

**THE TIPPIT MURDER
AND THE EXONERATION OF LEE HARVEY
OSWALD:
A CASE OF WRONGFUL CONVICTION**

An Investigative Essay

This essay argues that Lee Harvey Oswald is proven innocent of the Tippit murder and suggests a different person of interest may account for the available evidence.

GREGORY L. DOUDNA

Copyright © 2026 Gregory L. Doudna

draft edition June 2, 2026

THIS VERSION: edited August 20, 2026

The Scrollery

PO Box 4436

Bellingham, WA 98227

Author's email: gdoudna -- "at" -- msn.com

The Murder of Officer J. D. Tippit

On the afternoon of November 22, 1963, approximately forty-five minutes after President John F. Kennedy was shot in Dealey Plaza, Dallas Police Officer J. D. Tippit was killed on a residential street in the Oak Cliff section of Dallas. Four shots struck him as he stood beside his patrol car on East Tenth Street. He died at the scene. Within the hour, Lee Harvey Oswald—soon identified as the prime suspect in the Kennedy assassination—was arrested in the nearby Texas Theatre after a struggle with police. The Dallas Police and subsequently the Warren Commission concluded that Oswald had killed Tippit while fleeing the presidential assassination.

At first glance the narrative appears straightforward. A police officer stops a pedestrian; the pedestrian shoots the officer and flees; the suspected assassin of the President is arrested nearby and is linked to the killing of the officer by witnesses and ballistic evidence. Oswald's perpetration of the Tippit murder has long been regarded as one of the most firmly established elements of the Kennedy assassination record. Yet as this study brings out, when the evidentiary foundation of this account is examined closely—witness descriptions, forensic documentation, and the circumstances surrounding the investigation itself—that apparent simplicity begins to dissolve.

This study contends there is evidence exonerating Oswald on Tippit, not previously recognized or appreciated, and that the supposedly settled fact was a mistake.

The argument advanced is not that the Warren Commission acted in bad faith in its conclusion on Tippit, or that any conspiracy existed in advance to frame Oswald for the Tippit killing. The argument advanced is simpler yet no less troubling: that in the heat of a manhunt for a live shooter, the police arrested the wrong man, a man who didn't do it. Oswald *looked* to the police at the time like he was the right man, but he was not—the kind of thing that has happened in Innocence Project cases of convicted persons later found to have been innocent. This study will present the evidentiary case that Oswald did not kill Officer Tippit, and that the loaded revolver he was carrying concealed when he was arrested was not the murder weapon and had not been fired that day.

Yet this study does not stop there, but will go on to suggest a different, overlooked suspect: one Curtis LaVerne Craford, then 22 years old, U.S. Army veteran, carnival worker, known at the time under the alternative name and spelling Larry Craford. He was a recently-hired live-in employee at

Jack Ruby's Carousel Club, and his appearance and actions correspond closely with the available physical, forensic, and behavior evidence of Tippit's killer.

The implications, if the argument of this study holds, are profound. Following his arrest, Oswald was charged with the murder of Officer Tippit on Friday night, November 22, and then was killed on Sunday by Jack Ruby in the basement of the Dallas Police station, before any trial could establish or test his guilt. The Warren Commission's finding of Oswald's guilt on Tippit was made in a context in which all institutional incentives called for confirmation of the Dallas Police's initial determination. In the six decades since, the Tippit finding has served as a supporting pillar of the broader Oswald narrative: the argument that because Oswald killed a police officer in flight, his guilt in the Kennedy assassination is correspondingly reinforced. If the Tippit finding was in error—the equivalent, in the language of the Innocence Project, of a wrongful conviction—the JFK assassination will require revisitation, to determine whether the remaining evidence is sufficient to justify the same confidence in the narrative of the JFK assassination, if that one pillar of the broader case was removed.

The case to be developed is built on four interlocking categories of evidence.

The first is physical and forensic evidence that exonerates Oswald from being Tippit's killer: fingerprints lifted from Tippit's patrol car, which can be shown to have been left by the killer at extremely high confidence, were newly disclosed in 1998 not to have been from Oswald. The Dallas Police had reported to the Warren Commission in 1964, and the Commission had accepted and believed on the basis of that report, that the prints from both of two locations lifted from the Tippit patrol car were all none of value for comparison purposes, which was found in 1994 not to have been correct and the truth. Information developed from that 1994 fingerprints examination, in argument to be presented, is the exonerating evidence—proof of innocence—of Oswald on Tippit. And in that light all of the other evidence which has been perceived as incriminating of Oswald must be revisited and reexamined, comparable to Innocence Project cases of persons convicted of serious crimes by unanimous jury verdicts through procedurally correct process—yet are subsequently proven to have been innocent through DNA analysis, wrongfully convicted of a crime they did not do. In this light, in the Tippit case, a revolver of the same make and caliber used to kill Tippit, found abandoned hours later in a paper bag near a downtown Dallas street curb and never publicly tested against the crime scene evidence, becomes of interest as the possible actual murder weapon, instead of Oswald's revolver just like it. Specific witness physical descriptions of the gunman, independent of facial recognition claims shown by many studies to be fraught with human error factors—black-appearing hair, a block-cut rear hairline, and a white- or light-colored shirt worn by the killer opposite in color to the dark brown shirt Oswald was wearing at his arrest—are incompatible with Oswald, but point to a different person of interest.

The second is serious failures in the chain of custody and provenance identifications of cartridge cases matched by the FBI lab to Oswald's revolver which were assumed by the Warren Report to be the same casings found at the crime scene—the forensic backbone of the case against Oswald—

failures so serious that identification of the cartridge cases the FBI lab examined as the ones from the crime scene cannot be considered verified by any standard accepted as reasonable today.

