



Ike Pappas was doing a live radio broadcast for CBS's New York station (WNEW), in the basement of the Dallas Municipal Building, when Lee Harvey Oswald appeared with local officers.

It was the 24th of November, 1963 (the day before President Kennedy's funeral).

Oswald, accused of killing Officer J.D. Tippit and President Kennedy, was being transferred from one jail to another. Pappas—who'd run down four flights of stairs to be in place when Oswald arrived—had a good vantage point as the police arrived with the suspect.

Known as "the man in the white raincoat," Pappas asked Oswald a question:

Do you have anything to say in your defense?

Simultaneously with that question, Jack Ruby—a man known to local officials—moved past Ike, gun in hand. During live radio and television broadcasts, Ruby aimed his gun and fired a single shot into Oswald's stomach. As Oswald crumpled, mortally wounded, radio listeners could hear the sound of a gunshot.

Pappas—with a microphone in his right hand and a tape recorder in his left—continued to broadcast:

There's a shot! Oswald has been shot! Oswald has been shot!

Shocked, in the same way as Herb Morrison had been shocked during his live broadcast of the Hindenberg's stunning explosion, Pappas continued:

A shot rang out. Mass confusion here, all the doors have been locked. Holy mackerel!

Taking a couple of seconds to keep composed, Ike then observed the whole event was:

One of the wildest scenes I've ever seen. Let me see if I can reconstruct it. ... There is a gunshot wound in his lower abdomen. Oswald is white, lying in the ambulance. ... His hand is dangling over the edge of the stretcher. ... Jack Ruby has shot Oswald. Holy mackerel!

Later, Ike was a witness at Ruby's trial. He also gave deposition testimony for the Warren Commission (where he was questioned, in Washington, D.C., by Burt W. Griffin, assistant counsel of the President's Commission, on July 29, 1964). We pick-up the testimony as Ike describes Oswald's arrival on the scene:

Mr. GRIFFIN. And what did you see happen as Oswald came out?

Mr. PAPPAS. Oswald came out. There were two detectives on either side of him. Captain Fritz was leading the way. There were other detectives behind him. Detectives behind, both walls from the exit to the jail, the basement walls. Oswald came right past me, and I did as many of us did throughout those 2 days, I shouted a question at him. And then I noticed a black blur, and I noticed a bang—I heard a bang, rather, I recall a flash, and then pandemonium.

Mr. GRIFFIN. Did you hear Jack Ruby say anything as he moved toward Oswald?

Mr. PAPPAS. No.

Mr. GRIFFIN. Did you think if he had said something, that you would have heard it?

Mr. PAPPAS. It depends on how loudly he said it. If he whispered it, certainly I could not hear it.

Mr. GRIFFIN. But if he had spoken in a normal voice?

Mr. PAPPAS. If he had spoken in a normal voice that would be difficult for me to tell. I could not say if he spoke in a normal voice. If he shouted something at I would say that I could have heard it.

Mr. GRIFFIN. Well, were you able to hear Oswald's groan or response as he was hit?

Mr. PAPPAS. Yes.

Mr. GRIFFIN. How did the volume of that response compare to somebody speaking in a normal voice? Was it an extremely loud sound that he made, or don't you have any recollection?

Mr. PAPPAS. Well, an extremely loud sound--it is hard for me to estimate what is loud and what is not. It is very vague.

Mr. GRIFFIN. Well, describe it in your own words.

Mr. PAPPAS. It was like an expulsion of air, a gasp. It was audible from where I was. I heard him. If I said it was loud, I don't know whether it would mean anything to you.

Mr. GRIFFIN. You can make a statement like that and then maybe you can---

Mr. PAPPAS. It didn't throw my head back or anything like that. I have been blasted by loud sounds. But this was an audible sound.

Mr. GRIFFIN. Were other people speaking and shouting at the time?

Mr. PAPPAS. At the time of what?

Mr. GRIFFIN. At the time this gasp came out?

Mr. PAPPAS. No. There were people--I imagine there was a slight din. But I noticed distinctly that the shot went off, and there was a cold moment of silence, and then the gasp. It was a very quick split-second thing. But there were these two moans that I heard.

Mr. GRIFFIN. Of course, I have not listened to the tape yet, and that might answer many of the questions.

Mr. PAPPAS. I think that would help a lot.

Mr. GRIFFIN. But in order---of course, the tape is a result of a microphone, which may or may not pick up everything that the human ear picks up. Maybe we can work into this by my asking you, was this a directional mike or to what extent did the microphone itself that you were using limit the ability of the recording apparatus to pick up the kinds of sounds that the human ear would have heard?

