallas Morning News. The commentary is not remarkable for a person of the prominence of ex-deputy sheriff Roger Craig. Not for the employee the Dallas County sheriff's office proclaimed "Man of the Year" in 1960.

Roger Craig's popularity grew among Kennedy assassination investigators when he maintained he witnessed an event involving a Nash Rambler station wagon in Dealey Plaza on November 22, 1963. He spoke freely about the incident, disputed details of the assassination with superior officers, lost his job, aided in Jim Garrison's probe of Clay Shaw, became the friend of several researchers' and died by his own hand on May 15, 1975.

Sadly, Craig's father discovered the body in a back bedroom of the small house on Luna Road in Dallas, this a few minutes after the old man had returned from mowing his lawn. There was a note. The physical and mental anguish resulting from a car wreck in 1973 and a shotgun wound to the shoulder sustained in 1974 was too much. Roger was sorry for what he had to do but he just "couldn't stand the pain."

In the quiet of the Dallas Public Library I reviewed the eighteen year old obituary. I remembered the story of Craig's sighting of the Nash Rambler station wagon in front of the Texas School Book Depository on November 22nd. His account became important when a claim arose that Marina Oswald's friend and confidant, Ruth Paine, owned a similar vehicle.

Author and researcher Penn Jones Jr. briefly reviewed the episode in his 1969 paperback *Forgive My Grief III*. On page twenty nine, Jones asserted, "Craig insisted from the day of the assassination that he saw Oswald race down the grassy area and get into a station wagon like the one owned by Mrs. Ruth Paine of Irving." Curiously this important allegation, that the Paine vehicle might have been used in the assassination, lay dormant until Jones published the story.

Over the years, looking into what was written about Lee Bowers Jr., Roscoe White, Beverly Oliver, John Crawford and Dr. Charles Crenshaw, I discovered some researcher's accounts contained historical inaccuracies, embellishments and occasionally outright deception. I wondered if Craig's story had received similar treatment.

I concluded more information could be obtained from Craig's unpublished 1971 autobiography, *When They Kill a President*. In that work he described how his life was influenced by the assassination, often in staccato paragraphs and frequently railing at the Warren Commission for altering his testimony.

Here is how he described the occurrence:

"As I have earlier stated, the time was approximately 12:40 p.m. when I ran into [fellow Deputy Sheriff] Buddy Walthers. The traffic was very heavy as Patrolman Baker (assigned to Elm and Houston Streets) had left his post, allowing the traffic to travel west on Elm Street. As we were scanning the curb I heard a shrill whistle coming from the north side of Elm Street. I turned and saw a white male in his twenties running down the grassy knoll from the direction of the Texas School Book Depository Building. A light green Rambler station wagon was coming slowly west on Elm Street. The driver of the station wagon was a husky looking Latin, with dark wavy hair, wearing a tan wind-breaker type jacket. He was looking up at the man running toward him. He pulled over to the north curb and picked up the man coming down the hill. I tried to cross Elm Street to stop them and find out who they were. The traffic was too heavy and I was unable to reach them. They drove away going west on Elm Street."

"I ran to the front of the Texas School Book Depository where I asked for anyone involved in the investigation. There was a man standing on the steps of the Book Depository Building and he turned to me and said, 'I'm with the Secret Service.'" ". . . He showed little interest in the persons leaving. However, he seemed extremely interested in the description of the Rambler. This was the only part of my statement which he wrote down in his little pad he was holding. Point: Mrs. Ruth Paine, the woman Marina Oswald lived with in Irving, Texas, owned a Rambler station wagon, at that time, of this same color."

The next paragraph, also from the autobiography, reveals the relationship between Lee Harvey Oswald, Ruth Hyde Paine and the light green Nash Rambler station wagon.