The third is an independent and surprisingly extensive pattern—a half dozen instances—of sincere Dallas witnesses who, in contexts unrelated to the Tippit case, encountered the person of interest, Curtis Craford, in the weeks before the assassination and then, afterward, *mistakenly positively identified the man they had actually seen*—22-year old Craford—as 24-year old Lee Harvey Oswald. These repeated and sustained cases of mistaken identification of this person for Oswald by sincere witnesses is all the more striking in that the two young men’s faces, both relatively nondescript, do not look identical in photos in any particularly striking way—nevertheless witnesses *thought* they were the same person. Simple ordinary witness error are all those cases of mistaken identification were, but they are evidence of a phenomenon that can account for the Tippit lineup identifications, in which five crime scene witnesses picked Oswald on Friday and a sixth on Saturday, under conditions that were far from ideal and without blind lineup procedures.

The fourth is behavioral and circumstantial evidence concerning the alternative suspect, consistent with his having been the Tippit gunman: a self-described background, by his own later account to both a writer and a family member, as a contract killer for hire at that stage of his life; a physical description matching the Tippit killer’s; left-handedness, agreeing with fingerprint evidence indicating the killer was left-handed; a jacket photographed on him six days later closely resembling in color, cut, and material the killer’s abandoned jacket (CE 162); and an unexplained sudden decision to leave Dallas for the opposite end of the country the morning after the killing—a departure whose timing is consistent with his having disposed of the murder weapon at the Ross–Lamar find spot in the preceding hours before leaving Dallas.

Officer J. D. Tippit served the Dallas Police Department for eleven years. He was thirty-nine years old when he was killed, a husband and father of three children. He deserves an accurate accounting of who ended his life, and so does his family. The same is true of the family of Lee Harvey Oswald, who for six decades has carried the public designation of cop-killer without the benefit of a trial. But most importantly, it matters to history to get this one right.¹

¹ The Innocence Project, founded in 1992 by attorneys Barry Scheck and Peter Neufeld at Cardozo School of Law, has to date exonerated more than 375 wrongfully convicted individuals in the United States through post-conviction DNA testing and related forensic review. Its published research on the causes of wrongful conviction — including mistaken eyewitness identification, inadequate forensic standards, and confirmation bias in investigation — provides the methodological framework within which this study’s reassessment of the Tippit evidence is conducted. See www.innocenceproject.org.

A Central Anomaly: The Ross–Lamar Paper-Bag Revolver

“On 11/23/63, Patrolman J. Raz brought into the Homicide and Robbery Bureau, Dallas PD, a brown paper sack which contained a snub-nosed .38 caliber Smith & Wesson, SN 893265. This gun had the word ‘England’ on the cylinder and had been found at approximately 7:30 AM in a brown paper sack, together with an apple and an orange, near the curb at the corner of Ross and Lamar Streets and was turned in by one Willie Flat, white male...”²

– FBI memorandum, Dallas, November 25, 1963

On the morning of Saturday, November 23, 1963—less than twenty-four hours after President Kennedy was assassinated in Dealey Plaza and Dallas Police Officer J. D. Tippit was shot in Oak Cliff—a delivery man named Willie Fladd (misspelled in the FBI memorandum as “Willie Flat”) found a brown paper bag next to a street curb at the corner of Ross Avenue and Lamar Street in downtown Dallas. It was approximately 7:30 am. Inside the bag were an apple, an orange, and a snub-nosed .38 caliber Smith & Wesson revolver, modified to fire .38 Special, serial number 893265. Fladd turned it over to the Dallas Police, who routed it to the Homicide and Robbery Bureau.

The caliber matched that of the weapon which had been used to kill Tippit the previous afternoon. The manner of abandonment—a handgun concealed inside a paper bag left beside a street curb—has the unmistakable character of a weapon being intentionally discarded, not lost or forgotten. Downtown Dallas streets, including the Ross and Lamar intersection, if it was like the practice of most major American cities in the 1960s and as is the practice today in Dallas, would have been swept nightly by city vehicles, followed by city workers on foot during daylight hours removing whatever litter the nightly street sweeping had missed.³ This suggests that paper bag, with the revolver inside, had been placed there within the preceding twenty-four hours, the same time window as the aftermath of the murder of Tippit. No other Dallas-area murder involving such a

² FBI, memorandum, Dallas, November 25, 1963, re: recovery of a snub-nosed .38 caliber Smith & Wesson (SN 893265) at Ross and Lamar Streets, in file 89-43, serial 636.
<https://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=9881#relPageId=187>.

³ Downtown Dallas streets today are “swept five nights a week” according to the Dallas City Hall website, accessed August 2, 2026 (<https://dallascityhall.com/departments/public-works/Pages/Street-Sweeping.aspx>). As for municipal practices in the 1960s, a 1969 Dept. of Interior study, “Water Pollution Aspects of Urban Runoff” (American Public Works Association 20/15 [1969]), at page 64 tells of sending out surveys to 500 municipalities in the US, receiving 149 surveys back filled out, and “70 percent” of the responding cities at that time were sweeping their downtown business areas daily (https://www.google.com/books/edition/Water_Pollution_Aspects_of_Urban_Runoff/jY6Y1JQY9AIC?hl=en).

weapon has ever been identified from contemporary newspaper or police records. No innocent explanation for the Ross–Lamar revolver’s disposal is evident from the record.

On its face, that revolver, given its circumstances, would receive forensic examination as a suspected murder weapon.

What happened instead is one of the most troubling episodes in the history of the Tippit investigation. The Dallas Police received the revolver and consulted with the FBI. Standard forensic procedure would have required that both the Ross–Lamar revolver and the revolver taken from Oswald at his arrest—both Smith & Wesson .38 revolvers modified to fire .38 Special—be tested against the Tippit crime scene evidence.

Yet no documentation of ballistic testing of the Ross–Lamar revolver against the Tippit evidence has been found in any record—no FBI laboratory report; no reference in any Warren Commission document. The revolver itself subsequently disappeared from the record. *Even information of the Ross–Lamar revolver’s existence found on November 23*—its discovery, its receipt by the Dallas Police, its serial-number trace by the FBI—*was never disclosed to the Warren Commission* (which adjudicated the Tippit case to America). The find of the Ross–Lamar revolver on November 23, 1963, hours after the murder of Tippit from the same kind of weapon, remained unknown to JFK assassination scholarship, researchers on the Tippit case, and the public for nearly three decades. Its existence that first weekend of the JFK and Tippit killings came to light in the early 1990s through declassification of FBI field office records and Freedom of Information Act document requests.

