

The Ammunition for the Carcano

Press reports in the days immediately after the assassination indicated that the police and other investigators expected to trace the purchase of ammunition for the alleged murder rifle and that this would be important evidence in identifying the assassin. It was said that ammunition for this ancient Carcano was relatively rare.

Later, Thomas Buchanan and others who questioned the official thesis pointed to the fact that ammunition for the Carcano had not been manufactured since the end of the Second World War and was of extremely poor quality. They questioned whether Oswald or anyone could have fired three shots with ammunition which misfired 20 out of 30 times in one experiment.

The report of the Warren Commission appears to eliminate this charge. The Commission states that one cartridge found in the chamber of the Carcano was manufactured by the Western Cartridge Company of East Alton, Illinois, and that this ammunition is very dependable. In tests by the FBI and the U.S. Army there had been no misfires in ^{more than} 100 times. The Commission acknowledges that some other ammunition for this rifle is "undesirable or of very poor quality" but notes that the Western Cartridge Company brand is "readily available for purchase from mail-order houses, as well as a few gun-shops."

The Commission next refers to the three spent cartridges found on the sixth floor near the south-east window but does not identify them specifically as Western Cartridge Company cartridges. No doubt the Commission would have indicated any signs that these cartridges were of another make, if identification of the manufacturer was possible at all.

We know that "Hidell" did not purchase any ammunition by mail, either from Klein's Sporting Goods in Chicago or from Seaport Traders, Inc. in Los Angeles. One would therefore assume that he purchased the ammunition from one of the "few gun-shops" where the Commission says such ammunition is available.

It is strange that the Commission has apparently failed to pursue the trail to its logical end. Did Oswald in fact make any purchase of ammunition ~~from~~ from such a gun-shop? Is there any indication that he purchased ammunition by mail order from a source other than MM Klein's or Seaport? Or was no effort made to trace his purchase of ammunition? If it was made, did it prove impossible to establish that Oswald bought ammunition personally or by mail? If so, why has not the Commission said so in its report? It is difficult to account for this significant lack in the chain of evidence against Oswald---a chain already noteworthy for the weakness of many of its links.

A further cause for wonderment lies in the fact that Oswald, having obtained a strange foreign rifle with which he had no previous experience and which, so far as is known, he never fired up to the 22nd of November, had the remarkable good fortune to supply himself with the one reliable brand of ammunition for this weapon. The Commission itself, in certifying the dependability of the Western Cartridge Company product, acknowledges that other brands are of very poor quality. Independent tests reported in the press demonstrated that in one experiment with other brands of ammunition, 26 out of 30 shots were duds (20 ~~missiles~~ did not fire at all and 6 were guilty of hang-fire).

Chapter IV tells us also that there was a defect in the scope but one for which a person familiar with the rifle could have compensated. Is one to assume that Oswald not only had the dumb luck to stumble on the one trustworthy brand of ammunition, or one of the few such brands, but he was also able to "compensate" for the defect in the scope on his first try, thanks to the "dry run" for which we have only Marina Oswald's vouchsafe?

No one ever had such beginner's luck as this alleged assassin.