

FBI to Make Gun Acoustic Tests at Site of JFK Slaying

Grassy Knoll Has Spurred Most Nagging Question

By Lance Gay
Washington Star Staff Writer

Of all the questions arising from the assassination of President John Kennedy, none is considered so important as how many shots were fired at the Kennedy motorcade and from what direction they came.

And nothing has spurred as much doubt as persisting testimony that shots were fired from the so-called grassy knoll.

The conclusions of the Warren Commission depended on the theory that only three shots were fired, all from the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository in Dealey Plaza in Dallas at 12:30 p.m. on Nov. 22, 1963.

Debate over the direction and

number of shots dates to the day of the assassination, when The Associated Press reported in its initial dispatches that the shots came from the grassy knoll.

Six witnesses told the Warren Commission that they thought the shots came from the knoll — or that they saw a puff of smoke in the trees that flanked a stockade fence in back. And photographs show the crowd turning toward the knoll and pointing or walking in that direction; two persons fell to the ground as if to avoid more shots.

ONE FILM SHOWS two motorcade policemen, one running up the knoll toward the stockade fence.

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Panel Report to Include Evidence of Second Gunman

By Jeremiah O'Leary
Washington Star Staff Writer

FBI acoustical experts are expected to conduct independent gunshot tests at the scene of the murder of President John Kennedy after the House Assassinations Committee issues its final report.

That report will include new evidence indicating that there was a second gunman and a conspiracy.

FBI spokesmen declined comment on the content of the acoustics report, but said no immediate action is likely to be ordered by Director William Webster until the House panel formally makes its findings public early next year.

The FBI has continuing responsi-

bility for investigating all aspects of Kennedy's death under the law giving the FBI automatic jurisdiction in attacks on public officials.

One source said the FBI has experts in the acoustics of gunshots who are considered at least as skillful as the private consultants who produced the report this week that indicated Kennedy's death was the result of a conspiracy.

INFORMED SOURCES said bureau officials were appalled last week when G. Robert Blakey, the committee chief counsel, notified them that the acoustics experts had turned up evidence indicative of a conspiracy to kill Kennedy.

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The sources said the FBI disputed this conclusion because it did not take into account the possibility that there could have been two independent gunmen present — Oswald in his perch above and behind the president and a second gunman in front of and to the right on the "grassy knoll."

FBI officials, it was reported, asked Blakey last week when he disclosed the new evidence whether there also was evidence that the two supposed gunmen were working as a team. The point was raised with Blakey by the FBI that if there was a second sniper on the grassy knoll this did not mean for certain the marksmen were conspirators.

Investigators said the FBI says it never found anyone at the Dallas scene who claims to have seen anyone on the knoll with a gun or running away with anything resembling a rifle.

NO WITNESS or expert, including the committee photographic panel, was able to testify that the photograph depicted a man with a rifle on the hillock.

The House committee is required by law to complete its work by Dec. 31, the day it goes out of existence. However, the full report might not be available for several weeks.

The committee may have to rewrite major portions of the 600 pages it has prepared on the Kennedy case in light of the new acoustical findings.

It has been generally accepted that Lee Harvey Oswald fired three shots from the sixth-floor window of the Texas School Book Depository after the president's car passed his vantage point and headed toward the grassy knoll ahead and to the right of the motorcade in Dealey Plaza in Dallas, Texas.

But the findings of the FBI and the Warren Commission that Oswald was a lone assassin were thrown into question Monday when acoustical experts informed the House committee that there is a 95 percent certainty that there was a fourth shot fired at Kennedy from the grassy knoll.

BLAKEY, the chief counsel of the committee, said that if there were two gunmen firing from two different positions as the president's car passed it would be virtually prima facie evidence of conspiracy.

This development will be taken up today at a closed meeting of the House committee, and Blakey said there will be a public hearing next week to discuss the acoustical findings.

The last meeting of the committee will be Dec. 30, when the panel will

vote on the wording of the reports on who killed Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and how the murders were committed.

The new acoustics findings were presented to about seven committee members Monday behind closed doors by a new team of experts, Mark Weiss and Ernie Oskenoski of Queens College, N.Y. That meeting had been for the purpose of working on some of the final language of the report but when Blakey informed members that there was new evidence, the members decided they ought to hear it before any more drafting was done on the report.