The first report of that revolver in the source documents appears in a Dallas FBI field office file dated the Monday following the assassination weekend (DL 89-43), indicating that the discovery initially entered the investigation as a local lead. Five FBI teletype documents show what happened next. FBI headquarters in Washington, D.C. opened a trace investigation under the main Kennedy assassination case file (62-109060). Four FBI field offices were involved in a five-day tracing effort. These documents, listed below in Table 1 and reproduced in full in Appendix A, show that the weapon was treated initially as a significant lead. Within five days, the FBI had traced the weapon to its wartime manufacture and attempted to follow its subsequent distribution through Army records. After November 30, however, all reference to the Ross–Lamar revolver ceases entirely, with no information of what became of the weapon.

Table 1: FBI documents concerning the Smith & Wesson revolver SN 893265 (Ross–Lamar paper-bag revolver)

Doc.	Date	Origin	Document Type	FBI File Serial	Key Content
1	Nov. 25, 1963	FBI Dallas	Memorandum (SA Richard E. Harrison)	DL 89-43-636	Reports discovery of Smith & Wesson revolver SN 893265 in paper bag with fruit at Ross & Lamar.
2	Nov. 28, 1963	FBI HQ	Teletype	62-109060-857	Requests tracing of revolver found in paper bag in assassination vicinity.

Doc.	Date	Origin	Document Type	FBI File Serial	Key Content
3	Nov. 29, 1963	FBI Dallas	Teletype	62-109060-485	Requests Philadelphia and Boston offices to trace ownership of revolver.
4	Nov. 29, 1963	FBI Boston	Teletype	(same file)	Smith & Wesson advises revolver shipped to U.S. government in 1942 for Lend-Lease distribution to England.
5	Nov. 29, 1963	FBI Philadelphia	Teletype	62-109060-638	Further tracing instructions via Letterkenny Ordnance records.
6	Nov. 30, 1963	FBI Springfield	Teletype	62-109060-858	Rock Island Arsenal reports no record of revolver SN 893265.

As can be seen in these documents, the FBI traced serial number 893265 through Smith & Wesson's Springfield, Massachusetts facility, which confirmed the revolver had been shipped on January 13, 1942 to the U.S. government at Hartford Ordnance, Connecticut, under the Lend-Lease agreement with Britain. The word "England" stamped on the cylinder is a British government mark certifying acceptance. After the war, the revolver was sold as surplus, rechambered to fire .38 Special ammunition, and reimported to the United States for commercial sale. The trace inquiry then went to Letterkenny Ordnance in Philadelphia and Rock Island Arsenal in Illinois where the trail ended, indicating the weapon had entered the civilian market in which no ownership records were kept. No owner of that revolver was identified.

Mistaken initial investigation association of the Ross–Lamar revolver with the JFK assassination instead of the Tippit murder

The FBI documents consistently refer to the weapon as having been found "in the vicinity of the assassination area," a formulation pointing to Dealey Plaza, about a half mile southwest of the find spot of Ross and Lamar. Yet the only homicide in Dallas on November 22 involving a revolver and .38 Special bullets was the killing of officer Tippit in Oak Cliff. The record therefore raises an obvious question: why was the tracing effort framed only in relation to the presidential assassination, instead of Tippit, the only known event to which the weapon's description corresponded?

Part of the explanation may lie in the timing. The Ross–Lamar revolver was found less than twenty-four hours after the President's assassination with initial confusion. Investigators were reconstructing timelines; leads were rapidly arriving; numerous tips and objects were being processed. The FBI documents show that the Ross–Lamar revolver triggered a rapid, multi-office trace effort, suggesting it was regarded as potentially significant. Serial numbers of both the Ross–Lamar revolver and Oswald's revolver were included in the same ordnance inquiry noted in the final surviving teletype of November 30. That juxtaposition is striking, but it may be the FBI was simply

systematically checking relevant weapons, not necessarily assuming the two revolvers were suspected in the same event. Investigators may have wanted to determine whether either weapon originated from a government contract or military shipment. In the November 30 teletype, however, the FBI's Springfield office reported that Rock Island Arsenal had no record of either revolver SN V510210 (Oswald's) or SN 893265 (Ross–Lamar).

Technically, the Ross–Lamar revolver was a Smith & Wesson Military & Police Model of 1905, Fourth Change; its serial number 893265 falls just below the threshold at which Smith & Wesson introduced the “V” prefix and renamed the line the Victory Model in April 1942. Oswald's revolver, taken from him at his arrest, serial number V510210, was a Victory Model, approximately two years later in production than the Ross–Lamar revolver. Both were K-frame Smith & Wesson revolvers; both shipped to Hartford Ordnance under Lend-Lease; both were later rechambered for .38 Special; and both were snub-nosed. They share the same manufacturer, basic design, wartime supply chain, and postwar modification.

Two weapons so similar were not both the Tippit murder weapon. One was, the other was not, but which was the true and which was the false positive? It is not obvious from the weapons' forensic characteristics alone since both match perfectly.

FBI firearms examiner Cortlandt Cunningham testified that the rechambering process on the Oswald revolver—boring out the Smith & Wesson .38/200 cylinder to accept the longer .38 Special cartridge—produced an oversized chamber that caused inconsistent pressure on firing, generating irregular rifling impressions that varied from shot to shot and could not be reliably matched. The bullets recovered from Tippit's body displayed a pattern consistent with that description. The firearms panel of the House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA) of 1979 later confirmed the FBI's 1964 finding that none of the four bullets which struck officer Tippit and were taken from his body in the autopsy could be either conclusively matched to or eliminated from any specific Smith & Wesson revolver, whether Oswald's revolver or any other.

However Cunningham also testified that the rifling characteristics of the Tippit body bullets *were* consistent *only* with Smith & Wesson manufacture specifically—or a cheap “Spanish Smith” foreign knockoff—but no other make of handgun.⁴ The Tippit body bullets therefore support the inference that the murder weapon was a rechambered Smith & Wesson specifically—exactly the category to which both the Ross–Lamar revolver and Oswald's revolver belong.