Mr. PAPPAS. It didn't limit it at all--from my knowledge of the instrument. It is nondirectional microphone. Its field travels in a slightly elliptical fashion. But it encompasses a greater area.

Then Griffin asks Pappas to identify a series of pictures, starting with the one which appears at the top of this page (which became deposition exhibit 1):

Mr. GRIFFIN. I have here a number of pictures which I think you provided to the FBI.

Mr. PAPPAS. Yes.

Mr. GRIFFIN. What I would like to do is to have you look at them. But I want to mark them first. And I would like to get some idea of what distances are really involved in these pictures. I am going to mark a single large photograph which shows a picture of Jack Ruby approaching Lee Oswald, and Oswald in this picture is not looking at Ruby--I am going to mark this Icarus M. Pappas Deposition, July 29, 1964, Exhibit No. 1. (The document referred to was marked Icarus M. Pappas Deposition Exhibit No. 1 for identification.)

Mr. GRIFFIN. I want to ask you to look at it with me. Now, you are in this photograph, and I take it you are the person who someone has circled in ink.

Mr. PAPPAS. Yes.

Mr. GRIFFIN. About how far are you actually standing from Jack Ruby as you recall in that picture?

Mr. PAPPAS. From Ruby, I don't know, because he was just a blur over to my left I was approximately 5 feet--5 or 6 feet from Oswald.

Mr. GRIFFIN. I see. I am going to mark the next picture in the same manner--Icarus M. Pappas Deposition, July 29, 1964, Exhibit No. 2. (The document referred to was marked Icarus M. Pappas Deposition Exhibit No. 2 for identification.)

Mr. GRIFFIN. This is a series of six photographs on one photographic sheet. It is a sequence of shots showing Lee Oswald approaching, and in each of the first four pictures, starting at the top, you appear, and your head is circled. In the first picture in the middle row, you can see you holding out a microphone. Do you have any recollection, or are you able to give us any identification at that point where the microphone is being held out in this first picture in the second row how far that microphone really was from Lee Oswald?

Mr. PAPPAS. Well, it was at this point that I was asking my question, and it was--maybe 4 feet, or 5 feet.

Mr. GRIFFIN. Now, the next picture, and that is the second picture in the second row, shows a figure which is Jack Ruby approaching toward Oswald, and the microphone appears to be between Ruby and Oswald.

Mr. PAPPAS. Yes.

Mr. GRIFFIN. Do you have any idea in that picture how far the microphone would be from Jack Ruby's face?

Mr. PAPPAS. From Jack Ruby's face?

Mr. GRIFFIN. Yes.

Mr. PAPPAS. No; I do not. I did not see Jack Ruby at that point. I could not estimate it, because I don't know.

Mr. GRIFFIN. Well, how far was the path that Jack Ruby traveled as he would have got directly in front of you--how far would he have been from you at that point? Do you have some recollection of his path?

Mr. PAPPAS. It was just a quick streak. I don't want to mislead you.

Mr. GRIFFIN. I don't want you to. I don't want to lead you into saying something which you cannot be accurate about.

Mr. PAPPAS. No. I was concentrating on Oswald. He was the person that we had to speak to. And--you notice I am watching Oswald throughout. Here is Ruby, apparently going right for him. And I suppose when he got up around forward of me, I saw this flash. And I really cannot judge.

Mr. GRIFFIN. Do you have any recollection of having to pull the microphone back as this flash went past you?

Mr. PAPPAS. No. I realized at a certain point that Oswald was not going to answer my question, and I still held it out. It was still out here. And--it was still projected forward at that point, still hoping that he might turn around and say something.

Mr. GRIFFIN. Again let me ask you--what is your best estimate of how far Oswald was from you, as you look at the second picture in the second row?

Mr. PAPPAS. The best estimate is 6 feet. (Excerpted testimony from Ike Pappas' deposition transcript, Warren Commission evidentiary record, pages 369-371.)

It is clear, from Pappas' tape recording, that there was a single gunshot. The shot was fatal. Soon after, Oswald was dead.

Credits:

Photo by Ira Jefferson "Jack" Beers, Jr., a photographer for "The Dallas Morning News." Marked as Exhibit 1 during the deposition testimony of Icarus ("Ike") Pappas, given to counsel for the Warren Commission (investigating the murder of President John F. Kennedy). Included in the Warren Report, Volume XXI, page 19. Public Domain.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Jack-Ruby-Just-Before-Shooting-Lee-Harvey-Oswald>

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