

BACK FIRE:

An Evaluation of the Firearms Areas of the Kennedy Assassination Studies.

by
Shelley Braverman

The usual way of handling a "hot potato" that has political angles is to "appoint a committee" and ride out the storm. This was done in the Sacco-Vanzetti case (Lowell Committee) and the Pearl Harbor scandal (Roberts Committee).

The Kennedy Assassination triggered the Warren Commission which wasted little time in turning on the stupidity. In its clumsy efforts to calm more than half of the civilized world, it dropped the ball and this fumble raised more questions than it answered- thus joining its two famous predecessors as dismal failures. The very real tragedy is that its inept gyrations worked against itself; obvious errors made suspect much that was originally acceptable.

As its study progressed, the Warren Commission encountered evidence that it felt was in conflict with its hope for a simple explanation- i.e. that Oswald, alone, was the assassin. Accordingly much nonsense was recorded to this effect. Actually, this was not necessary; competent investigation by firearms experts would have made unprofitable much of the illiterate trash spawned by status-seeking "researchers."

Of the many errors that scream out, possibly the dereliction was the failure to appoint a vigorous "Devil's Advocate" or Cross-Examiner; use of expert witnesses presents terrible dangers, and cross examination is absolutely essential if Truth is to be approached. The witness may swear to tell "...the whole truth" etc., but this is limited to the actual questions asked; expert testimony without cross-examination can result in little more than compurgation. Were the expert witnesses

cross-examined by properly coached counsel, it is more than likely that the shadows that are now over this mess would have disappeared long ago- particularly in regard to the firearms matters involved.

When errors are encountered in a report, the entire document becomes suspect immediately; when the errors are unwarranted (in that they indicate inefficiency) they are inexcusable.

The various investigations- Official, Public or Private- list one or more of the following errors, ignorances or mistakes:-

- ITEM- The scope "...was installed as if for a left-handed man."
- The Model 91/38 Paraviccini-Carcano is a packet-loaded rifle, the clip being inserted straight down from the top of the action; any fixed, telescopic mount would require offset installation to allow for loading.
- ITEM- The rifle "...could be taken down and reassembled with a dime."
- The evidence rifle is of typical military design in that the action is retained by two receiver screws and includes a middle and a forward stock band, each with screws; and the gun was expected to maintain its "zero"? Try it when you next visit your gunsmith!
- ITEM- It is contended that Oswald "took-down" the rifle and carried it in a home-made paper bag 38 inches long.
- The rifle is 40 inches long; when "taken-down" the stock is 35 inches long. Not explained is why Oswald made the bag 38 inches long instead of 40 inches; why the 5 inches were important enough to ~~require~~ require disassembly and reassembly; what were and where are the tools required and how the various parts of the gun with several sharp steel corners were transported without leaving any tears or marks in the bag.
- ITEM- The evidence rifle was fired more than 100 times in various tests.
- A duplicate of the evidence gun was available; firing the evidence gun more than the two or three times necessary to obtain specimens for microscopic comparisons was not only improper- it is incomprehensible! The bullet-ballistics evidence of the gun has been destroyed forever.

ITEM- The gun was an "...ideal type of weapon for moving targets" and "...a real aid, an extreme aid for rapid fire shooting."

The record confuses accuracy with rapidity of fire and rapidity of fire with rapidity or ease of sighting. The evidence rifle was fitted with a cheap 4 X 18 telescopic sight of low light gathering power and restricted field of view- about the length of the President's car at 60 yards. Such a scope would be about the slowest set-up for rapid sighting and shooting generally encountered. It is also claimed that the assassin was sitting or kneeling- the two positions least suitable for rapid fire!

ITEMS- (Miscellaneous) Also offered are the contentions that Oswald missed a stationary target (General Walker) at short range but twice hit a moving target the size of a grape fruit at 60 yards; that a bullet entered President Kennedy's back and fell out; that the President was shot completely through the neck (penetrating the trachea) and that he could clearly say, "My God, I am hit"; that the common name for firing pin is "plunger"; that a single bullet could enter the President's back, range upward and exit through his neck, enter Governor Connally's back, go through his chest, continue on through his right wrist (while holding his hat), penetrate his left thigh and eventually "fall" off his stretcher in the hall at the Parkland Hospital; that cleaning and pressing Governor Connally's clothes before microscopic examination was justified; and that discharged cartridge cases are reliable indexes of the bullets they discharged.