The available FBI documents show efforts to trace the origin of the Ross–Lamar revolver rather than forensic examination of it. No surviving record indicates that the Ross–Lamar weapon was submitted to the FBI laboratory for ballistic testing, as was Oswald's revolver. Given that the Bureau laboratory in Washington routinely conducted such examinations in major investigations, whether

⁴ From the Warren Commission testimony of Cortlandt Cunningham: “Mr. Eisenberg. Now, apart from specially handmade or equivalent weapons, how many other types of weapons have you encountered which have these rifling characteristics? Mr. Cunningham. Other than possibly a Spanish-made copy of the Smith—the Smith is the only one in .38 Special now that will have similar rifling characteristics.”

the Ross–Lamar revolver never *was* examined remains a distinct and unresolved question. The known documentary record establishes only that no report of such testing has been found or survives.

November 30, 1963: the Ross-Lamar revolver disappears from the record

The paper trail on the Ross-Lamar revolver ended, and all trace of its existence disappeared, after November 30, 1963. Why is not known. November 30, 1963 was also the date four cartridge cases were turned in from an unknown submitter to the FBI laboratory at the Justice Department building in Washington, D.C. They were found by the FBI lab to have been fired from Oswald's revolver to the exclusion of any other weapon. The Warren Report—but not the FBI lab or anyone with knowledge of the delivery—stated those were the same four Tippit crime scene cartridge cases which had been signed for from the Dallas Police by FBI agent Vincent Drain in Dallas two days earlier on November 28. The Warren Report cited no document or record supporting a provenance claim of what the FBI lab received two days later. The FBI lab made no claim regarding the origin of what it received and examined. There is an unexplained gap of ca. 36-48 hours between the time FBI agent Drain signed for the Tippit crime scene shell casings in Dallas on November 28, and the shell casings the FBI laboratory received from the unidentified submitter on November 30. During those ca. 36-48 hours, there is no record of possession or custody, of where those cartridge cases were or who had them. Drain was not called to testify. Nor is any FBI interview, or written report or statement or comment from Drain of any kind, known to exist on this matter.

The Ross–Lamar paper-bag revolver as a disposal of a murder weapon

The manner of disposal of the Ross–Lamar revolver bears close attention. The purpose of disposal of a murder weapon is to prevent the perpetrator from being found in possession of or associated with an item that can be forensically linked to the crime. The Ross-Lamar curb placement of the revolver, concealed within a paper bag, is consistent with such an objective.

The FBI memorandum, based on Dallas Police reporting, states that the paper bag was found “near the curb.” This suggests either it had been tossed out the window of a moving car and landed there by accident like any tossed litter (but if so would the paper bag have burst open?), or that it had been left more deliberately and intentionally at the edge of the street. The location is consistent with a quick disposal: a person in a vehicle could toss the paper bag with its contents—which could appear to others in the car to be only fruit—out the window looking indistinguishable from a discarding of litter. Or, a car could pull over momentarily to the side of the curb at that intersection and pause briefly, perhaps while waiting for a traffic light, a car door opened, and either the driver or a passenger could quietly drop or set down a paper bag alongside the car door to the street next to the curb in a moment, without being seen or attracting attention, especially if it was done at night.

The inclusion of ordinary food items—an apple and an orange—in the paper bag would help make the contents appear innocuous if anyone looked inside (the revolver within could have been additionally wrapped in paper or aluminum foil). A toss from a moving car would risk the paper bag splitting open and spilling its contents upon impact with the pavement, which may suggest the car was not moving when the paper bag was placed where it was. If the person doing the disposing had control of the car he might go to a river or a far-away dumpster bin to toss the bag with its contents. But what if the one doing the disposing did not control the car, did not have a car, but was only a passenger and/or did not necessarily wish others in the car to know that a revolver was being disposed of?

Whether the paper bag with the revolver inside ended up where it did at Ross and Lamar from being tossed from a moving car, or was set there next to the curb more intentionally from someone in a car that had slowed or stopped, that paper bag would be expected to be collected during street cleaning, carried away as refuse and taken to the city landfill. The sweeping of downtown streets would be done in combination with no-parking ordinances for certain hours of night so that the mechanical sweeper could get access to the curbs. If there was an illegally parked car the sweeper would go around it and miss that area of the curb. The 1960s-era mechanical sweeper vehicles worked by having spinning rotating gutter brushes push debris inward toward a collection mechanism and conveyor. A paper bag in a street gutter next to a curb would be expected to be swept up in this process.

In this particular case, if the paper bag with its revolver within was placed there in the predawn hours of Saturday November 23 in expectation that a street sweeper would collect it, that expectation failed, because the paper bag was still there at 7:30 am when it was found, and the revolver inside was discovered and turned in to the police. For a weapon disposal, the paper bag with the revolver might be set next to the curb in advance of the expected time of arrival of the night sweeper. But it was not *necessary*, from the murderer's point of view, that the weapon never be found—only that it not be traceable to the person disposing of it. So long as the revolver could not be traced to the person, it was not in itself a major disaster, from a murderer's point of view, that it would be found and turned in to the police Saturday morning.

For someone familiar with downtown Dallas street-cleaning habits and timing—or someone in the downtown area who did not have a car—an untraceable toss or placement of the murder weapon hidden in a bag of fruit near a street curb in the downtown area would be a rational method of disposal. The real risk would be if one was seen doing the disposing, the revolver was recovered and the person was connected to the crime by having been seen disposing of it. But the risk of that happening would be minimal at night at a location where many vehicles naturally stopped, without attracting attention, such as the well-trafficked Ross-Lamar intersection.

The timing of the street sweepers could be known through familiarity by someone who knew downtown Dallas at night—a habitual “they usually/always come by around such-and-such time.” This becomes of interest in light of the identity of the alternative person of interest to be developed.

