

Living the mission



The WordchipperSM

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November 22nd marks the 47th anniversary since President John F. Kennedy was assassinated while riding in a motorcade through Dealey Plaza in downtown Dallas, Texas. I didn't realize until recently that in the chaos that erupted after those three shots rang out beneath the seven-floor Texas School Book Depository building, there was a connection to North Dakota and to Concordia College, Moorhead.

The Secret Service agent shown in Abraham Zapruder's famous film jumping onto the rear of the Presidential limo as Mrs. Kennedy reached back for—we learned later—a piece of the President's skull, was a Washburn, North Dakota, native: Clinton J. Hill. Born in 1932, Hill, now 78, was a football star and 1954 Concordia grad who married his Cobber sweetheart, Gwen Brown, Concordia '53. They're still married. Hill joined the U. S. Army in 1954 and served in the Korean conflict.

According to the Warren Commission Report, Hill, who entered the Secret Service in 1958, was the only agent who attempted to protect the President and his wife Jacqueline after hearing the first shots fired from the sixth floor of the book depository. Agent Rufus Youngblood did the same for Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson in the car in which he was riding.

In a 1975 interview with CBS-TV's Mike Wallace on *60 Minutes*, Hill said that, had he acted about "five-tenths of a second faster, or maybe a second faster," he wouldn't be here today. Wallace: "You mean you would have gotten there and you would have taken the shot?" Hill: "The third shot, yes, sir." Wallace: "And that would have been all right with you?" Hill replied, "That would have been fine with me."

Wallace then asked Hill, "Surely you don't have a sense of guilt about that?" Hill responded, "Yes, I certainly do. I have a great deal of guilt about that. Had I turned in a different direction, I'd have made it. It's my fault." But that's not how the Warren Commission or anyone else saw it; Agent Hill was commended for his "extraordinary courage and heroic effort in the face of maximum danger."

The reason I've become re-interested in the Kennedy assassination is because of a new book entitled *The Kennedy Detail: JFK's Secret Service Agents Break Their Silence*, by Gerald Blaine (an agent himself) with Lisa McCubbin, published this year by Gallery Books. I found it on the "new nonfiction" shelf at the Dr. James Carlson southside branch of the Fargo Public Library. When I picked it up, I thought: Do we really need yet another book on JFK's murder? It's been well covered over almost five decades.

But this is an excellent and needed contribution to the record of a historic event. You'll learn many facts that have never been told before. I believe the narrative is authentic because it's told from the perspective of the agents who were directly involved in protecting a President who presented great and special challenges to his body guards.

The portions of the book dealing with Clint Hill's experiences before, during and after the assassination are particularly interesting. I learned just how difficult the life of a Secret Service agent is, both professionally and for his family.

You can learn more about what Clint Hill went through after the assassination by viewing Clint Eastwood's popular movie, *In the Line of Fire*. The picture is built around a fictionalized story line and a Secret Service agent-character who suffers a lifetime of anguish because he didn't save Kennedy's life in Dallas. The portrayal resembles Hill's role in Dallas, and afterwards.

Realizing now that Mr. Hill was a Concordia graduate, I can't help but think he exemplified the mission of his alma mater as the institution states it today: *The purpose of Concordia College is to influence the affairs of the world by sending into society thoughtful and informed men and women dedicated to the Christian life.* Based on his record of public service, his role in history and the Presidential citation he received, I have to conclude that Clinton J. Hill lived that mission through his profession and in service to his country.