"I had said that [Dallas Police Captain Will] Fritz had said to Oswald, 'This man saw you leave' (indicating me). Oswald said, 'I told you people I did.' Fritz then said, 'Now take it easy, son, we're just trying to find out what happened, ' and then (to Oswald), 'What about the car? ' to which Oswald replied, 'That station wagon belongs to Mrs. Paine. Don't try to drag her into this.' Fritz said car -- station wagon was not mentioned by anyone but Oswald."

Craig was reinforcing a point he made to the Warren Commission in 1964. Warren Commission Counsel David Belin asked Roger if there was anything of importance that had not been discussed. From Warren Volume VI, page 271 [6H271]:

Mr. Craig. "No; except-uh-except for the fact that it came out later that Mrs. Paine does own a station wagon

and-uh-it has a luggage rack on top. And this came out of course, later after I got back to the office. I didn't know about this. Buddy Walthers brought it up. I believe they went by the house and the car was parked in the driveway."

Clearly, Jones' article depended on Craig's confirmation to support the Rambler story. However, where was Craig's proof that Ruth Paine owned a Rambler station wagon let alone of the same color. Granted, Craig was an ex-sheriff and likely had extensive investigative skill, but I never heard claims he was a student of the Kennedy assassination.

Craig acknowledged he first saw his testimony in 1968 ". . . when [he] looked at the twenty-six [Warren Commission] volumes that belonged to Penn Jones." Jones charged in *Forgive My Grief III* that "Craig's testimony was so devastating to the intentions of the Warren Commission that Craig's statements had to be changed."

To verify Jones' allegations, I reviewed those parts of the autobiography searching for areas where Craig indicated Warren Commission staff made modifications. Was there proof the Warren Commission had altered his Fritz/Oswald/Rambler statement? I found no such inference.

Craig testified in Dallas on April 1, 1964. The passage dealing with Fritz's interrogation of Oswald can be found in Warren Commission Volume VI, page 270, [6H270].

Mr. Belin. All right. Then what did Captain Fritz say and what did you say and what did the suspect say?

Mr. Craig. Captain Fritz then asked him about the-uh-he said, "What about this station wagon?"

Wait a minute! Craig never charged the Warren Commission altered this portion of his testimony. He also claimed Fritz never mentioned the station wagon. The cracks in the "story" began to appear.

I soon found Fritz didn't even remember Roger Craig being in on the Oswald interrogation! Warren Commission Counsel Joseph Ball asked Fritz if he remembered Craig being in his office "in the presence of Oswald." In Warren Volume IV, page 245, [4H245].

Fritz. "No, sir; I am sure he did not, I believe that man did come to my office in that little hallway, you know outside my office, and I believe I stepped outside the door and talked to him for a minute and I let someone else take an affidavit from him."

I now had more questions than answers.

It was one thing for Mrs. Paine to own a station wagon with a luggage rack but was the vehicle a Nash Rambler? Was it green? Why did Buddy Walthers bring the subject up? Why was Craig not positive but only believed someone went by the house? Who was the "they" that went to the Paine home to check on the car?

Craig's autobiographical declaration that "Mrs. Ruth Paine, the woman Marina Oswald lived with in Irving, Texas, owned a Rambler station wagon, at that time, of this same color." was on the verge of collapse. What is more important, Fritz challenged not only Craig's story but his credibility as well. Was there proof Craig had been in Fritz's office?

I felt Fritz's recollection was best countered in J. Gary Shaw's Cover-Up. That is until I looked into it. On page twenty seven, Shaw suggests "Fritz complied [with the Warren Commission by supplying perjured testimony] that Craig had not been in Fritz's office and had not even seen Oswald. The Fritz lie, however, was unintentionally exposed when Dallas Police Chief Jesse Curry published his personal JFK Assassination File. A photograph on page 72 of that book shows Craig standing in the background in Fritz's office; the caption is: 'The Homicide Bureau Office under guard while Oswald is being interrogated.'"