Recently-hired Curtis Craford lived downtown on the premises of Jack Ruby's Carousel Club, 1312-1/2 Commerce, in the three weeks of November preceding the Tippit killing in 1963. Ross and Lamar was about 0.4 to 0.5 miles northwest of the Carousel Club, distant enough to remove any obvious association with his Carousel Club living location, but still within the downtown perimeter to have the frequent street sweeping.

As it happens, there was an unusual pre-dawn excursion that same Saturday morning of the Ross–Lamar revolver find, on November 23. At about 3:00 am, in the middle of the night, Carousel Club owner Jack Ruby, who lived in Oak Cliff, woke up his apartment-mate, George Senator, and asked him to accompany him to go photograph a billboard. Ruby then phoned Craford at the Carousel Club to arrange for Ruby and Senator to drive there to pick up Craford sometime around 3:30 am. With Senator in the front passenger seat, and Craford in the back seat, Ruby then drove northwest from the Carousel Club toward the freeway entrances. A natural route for Ruby to get from Point A (Carousel Club) to Point B (freeway entrances) would have taken him north on Lamar through the intersection of Ross and Lamar. Ruby's stated purpose for the trip was he said he wanted Craford's assistance to photograph the billboard, and had decided 3:00-4:00 am was a good time to wake up two other persons in the dead of night and get them out of bed to do that. In what has been generally understood as a total coincidence, later that morning Craford suddenly decided to leave Dallas for Michigan. By midday, November 23, Craford was hitchhiking interstate in that direction starting out with only \$7.00 in his pocket, the way he told it to the Warren Commission in his testimony. Craford's explanation was he wanted to check that his sister in Michigan was OK (she was fine, as could have been learned in a phone call).

The story of the nighttime billboard-photography expedition of Ruby and the two others, of the early hours of November 23, is familiar to researchers. It was told by Ruby, Senator, and Craford in their Warren Commission testimonies, by Craford in his earlier FBI interview in Michigan, and is well known. The Warren Commission investigation and most researcher since then have tended to accept Ruby's reason for the nocturnal excursion as being the reason, without consideration that it may have functioned as a decoy or alibi story for some other undisclosed purpose—perhaps a disposal of the Ross–Lamar revolver/Tippit murder weapon before Craford left Dallas hours later.

It is not possible to prove directly that the Ross–Lamar revolver disposal was done from the car driven by Jack Ruby in proximity to that location the night of the disposal. But the sequence just described places a person separately to be developed as a person of interest in the Tippit case in a car driven by Ruby passing through the area in which the Ross–Lamar revolver was dropped, in unusual agreement with a narrow time frame in which that weapon disposal occurred.

Investigative response after the Ross–Lamar revolver was found

Although it may seem obvious in retrospect that the Ross–Lamar revolver should have been examined in connection with the Tippit murder, no ballistic comparison is known to have been

carried out. The Dallas Police Crime Scene Search Section, under Captain George Doughty and Lieutenant Carl Day, had the capability to carry out at least a preliminary comparison. They had access to the Tippit crime scene cartridge cases, the ability to test-fire both revolvers (Oswald's, and the Ross–Lamar), and microscopes. Prior to any formal conveyance to the FBI Dallas office and then to the FBI lab in Washington, D.C., a preliminary, unofficial “yes, no, or maybe” assessment could have been obtained off the record in Dallas, concerning matches of the crime scene shell casings with either or both of the Swiss & Wesson revolvers in their hands. It might even be surprising if such a preliminary, off-the-books assessment was not done (like the old rule that trial lawyers do not like asking questions of witnesses on the record in open court without knowing what the answer will be). If no formal examination of the Ross–Lamar revolver was reported done by the FBI lab in D.C., a conceivable explanation could be because a decision had been made not to develop for the record what had unofficially been learned, by law enforcement personnel who knew without officially knowing, so to speak. Captain Doughty, who may have been over the Dallas Police Crime Scene Search Section (the crime lab), was never called to testify by the Warren Commission. Lt. Day testified, but he was never asked about the Ross–Lamar revolver, which is hardly surprising since the Warren Commission had not been informed of its existence and therefore would not know to ask about it.

When Willie Fladd turned in the Ross–Lamar revolver on Saturday morning to the Dallas Police, it was delivered to the Dallas Police Department's Homicide and Robbery Bureau, the division responsible for investigating major violent crimes. The Ross–Lamar weapon was therefore not processed as a “lost and found” item but was treated immediately as potential evidence in a crime investigation, not as lost property. However, from all surviving documentation, the investigation during that one week in which there is some paper record of that revolver was understood to be that of the presidential assassination, not the Tippit homicide.

On why the Ross–Lamar revolver was treated as part of the presidential assassination investigation rather than the Tippit case during that first week, the simplest explanation may be a combination of geography and assumption. Geography: the find location was approximately three miles from Oak Cliff but only about a half mile northeast from Dealey Plaza. The assumption: by Friday afternoon of November 22 investigators had concluded that Oswald had killed Tippit, because of the circumstances of his arrest in the theater in the midst of a police dragnet for Tippit's killer, seemingly confirmed by witness identifications of the arrested Oswald as Tippit's killer by Friday evening, and overwhelmingly on top of that, because Oswald was believed to have assassinated the president, which seemed confirmed later that night when the assassination rifle found on the sixth floor of Oswald's workplace, the Book Depository, was matched to Oswald as having ordered and received it mail-order.

With Oswald's guilt on Tippit believed assured on Friday, it followed that Oswald's revolver was believed to be the murder weapon, and, it further followed, the Ross–Lamar revolver on Saturday could not be the Tippit murder weapon.

The FBI's characterization of the find location as "in the immediate vicinity of the assassination area" and "in the general area of where the assassination of President Kennedy took place" reinforced this framing. By the time the Ross–Lamar documents surfaced decades later, researchers had long treated the Tippit murder weapon question as settled, and researchers too therefore also even then only speculated associations of the Ross–Lamar revolver with Dealey Plaza, not with Tippit.

