



## **Zapruder Film of the Kennedy Assassination (1963)**

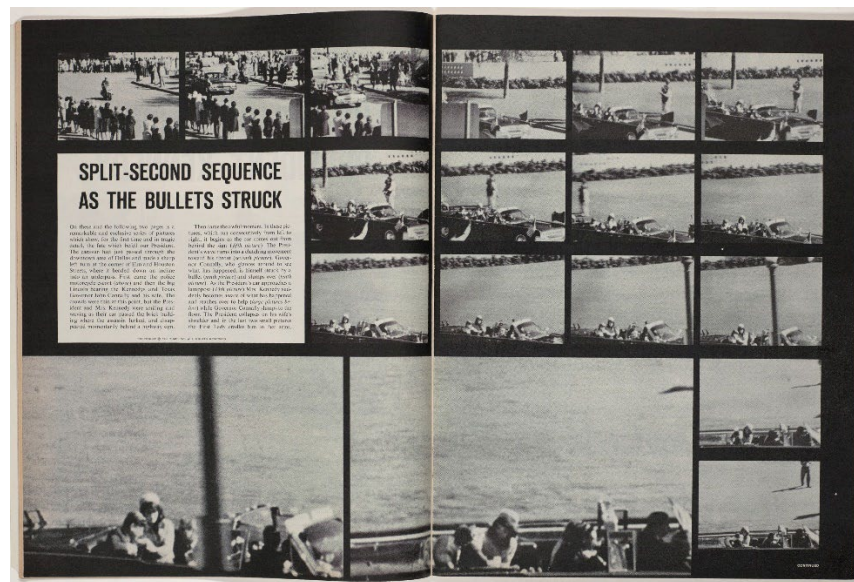
**By Daniel Eagan**

Abraham Zapruder was born in Kovel, Russia in 1905. He received four years' education in Hebrew school before emigrating in 1920 to the United States, where he found work in New York City as a fabric pattern maker. After marrying Lillian Shapovnick in 1933, Zapruder moved to Texas in 1941 to work for Nardis of Dallas, a clothing company. With his partner Irwin Schwartz, Zapruder formed his own dress labels, Chalet and Jennifer Juniors. Schwartz and Zapruder worked out of the Dal-Tex Building, across the street from the Texas School Book Depository and near Dealey Plaza.

On November 22, 1963, Zapruder and his secretary, Marilyn Sitzman, went to Elm Street to watch President John F. Kennedy's motorcade pass. Supported by Sitzman, Zapruder climbed a concrete parapet, next to a staircase for a better view. Using an 8mm Bell & Zoomatic camera and a Kodak Kodachrome II film, Zapruder photographed the motorcade from the moment it turned onto Elm from Houston Street until it went under a railroad bridge. President Kennedy was mortally wounded by a rifle shot as his limousine was almost immediately in front of Zapruder.

Returning to his office, Zapruder encountered “Dallas Morning News” reporter Harry McCormick, who contacted Secret Service agent Forrest Sorrels. The three brought the film to television station WFAA, where Zapruder appeared on-air to describe what he saw around 3:00 p.m. At the same time, the film and three copies were processed at a local Eastman Kodak plant. Sorrels sent two copies to Washington, D.C.

On November 23, Zapruder sold his film and copy to “Life” magazine, with the provision that frame 313, showing the fatal impact wound, would not be published. Individual frames from the film were published in black-and-white in the November 29 issue of “Life,” and in color in subsequent issues. By this point a number of frames has been damaged and deleted. “Life” ordered 16mm and 35mm copies made in 1967 and 1968. A copy was used in the 1969 trial of Clay Shaw, and was shown ten times by prosecutor Jim Garrison. Zapruder died on August 30, 1970, of cancer.



*November 29, 1963 issue of "Life" magazine featuring scenes from the Zapruder film and the Kennedy assassination.*

In March 1975, ABC’s “Good Night America,” hosted by Geraldo Rivera, broadcast an apparently bootleg copy. It was the first time the film was seen on television. When the Zapruder family initiated a lawsuit over royalties, Time, Inc., the owner of “Life” sold the footage back to them a month a later.

In 1978, the Zapruder family asked the National Archives to store the footage. For the next seventeen years, the archives kept the film in a security cabinet inside a refrigerated vault. Director Oliver Stone paid \$85,000 to use the footage in “JFK” (1991). A year later, President George H.W. Bush signed a law that designated the footage an “assassination record” under the control of the government. In 1999, the federal government purchased the film from the Zapruder estate for \$16 million. In December of that year, the estate donated the copyright to the Sixth Floor Museum at the Texas School Book Depository. The museum currently controls all rights to the footage.

In 1997, LMH, a company formed by the Zapruders to manage the footage, authorized a digital preservation. After warming up the film to 50 degrees for twenty-four hours, Joseph Barabe of McCrone Associates photographed each individual frame onto Kodak 6121 4x5 transparency film. Barabe included the entire film strip, capturing more visual information around the sprocket holes than had previously been seen by the public. The 4x5 transparencies were scanned into a computer at 1500 dpi. With the original information preserved, further enhancements could be made to the computer record. Scratches were removed, for example. Motion stabilization placed each frame on the same horizontal plane, making the film easier to follow visually.

The Zapruder film is not the only record of the assassination – some thirty-two photographers and filmmakers who covered Dealey Plaza on that day of the motorcade have been identified. Orville Nix, an air-conditioning engineer, filmed the motorcade from a reverse angle from Zapruder, for example. Footage shot by George Jeffries of Kennedy in his limousine moments before the assassination surfaced in 2007.

However, the Zapruder footage remains the most authoritative visual record of the assassination. It is a difficult film to watch, not just for its brutal violence, but for the effect the killing had on Kennedy’s family and on society as a whole. Zapruder never got over what he saw. To his credit and that of his heirs, he never stopped trying to protect the footage from commercial exploitation.

The “Zapruder Film” was added to the Library of Congress National Film Registry in 1994.

Daniel Eagan has worked for Warner Bros., MGM, and other studios as a researcher and story analyst. He edited HBO's Guide to Movies on Videocassette and Cable TV (Harper Collins) and MGM: When the Lion Roars (Turner Publishing), to which he also contributed articles. His work has appeared in Smithsonian, The Nation, The Hollywood Reporter, and other outlets

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