

1999 JFK LANCER BUS TOUR

Ken M. Holmes, Jr.

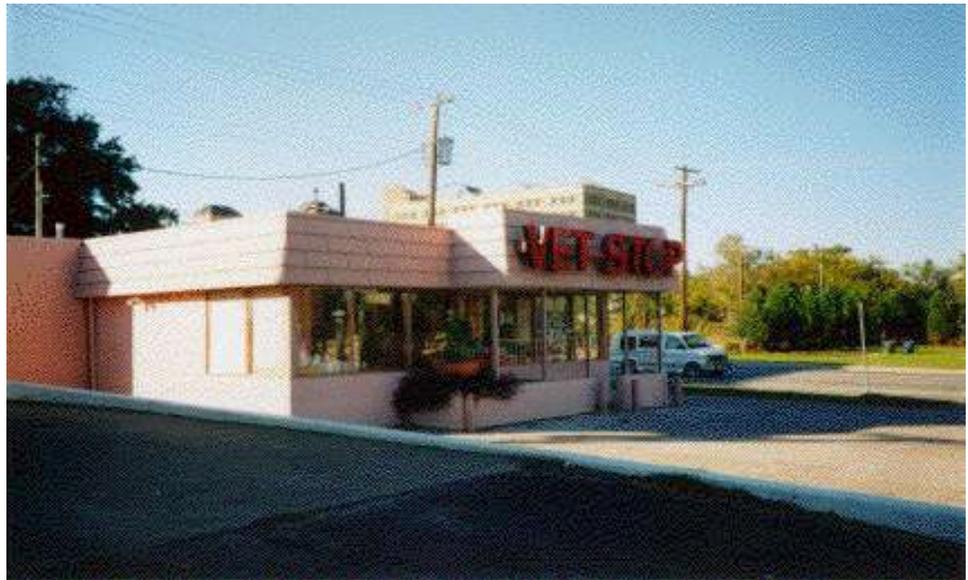
This year's JFK Lancer Bus Tour was hosted by Bill Drenas. Bill has written several very well researched articles on J. D. Tippit including "Car #10 Where Are You" and has a background of interviewing many witnesses. He is careful to question and record the answers with the most accuracy. He has taken great pride in the Tour for the past two years and goes into great detail to help the researchers on the Tour to understand exactly where and what happened.

The researchers boarded the 45-seat bus in Dealey Plaza near the corner of Houston and Main streets. When all had boarded the bus, Bill went to each person to introduce himself and shake hands and help them to feel comfortable and welcome on the tour. Bill told everybody that if they had questions not to hesitate to ask. While waiting for the bus to depart, Bill pointed out the various buildings in Dealey Plaza, such as the Texas School Book Depository, The Dal Tex Building, The Dallas County Records Building, The Criminal Courts Building, The Old Red Courthouse, The Terminal Annex Building, and The Dallas Morning News Building.

Because of a mix up at the Bus Company, the bus had to make a stop at the Dallas Grand Hotel before the tour began so that Tom Jones, who supervised this year's Bus Tour, could correct a problem. Bill took this opportunity to show points of interest as we traveled east on Commerce Street towards the Hotel. First was the Greyhound Bus Depot at Commerce and Lamar Streets, where Oswald boarded William Whaley's cab after the assassination and rode to Oak Cliff. Next was the Santa Fe Building, which housed the FBI offices in 1963 and where Oswald delivered his note to agent James Hosty shortly before the assassination. A short distance up Commerce Street, Bill pointed out the former locations of Jack Ruby's Carousel Club, Enquire Shine and Press Shop, Nichols Brothers Parking Garage, and Abe's Colony Club all of which were important in Jack Ruby's life. Across the street from these former locations is the Adolphus Hotel and a few blocks east is the former location of Sol's Turf Bar, a Ruby hangout.

While we waited outside the Dallas Grand Hotel, Bill informed us that at the time of the assassination it was known as the Statler Hilton Hotel and that Jack Ruby was often seen there trying to promote his business. Bill also pointed out that diagonally across Commerce Street at the corner of Harwood Street is the location of Dallas Police Headquarters where Lee Harvey Oswald was in-

terrogated, detained and murdered. After the difficulty with the Bus Company was corrected, we were able to depart on the Tour. As we headed west on Main Street towards Dealey Plaza, Bill pointed out that this was the exact route that President Kennedy's Limousine took down Main Street on 11/22/63. As the bus waited for a traffic light on Main Street, Bill was able to show where on Elm Street Oswald boarded Cecil McWatter's bus on 11/22/63. Because many of the buildings have been demolished, Bill was able to point out most of the route that Oswald walked when he got off the bus on Elm Street and walked down Lamar Street to the Greyhound Bus Depot. As the tour bus crossed the Houston Street Viaduct heading towards Oak Cliff, Bill explained that William



Dobb's House Snack Bar

Whaley's cab carrying Oswald on 11/22/63 took this same route. Bill explained where the Gloco gas station was located at the south end of this Viaduct, and told how officer J. D. Tippit was seen here by five witnesses sitting in his squad car shortly before he was murdered. The bus then passed Methodist Hospital where J. D. Tippit was taken by ambulance and pronounced dead. Also near Methodist Hospital was the location of the Dobb's House Snack Bar. Employees of the Dobb's House stated that Oswald, Jack Ruby and J. D. Tippit had all been customers there at different times. Bill also showed us that Oswald's rooming house is only a little more than a block away from the snack bar.