Yet in retrospect, even with these contributing factors understood it is still surprising in retrospect that a possible connection of the Ross–Lamar revolver to the Tippit murder—only three miles away in Oak Cliff—would not have been immediately investigated in the Tippit case, to be tested and either confirmed or eliminated on evidentiary grounds. Yet no surviving record indicates that was done, and it is puzzling that that was not reported done.

The documentary record shows a weapon that shared the same make, model lineage, rechambering modification, and Lend-Lease origin as Oswald's revolver; that matched the independently inferred characteristics of the Tippit murder weapon; and that was deliberately discarded under circumstances almost uniquely identifiable as a disposal of a weapon used in a serious crime or killing to the exclusion of any other explanation, was found within hours of the Tippit killing. There is also a known pre-dawn excursion involving driving through the exact area of the weapon's disposal at Ross and Lamar, by figures of possible interest on other grounds to the Tippit murder, in agreement with the timeline of that suspected murder weapon's disposal, with unusual coherence. Yet no surviving record indicates that any early investigators examined or considered the possibility of a connection of that weapon to the Tippit murder. The window of opportunity to test and resolve that question forensically was closed through inaction.

One further point deserves note. If a preliminary comparison—unofficial and not yet on the record—indicated that the Ross–Lamar revolver matched the Tippit crime scene evidence, the institutional stakes in reporting such a finding would have been major. By November 30, federal authorities who had now taken over the case and its evidence were publicly committed to the conclusion that Oswald alone was responsible for both the assassination and the killing of Tippit. A forensic finding pointing to a different weapon—and by implication a different killer—on Tippit would have required a complete reset of the Tippit case starting from scratch, with unpredictable consequences for the Kennedy assassination narrative.

The absence of known forensic examination of the Ross–Lamar revolver, whatever its cause, occurred in a context in which a contrary finding would have been institutionally unwelcome, and this occurred alongside other unexplained gaps in how both the Ross–Lamar revolver and the crime scene shell casings were handled. Bureaucratic error, lost records, or investigative decisions to close off leads not going in desired directions are possible but unproven explanations of the gaps and omissions. What the record does establish is: a potentially significant piece of physical evidence entered the investigation under the wrong case file, was never forensically tested against the Tippit

evidence so far as any surviving record shows, and then disappeared from the documentary trail entirely.

After the 1990s when the Ross–Lamar revolver’s existence became known

The lack of attention the Ross–Lamar revolver received with respect to the Tippit case *after* its existence came to light in the 1990s is also remarkable. Discussions from researchers, including ones critical of the Warren Report, continued the same early mistaken association of it with Dealey Plaza—where there is no known association—with virtually no consideration given to its potential interest with reference to the Tippit case, which involved a killing by a weapon of exactly that make and caliber.

For example, Dale Myers’s *With Malice: Lee Harvey Oswald and the Murder of Officer J.D. Tippit*—the comprehensive and authoritative study of the Tippit case—702 pages in the first edition of 1998, then 863 pages in the revised second edition of 2013—contains not a single syllable about the Ross–Lamar revolver in all those pages in either edition—no mention of what may have been the actual murder weapon in the Tippit killing, despite that revolver’s existence having become known in the early 1990s.⁵

That is how invisible this elephant in the room of the Tippit case has been.

The modern silence continues and compounds the original omission.

The Rosetta Stone of the Tippit case

The revolver found in a paper bag near a street curb at Ross and Lamar on the morning of November 23, 1963 stands as the single most arresting anomaly in the Tippit case. Its caliber, timing, location, manner of abandonment, and subsequent disappearance form a constellation of facts not easily accommodated within the conventional account.

The hypothesis of the different named person of interest for the Tippit killing to be developed, by contrast, offers a framework that can account for these elements in a natural way: a contract killer working for Jack Ruby discards his weapon in the hours after carrying out a job before leaving Dallas later that morning, in a manner designed to ensure its removal through routine street cleaning, but by accident the revolver was not collected in street cleaning, and instead was recovered by chance.

The FBI had the means, in November and December of 1963, to routinely test the Ross–Lamar revolver against the Tippit evidence forensically and to have resolved its status at that time. That that either was not done or was not disclosed done is a fact that any serious assessment of the Tippit evidence must consider at the outset.

⁵ Dale Myers, *With Malice: Lee Harvey Oswald and the Murder of Officer J. D. Tippit* (Milford, Michigan: Oak Cliff Press, 1998; second edition 2013).

It has been said that the Tippit case is the Rosetta Stone of the Kennedy assassination. The Ross–Lamar revolver may be the Rosetta Stone of the Tippit case.

It may have been the murder weapon.

With the exoneration of Oswald on Tippit to be developed, it may come to be recognized. It was the murder weapon.

[to be continued]

Appendix A

Documents Concerning the Revolver Found in a Paper Bag Near a Street Curb at Ross and Lamar, Dallas, November 23, 1963

For reference purposes, here are the known FBI documents telling of the .38 Special Smith & Wesson revolver found in a paper bag with fruit next to a street curb at Ross and Lamar in downtown Dallas early the morning of November 23, 1963, which from its timing could be the murder weapon used in the murder of Officer J.D. Tippit of the previous afternoon. The find of this weapon and information of its existence was concealed from the Warren Commission in its investigation which concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald was incriminated in the murder of Tippit. No Dallas Police paperwork is known to survive concerning this weapon even though it was originally turned in to the Dallas Police who conveyed it to the FBI. The whereabouts of this revolver is unknown today and presumed permanently unrecoverable. These documents were obtained from <https://jfkconspiracyforum.freeforums.net/thread/983/gun-bag>, dated July 24, 2020, accessed February 15, 2026. Following the documents is summary information on how they came to light.

THE DOCUMENTS

Document 1 (Nov 25, 1963)

MEMORANDUM

TO SAC, DALLAS (89-43) DATE: 11/25/63

FROM SA RICHARD E. HARRISON

SUBJECT: ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT KENNEDY

On 11/23/63, Patrolman J. RAZ brought into the Homicide and Robbery Bureau, Dallas PD, a brown paper sack which contained a snub-nosed .38 caliber Smith & Wesson, SN 893265.