Not so fast, "perjured testimony" and "lie" is a little strong. The photograph Shaw claims is of Fritz's office during the Oswald interrogation, is not. It is of the outer office of Room 317, the Homicide and Robbery Bureau. There are two other photographs that by coincidence appear in Cover-Up on pages twenty-seven and 101. They are of the same scene but shot from different perspectives. Those photographs show at least five men, one Dallas Police Officer Gerald Hill, and a secretary. Some individuals might be conversing while drinking coffee or water. The secretary looks like she is eating a sandwich. These are hardly activities one would expect Fritz to condone while questioning the prized suspect. Oswald is nowhere to be seen. While there is no evidence that Craig wasn't in Fritz's office, Shaw's alleged photographic confirmation is no proof at all. In fact it only shows Craig was outside the office close to the spot Fritz claimed he was.

What about the color of the station wagon? Craig made it a point to claim his testimony was changed with respect to the color of the car. "I said the Rambler station wagon was light green. The Warren Commission: Changed [it] to a white station wagon . . ."

Curious, I went back to Craig's deposition of November 25, 1963. I concluded the Warren Commission could alter the testimony but would have to go to extreme lengths to change a document obtained three days after the assassination. FBI Special Agent

Benjamin O. Keutzer took Craig's statement. It appears in Commission Exhibit No. 1993, [CE 1993].

"He stated he also noticed an automobile traveling west on Elm, which he feels was a white Nash Rambler station wagon with a luggage rack on top."

This seemed to confirm that Craig originally thought the car was white. I still couldn't understand why color was so important. Why was it necessary for the station wagon to be green rather than white? A little more research resolved the issue. In Warren Commission Volume II, pg. 506, [2H506] the following exchange takes place.

Mr. Jenner: "Describe your automobile, will you please?"

Mrs. Paine: "It is a 1955 Chevrolet station wagon, green, needing paint, which we bought secondhand. It is in my name."

I thought I was seeing things! Ruth Paine owned a green Chevrolet not a Nash Rambler?

The episode in Will Fritz's office, if it ever occurred, must now be looked upon in a new light. One not as sinister as originally believed, one that modifies the perception of the entire Rambler scenario. Everything hinges on the simplification of Fritz's question and Oswald's response not the enhancement of it. Let's say Fritz did ask Oswald about the Nash Rambler station wagon, Roger Craig observed. Perhaps when Oswald heard the words station wagon, he immediately thought of Ruth Paine's Chevrolet station wagon. His response to Fritz could then be predicated by the fact Mrs. Paine had given him driving lessons in the Chevy a few short weeks before. [See 2H502 to 2H517] Craig and Oswald would then be referring to different station wagons!

One can almost picture Roger Craig, trying to stir the assassination conspiracy pot. Failing to verify facts, depending upon memories inactive for four years, assuming "they" whoever "they" were checked the automobile at the Paine house, relying on Buddy Walthers spotty remarks, accusing the Warren Commission of altering testimony so the color of the vehicles matched and looking myopically at the Fritz interrogation of Oswald. To what purpose? To implicate Ruth Paine in the plot? If not, why the great charade?

We are left with another story we thought had possibilities, turned sour. At one point I thought there was independent corroboration of Craig's Nash Rambler story in High Treason. The Groden/Livingstone book describes the episode on pages 161 and 162. Imagine my disappointment when I discovered the authors were merely rehashing Penn Jones' "investigation."

And what of Penn Jones Jr.? Consider it was Jones who wrote in The Importance of Roger Craig that "Craig insisted from the day of the assassination that he saw Oswald race down the grassy area and get into a station wagon like (emphasis mine) the one owned by Mrs. Ruth Paine of Irving."

As J. Gary Shaw, protege of Penn Jones Jr. whose research appears in the "Forgive My Grief" series, told Baltimore's "City Paper" staff writer David Dudley, "We can correct our pasts even if we find we have to knock down a few statues to do it."

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