WEISS AND Oskenoski reported that they had taken the tapes made from the broadcast of an open transmitter on a Dallas police motorcycle in Dealey Plaza and eliminated much of the static. They then compared the tapes of the actual shooting with test shots made under similar conditions and made "fingerprints" of the actual and the test shots. The echoes, committee sources said, were identical and provided physical evidence that four shots had been fired in Dealey Plaza as Kennedy drove by.

The tests, according to the committee, showed that the third of the four shots was the one that came from the grassy knoll.

Rep. Harold Sawyer, R-Mich., who first disclosed the new evidence publicly in a radio interview, said the experts synchronized the recordings of the real shots with the film of Abraham Zapruder.

"It was a grisly thing to see," said Sawyer. "It appeared to me that there was some movement of the president's head in conjunction with the third shot."

BUT SAWYER said he was not yet ready to accept the new evidence as conclusive even though other committee sources said the evidence "cannot be ignored and cannot be explained."

The new information indicates only that there were four shots fired, that the third one came from ahead of the president's entourage while Oswald was firing from above and behind and that all four shots were supersonic. Sawyer said this meant that all four shots were fired from rifles since virtually all rifle bullets travel faster than the speed of sound while pistol bullets do not.

The dilemma created for the House committee is that it may leave the nation more confused about the death of Kennedy than it was before the two-year, \$5 million investigation was begun.

Having received substantial scientific evidence that a second gunman fired one shot from the grassy knoll, the committee has no way of answering the question it has raised: who were the conspirators and what was their motivation?

KNOLL

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Yet in its final report the Warren Commission concluded:

"In contrast to the testimony of the witnesses who heard and observed shots fired from the depository, the commission's investigation has disclosed no credible evidence that any shots were fired from anywhere else."

In support of that conclusion, the panel noted that no cartridge cases were found on the hill and no credible reports were received from witnesses.

The grassy knoll — it is actually just a small, grass-covered highway bank — was to the front and right of Kennedy's limousine as it turned onto Elm Street and into Dealey Plaza, and any shots from there would have come from ahead. The shots from the depository building came from behind.

A GOOD DEAL of the controversy has come over the Warren Commission's refusal to accept the testimony of many witnesses. To have accepted testimony of shots from the knoll would have led the commission to conclude there were two assassins.

Private investigators into the case have long maintained that the commission should have heeded this testimony. Lawyer Mark Lane in his book "Rush to Judgment" maintains that of the estimated 400 witnesses in Dealey Plaza that day, 90 were asked by police where the shots came from and 58 replied that the shots came from the grassy knoll.

"Witnesses heard shots come from the knoll. Witnesses saw smoke on the knoll. One witness even smelled gunpowder behind the fence," Lane wrote. "There is some evidence that one or more shots may have been fired from the book depository, as the Warren Commission maintained. It is considerably less compelling than the evidence suggesting that shots came from behind the fence."

"TO CONTEND, however, that shots came from the knoll is not to say that no shots were fired from elsewhere. But it is impossible to contend at one and the same time that some shots came from the fence and that a lone assassin — Oswald — fired from the book depository window.

"As the commission was to remain faithful to the latter conclusion, it had first to prove that no shots came from the knoll. In attempting to do so, the report cited evidence out of context, ignored and reshaped evidence and — which is perhaps worse — oversimplified evidence."

Edward J. Epstein, author of "Inquest," says that "despite the fact that almost all the witnesses on the knoll or with a view of the knoll who expressed an opinion as to the source of the shots said that the shots had

come from the knoll, no thorough investigation was made of this area.

"VERY FEW of the witnesses who thought the shots had come from the knoll were questioned and no full examination was made of photographs of the knoll area for indications of a second assassin. . . . The investigation of the threshold question was thus a limited and relatively superficial one which never pursued answers to many important questions."

The Warren Commission found only three shots were fired, all from the rear of the presidential limousine.

The commission said the first shot — called by conspiracy buffs the "magic bullet" because of its seem-

THE SECOND BULLET, the commission maintained, went wild, hitting the pavement and wounding a bystander.