This gun had the word "England" on the cylinder and had been found at approximately 7:30 AM in a brown paper sack, together with an apple and an orange, near the curb at the corner of Ross and Lamar Streets and was turned in by one Willie Flat, white male, 9221 Metz Drive, employed at 4770 Memphis, to the Dallas PD.

2 - Dallas

REH:cah

(2) FBI DL 89-43-636

Document 2 (Nov 28, 1963)

ORDNANCE, IN EFFORT TO FURTHER TRACE WEAPON WHICH, ACCORDING TO RETEL, WAS FOUND IN A PAPER BAG IN THE IMMEDIATE VICINITY OF ASSASSINATION AREA.
END AND ACK PLS

WA K"1" M 0 6-16 PMKOK FBI WA ELR
DL 5-17 PM OK FBI DL DRL
PH 6-17 PM OF FBI PH JTA
TU CLR
END ACK WA 11-28 PM OK FBI WA ELR DL 10-26 PM CST OK FBI DL VRG
SI 10-27 PM CST OK FBI SI WJA BS 10-28 PM OK FBI BS RCS

FBI HQ 62-109060-857

Document 3 (Nov 29, 1963)

URGENT 11-29-63 6-10 PM RCS TO DIRECTOR AND SACS, DALLAS AND PHILADELPHIA FROM SAC, BOSTON /89-43/ 2-P
ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY, NOVEMBER TWENTY-SECOND, SIXTYTHREE, DALLAS, TEXAS.
RE DALLAS TEL INSTANT DATE.

ON NOV. TWENTYNINE SIXTYTHREE FRED MILLER, SALES MANAGER OF SMITH AND WESSON INC., ADVISED SA THOMAS F. SULLIVAN THAT RECORDS SMITH AND WESSON, INC., SPRINGFIELD, MASS., DISCLOSE THIRTY-EIGHT CALIBER REVOLVER, SN EIGHT NINE THREE TWO SIX FIVE, WAS SHIPPED ON JANUARY THIRTEEN, FORTYTWO, TO U.S. GOVERNMENT, HARTFORD ORDNANCE, HARTFORD, CONN. HARTFORD ORDNANCE AT THAT TIME WAS DIVISION OF SPRINGFIELD ARMORY, SPRINGFIELD, MASS., AND ALL FIREARMS RECORDS AT THAT AGENCY WERE FORWARDED DURING NINETEEN FIFTY TO MISMS RECORDS CENTER, LETTERKENNY ORDNANCE, PHILADELPHIA, PA.

MILLER ADVISED HE BELIEVED SHIPMENTS TO HARTFORD ORDNANCE AT THAT TIME WERE DESTINED FOR ENGLAND UNDER LEND-LEASE AGREEMENT AND STAMPING ON CYLINDER IS PROBABLY A PROOF-MARK OF THAT GOVERNMENT CERTIFYING ITS ACCEPTANCE. SUCH WEAPONS ARE KNOWN TO HAVE BEEN SOLD SURPLUS IN

[PAGE TWO]

ENGLAND, ALTERED AND RECHAMBERED IN THAT COUNTRY TO ACCOMMODATE THIRTY-EIGHT SPECIAL AMMUNITION. SUCH WEAPONS WERE SUBSEQUENTLY IMPORTED FOR SALE BY U.S. GUN DEALERS.

Document 4 (Nov 29, 1963)

PHILADELPHIA CONTACT MISMA RECORDS CENTER, LETTERKENNY

URGENT 11-29-63 8-58 AM CST EEA TO DIRECTOR AND SAC, BOSTON
FROM SAC, DALLAS /89-43/ 1-P
ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT KENNEDY, NOVEMBER TWENTYTWO, LAST, DALLAS, TEXAS

FOR THE INFORMATION OF BOSTON OFFICE ON THE MORNING OF NOVEMBER TWENTYTHREE, LAST, A SNUB NOSE THIRTY EIGHT CALIBER SMITH AND WESSON, SERIAL NUMBER EIGHT NINE THREE TWO SIX FIVE, WITH THE WORD QUOTE ENGLAND UNQUOTE ON THE CYLINDER WAS FOUND AT APPROXIAMTELY SEVEN THIRTY AM., IN A BROWN PAPER SACK IN THE GENERAL AREA OF WHERE THE ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT KENNEDY TOOK PLACE.

BOSTON IS REQUESTED TO CONTACT SMITH AND WESSON AT SPRINGFIELD, MASS., AND TRACE OWNERSHIP OF THIS WEAPON.

END ACK IN ORD 10-02 AM OK FBI WA LA BS OK FBI BS 10-01 AM NCP TU CLEAR

FBI HQ 62-109060-485

Document 5 (Nov 29, 1963)

URGENT 11-29-63 11-21 PM EST JTA TO DIRECTOR AND SACS, DALLAS, SPRINGFIELD AND BOSTON
FROM SAC, PHILADELPHIA /157-916/ 1 P
ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY, ELEVEN TWENTYTWO SIXTYTHREE, DALLAS, TEXAS.

RE BOSTON TELETYPES INSTANT, TWELVE THIRTY-TWO PM AND SIX TEN PM AND PH TELETYPE TO BUREAU, DALLAS AND SPRINGFIELD INSTANT FIVE FORTYEIGHT PM.

BOSTON ADVISES RECORDS OF SMITH AND WESSON INC., SPRINGFIELD, MASS. SHOW THIRTY-EIGHT CALIBER REVOLVER, SN EIGHT NINE THREE TWO SIX FIVE WAS SHIPPED JANUARY THIRTEEN, NINETEEN FORTY-TWO TO US GOVERNMENT, HARTFORD ORDNANCE, HARTFORD, CONN. AND RECORDS WERE SHIPPED TO LETTERKENNY ORDNANCE, PHILADELPHIA, PA., IN NINETEEN FIFTY.

RE PH TELETYPE SHOWS THESE RECORDS SENT COMMANDING GENERAL, US ARMY WEAPONS COMMAND, ROCK ISLAND, ILL, FOR INFO SPRINGFIELD INSTANT WEAPON FOUND IN PAPER BAG IN IMMEDIATE VICINITY OF ASSASSINATION AREA.