The tour bus then stopped across the street from Oswald's rooming house at 1026 North Beckley Ave. and everyone got off the bus to get a closer look and some took photographs. Bill explained such details as when Oswald moved in, what room he lived

in and his activities when he returned here after the assassination. Of special interest was the bus stop where the rooming house manager Earlene Roberts last saw Oswald standing after he left the house at about 1:00 P.M. on 11/22/63. As the bus traveled south on North Beckley, Bill pointed out that this is a possible route that Oswald could have taken after he left his rooming house. Bill also showed us the corner of North Beckley and West Neeley Street and mentioned the controversy as to where Oswald actually left Whaley's cab.

The next stop was the former Mack Pate Garage where an employee of the garage saw a red Ford Falcon and later identified the driver as Lee Harvey Oswald. Bill explained the details of this event, and told us that he has developed some new information about this from a very reliable source and mentioned that some of the documents regarding this incident might not be accurate.

The bus then stopped at East Tenth Street and North Patton Ave. and everybody got off the bus. Bill then asked for volunteers to help him. He then gave out brightly colored pieces of paper with the names of the witnesses of the Tippit murder written on them. Bill then instructed these volunteers exactly where to stand to recreate the witness locations of the Tippit murder. I noticed the crowd was amazed by this demonstration of the actual distances that these witnesses were from the murder. I heard some say that they now had a better perspective of an event that they had only read about. Bill did a good job at explaining a very complicated historical event, basically telling what each witness had seen. He explained some of the discrepancies in the direction that the Tippit assailant was reported to have been walking before the murder. Bill explained the escape route of the assailant as we walked the same route south on North Patton Ave. and also showed the locations of Ted Callaway, Sam Guinyard and Warren Reynolds as they observed the escape of the assailant. We then proceeded west on East Jefferson Blvd.

Bill showed us the service station that the assailant ran behind, and gave a description of the parking lot that was formerly at the rear of this station.

Of special interest was the alleyway at the rear of this former parking lot and the former Abundant Life Temple building. Bill explained to us about early reports on the police radio after Tippit

was shot that had the assailant running down this alley and also the police had searched the Temple. From this location we walked east down the alley back to the bus. After we boarded the bus, Bill showed us something very interesting. Many researchers have questioned why the ambulance got to the Tippit murder scene so quickly. Bill had the bus driver pull up to a point on North Patton Street where you can see how close the distance from the Dudley M. Hughes Funeral Home to where the ambulance was dispatched from, to the Tippit murder scene was a distance of about two and a half blocks.

The bus then passed by the library on East Jefferson where the Tippit assailant was thought to have been hiding and then passed through the intersection on Lancaster and Eighth, where Tippit reported his position at 12:54 P.M. We also drove by the apartment building where Kathy Kay, one of Jack Ruby's dancers lived and then proceeded to the apartment building that Jack Ruby lived in at the time he murdered Oswald. This building had recently had a severe fire and was heavily damaged.

As we headed west on West Jefferson Blvd. we passed by the Texas Theater, the location of Oswald's arrest. It is now closed. Our next stop was the Top Ten Record Shop. Everybody got off the bus and went in to see a unique piece of history. This shop is basically the same as it was on 11/22/63. The shop's owner, Mike Polk, is a very friendly and warm man and allowed us complete run of the store while Bill explained how J. D. Tippit ran in here shortly before he was murdered and made a hurried phone call. The same telephone that Tippit used is still mounted on the side of the counter exactly where it was in 1963. We then visited two former residences of Lee Harvey Oswald. First we stopped at 214 West Neeley Street, where the famous "backyard photos" were taken. As we left the bus for a closer look a woman that is a current resident of this house informed us that if anybody wanted to go into the back yard and take photographs that there would be a five-dollar admission charge. We then went around the corner to the apartment at 604 Elsbeth Street where the Oswald's lived before they moved to West Neeley Street.

Bill told us an interesting story about the Oswald's. When the Oswald's moved from Fort Worth to Dallas their friend Gary Taylor had to rent a U Haul to move their belongings to Elsbeth Street.

When they moved from Elsbeth Street to Neeley Street the Oswald's used a baby carriage to move their belongings to the new apartment. It was now time to return to the Dallas Grand Hotel. As Bill was concluding his remarks several researchers had questions to ask. Some gathered in the Hotel lobby to visit and talk about the tour. Bill provided an excellent tour and one that I highly recommend for next year.

Editor's Note: Ken Holmes, Jr. is a Dallas Historian, raised in Oak Cliff, and he has researched the assassination for many years. His research favorites are J. D. Tippit, Bonnie and Clyde, and Dallas in the 30's. He has worked on several documentaries over the past few years: "Gangster Guns, Tales of the Gun on the History Channel, Texas Rangers CBS, Bonnie & Clyde German T.V., PBS, and has provided research and photos for three books.



The Top Ten Record Shop