A third bullet, the fatal one, struck Kennedy in the back of the head, the commission reported.

After examining movie film made by Abraham Zapruder, former Haverford College Professor Josiah Thompson concluded there were actually four shots — the first from the book depository, the second from the roof of the nearby county records building, a third shot that hit Kennedy in the back of the head and a fourth that hit him in the head and was fired from the front — presumably from the area of the grassy knoll.

Pictures taken by another cameraman, Orville Nix, though hazy, show what appears to be a man pointing what could be a long-barreled pistol from a cream-colored Rambler station wagon parked behind the fence at the top of the knoll. One witness later told investigators he had seen a commotion in that area. But photographic analysis has not substantiated that theory.

IN A 1975 article in New Times magazine, Robert Sam Anson said that a policeman who ran to the hill after the shots were fired told the FBI, "I pulled my gun from my holster and I thought, 'This is silly. I don't know who I am looking for,' and put it back. Just as I did he (the man at whom Smith had been pointing his weapon) showed me that he was a Secret Service agent."

"There is only one problem. The Secret Service's own records show there were no Secret Service men on the grassy knoll," Anson wrote.

"Indeed, a lot of people were where they shouldn't have been that day. Winston Lawson, the Secret Service agent responsible for the choice of the Kennedy motorcade route, later reported that motorcycle outriders were posted on the 'left and right flanks of the president's car' (a

position that would have made a cross-fire more difficult).

"But as the films of the motorcade clearly indicate, the motorcycles were posted well to the rear of the president's car, and according to the Dallas police were positioned there at Lawson's own instructions. After the shooting, the doors of the school book depository were sealed; a man was 'trapped inside' who didn't belong there. He was James W. Powell, an Army intelligence agent."

OTHER CONSPIRACY BUFFS have long contended that Oswald could not have acted alone and fired three bullets in quick succession as the Warren Commission maintained. Nor, they contend, is it likely that the so-called "magic bullet" could have taken such a circuitous course.

"There could not have been a lone assassin with that Mannlicher-Carcano rifle, serial C2766, not if he were the world's best rifleman, and Oswald was one of the poorest,"

maintains Harold Weisberg, the author of "Whitewash."

But the House Assassinations Committee, during public hearings this fall, produced experts to show that one assassin could have fired the three shots and even that the "magic bullet" could have done its damage and emerged relatively intact.

In one analysis of the Warren Commission's findings, Sylvia Meagher concludes that there "is a considerable body of evidence suggesting that shots were fired from the grassy knoll on Elm Street."

SHE MAINTAINS that the Warren Commission bent over backwards to avoid testimony and photographs it possessed when it concluded that the only shots came from the book depository.

The groups and individuals looking into the Kennedy assassination have suggested a Persian market of theories, from mundane to exotic, concerning the nature of the conspiracy.

Most theories center around Cuba, organized crime or the CIA.

These range from charges that the assassination was backed by either anti-Castro or pro-Castro groups, or Castro himself. Anti-Castro groups were angered with Kennedy, feeling betrayed by a lack of air support during the Bay of Pigs invasion. Others point to pro-Castro groups and even Castro, angry at Kennedy for embarking on that invasion and for attempts by American intelligence agencies to assassinate Castro.

(Those attempts were never reported to the Warren Commission.)

OTHER THEORIES revolve around plots by organized crime figures to stop government investigations of the Teamsters Union and Mafia funding; a plot by Texas oilmen against Kennedy; a conspiracy by right-wing groups such as the Ku Klux Klan.

And they include the bizarre: an effort by Kennedy to have himself killed because he had some sort of incurable disease; a plot by Lyndon Johnson to take over the government.

It has even been suggested that the fatal shot came from a Secret Service agent's revolver, either by mistake or on purpose.

Hugh MacDonald, who was Barry Goldwater's chief of security in the 1964 campaign, wrote a book in which he maintained that he had met the real assassin — a professional killer he called "Saul." MacDonald said Saul was the man photographed outside the Cuban Embassy in Mexico City in October 1963 and identified by the CIA as Lee Harvey Oswald. (The man in that picture has been studied by the House Committee and conspiracy theorists and no identification has been made.)