SPRINGFIELD CONTACT ROCK ISLAND ARSENAL RE FURTHER TRACING OF WEAPON.
END ACK WA 11-28 PM OK FBI WA ELR DL 10-26 PM CST OK FBI DL VRG SI 10-27 PM CST OK FBI SI
WJA BS 10-28 PM OK FBI BS RCS

FBI HQ 62-109060-638

Document 6 (Nov 30, 1963)

URGENT 11-30-63 3-27 PM CST DM TO DIRECTOR, /62-109060/42-24016 AND SAC, DALLAS FROM SAC, SPRINGFIELD /89-23/

ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY AFO. NSPI JACK L. RUBY, AKA., JACK RUBENSTEIN, JACK LEON RUBY. LEE HARVEY OSWALD DASH VICTEM, DECEASED. CR. RE PHILADELPHIA TEL NOVEMBER TWENTYNINE LAST.

ON NOVEMBER 30 INSTANT, GEORGE L. MAYERNICK, DEPUTY SHERIFF, AMSWE DASH SMD DASH I, ROCK ISLAND ARSENAL, ROCK ISLAND, ILLINOIS, ADVISED SA ELYON H. DAVIS THERE IS NO RECORD IN THE FILES OF AMSWE DASH SMD DASH I OF SMITH AND WESSON THIRTYEIGHT CALIBER REVOLVER, SN V FIVE ONE TWO ONE ZERO. MAYERNICK ALSO ADVISED THERE IS NO RECORD OF SMITH AND WESSON THIRTYEIGHT CALIBER REVOLVER, SN EIGHT NINE THREE TWO SIX FIVE IN FILES OF AMSWE DASH SMD DASH I.

NO FD THREE ZERO TWO BEING SUBMITTED, UAC. COPIES MAILED BOSTON AND PHILADELPHIA. P.

END AND ACK BOTH STS PLS WA 4-30 PM OK FBI WA RDR DL EAEP PM OK
FBI DL WD 3-30 P VVM CC-MR ROSEN

FBI HQ 62-109060-858

HOW THE PAPER-BAG REVOLVER DOCUMENTS CAME TO LIGHT

Below are excerpts from an article by researcher Bill Adams telling how knowledge of the paper-bag revolver came to light and his and others' contributions to bringing that about.

Bill Adams, "Second Gun or Second Guessing? The Story of the Revolver in the Paper Bag," *The Fourth Decade*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (May 1996): 8-15
(<https://maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=48693#relPageId=8>).

"The FBI unleashed a controversy in 1978 when they released 100,000 pages of documents concerning its investigation into the assassination of President Kennedy. Within those 100,000 pages was a very intriguing FBI document. That same year the Assassination Information Bureau (AIB) reviewed the FBI document release and reported the discovery of various documents in the AIB's newsletter, 'Clandestine America.' One issue of the newsletter mentioned that a .38 caliber revolver was discovered 'in a paper bag in the immediate vicinity of the assassination site.'

"In the Fall of 1991 I was reading through Paul Hoch's collection of 'Clandestine America' when I came across the AIB article on the revolver [1]. (...) Over the next few months I contacted many assassination researchers and was disappointed to learn that none of them had ever heard of the revolver. Late in 1991 I finally located a copy of a document concerning the revolver. Researcher John Woods II had a copy of the document in a collection of documents he had obtained regarding the HSCA investigation into the assassination. The document contained the following information:

' ... For the information of the Boston office on the morning of November Twentythree, last, a snub nose thirty eight caliber Smith and Wesson, serial number eight nine three two six five, with the word quote England unquote on the cylinder

was found at approximately seven thirty AM, in a brown paper sack in the general area of where the assassination of President Kennedy took place.’ [2]

“(...) As a result of the Assassination Records Collection Act (ARCA) of 1992 the FBI files reviewed by the HSCA were released to the National Archives. One of these FBI files turned out to be a two page document concerning the FBI’s attempts to trace the revolver. [4] (...) I obtained this document from another researcher and now possessed four different revolver documents. (...)

“Early in 1995 Paul Hoch sent me a copy of another AIB discovered document concerning the revolver. He discovered this document while looking for other material I had requested, unrelated to the revolver investigation. This document was also apparently included in the 1978 FBI document release. This document was a new fifth document that I had never seen before and my FOIA requests had not uncovered. The document provides the missing piece to the revolver puzzle. The document not only reveals where the revolver was found but who found it. (...)

‘On 11/23/63, Patrolman J. Raz brought into the Homicide and Robbery Bureau, Dallas PD, a brown paper sack which contained a snub-nosed .38 caliber Smith & Wesson, SN 893265 . . . had been found . . . near the curb at the corner of Ross and Lamar Streets and was turned in by one Willie Flat . . .’ [8]

Notes from the article:

[1] Assassination Information Bureau, *Clandestine America* Volume 2, Number 1, 1978. [2] FBI Dallas Field Office to FBI HQ [62-109060-485] and Boston Field Office, November 29, 1963. [4] FBI Boston Field Office to FBI HQ [62-109060-857], Dallas Field Office, Philadelphia Field Office, November 29, 1963. [8] FBI Dallas Field Office SA [89-43-636] to FBI Dallas Field Office SAC, November 25, 1963.

A MENTION OF THE PAPER-BAG REVOLVER IN A WIDELY-READ ARTICLE IN 1994

From Anthony Summers and Robbyn Swan, “The Ghosts of November,” *Vanity Fair*, December 1994:

“Just when you think the story holds no more factual surprises, it tends to produce one. We now have an F.B.I. report revealing that, at 7:30 on the morning after the assassination, ‘A snub nose thirty eight caliber Smith and Wesson, serial number eight nine three two six five, with the word quote England unquote on the cylinder was found . . . in a brown paper sack in the general area of where the assassination took place.’ In spite of repeated Freedom of Information requests by California researcher Bill Adams, the F.B.I. has not revealed how its investigation of the gun was concluded.”