When compared to the scope of the coverage of the 10 months and 26 volumes of the Warren Commission Hearings, the lack of quality and limitations of the firearms intelligence is shocking.

Experts are experts only in their specific fields. A fingerprint expert is an expert on prints, not fingers; for a problem involving a finger one should properly consult a physician. A firearms identification expert is actually a "bullet-print" expert, not a firearms expert. The results of this confusion are sometimes pathetic. In the Sacco-Vanzetti case, an identification expert with 20 years of experience didn't know how to field-strip his personal gun, a Colt Pocket Auto! On another occasion, the Commanding Officer of the Ballistics Squad of one of our largest cities didn't know that one might look for

efflorescence around a primer to distinguish between discharged shells found inside a store and another alleged to have been exposed to the elements for a week in a back yard.

Contradictions are more apparent than real; had the Commissioners retained P firearms Experts in addition to P firearms Identification Experts, avenues for study would have been suggested that should have resulted in more, if not complete, clarification- and considerably greater satisfaction.

Some twenty-five years ago, in Italian East Africa, I encountered the 6.5 Carcano cartridge in a wide variety of loadings. ~~Some of these~~ ^{Mitrgliadas} ~~are those that I personally brought back.~~ The illustrated ~~Mitrgliadas~~ are those that I personally brought back. The Commission assumes that "reloading" requires "resizing" and that none of the cartridges were "reloads." It is commonplace to pull military full-jacketed bullets and replace them with soft-nose bullets for use in hunting, without resizing the cases. The mystery of the "zero" of Oswald's rifle that was high and right with 160 grain Western military bullets might have evaporated were the gun tested with bullets of different weights and designs- the 263 grain ^{Mitrgliada} ~~Mitrgliada~~ for example.

And, were the 263 grain Mitrgliada loadings (but with Western cases) fired in test reenactments, the mystery of why Senator Ralph Yarborough said the smell of gunpowder "clung to the car nearly all the way to the hospital" might also have been solved, as ^{The} Mitrgliada requires the use of a tuft of cotton, ^{fragments of which usually travel} a few yards, carrying burning powder grains; and were these (or similar) bullets tested for penetration and fragmentation, the results might show just how ~~AMMMME~~ a single assassin could have shot the President

and the Governor; Kennedy and Connally with fragments of a ^{single} Mitrgliada and then Kennedy and Connally separately, each with a full-patch military bullet.

Another mystery the Mitrgliada might solve is the ricochet that injured a bystander during the assassination. The FBI Laboratory ran a spectrograph test on the smears on the curbstone and came up with a "positive" for lead and antimony- but as there was no trace of copper the Warren Commission was stymied. When the Mitrgliada ~~is~~ breaks up, its slugs, which are freed of the brass jacket, fly around; such could have caused the mysterious curb-stone smear. Incidentally, the ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ little cylindrical sections of the Mitrgliada run about 40 to 45 grains and are each composed of two halves, compressed; some do and some do not separate, but when they do, each fragment runs about 20-22 grains. The fact that the two recovered fragments from the President's head weighed 44 grains and 21 grains respectively ~~was~~ is certainly startling- but when considered with the other Mitrgliada characteristics- almost beyond reasonable coincidence!

The Parkland "super-bullet" mystery could have been caused by a souvenir-hound that chickened-out; after liberating the bullet he changed his mind and tossed it on a stretcher in the hall to get rid of it.

The mystery of where Oswald got how many of what kind of bullets remains unsolved; a substantial reward might have helped, had the importance of bullet types been understood.

All-in-all, the Warren Reports added nothing of particular significance to what was reported by Tom Wicker of the New York Times, datelined 22 November 1963, the day of the assassination. Contrarywise,

in its efforts to gild the lilly, the Committee raised more questions than it answered. As Gertrude points out in Hamlet (Act 4, Scene 5):

So full of artless jealousy is guilt,
It spills itself in fearing to be spilt.

(Additional was) BACKFIRE!
by Shelley Braverman

One wonders why only three fired cases and one loaded cartridge was all that was found with the gun; this design requires a clip, and is "packet-loaded" like our Garand, not a "charger" like the Springfield or a magazine like our Carbine. Accordingly, to try and load with less than a full clip (i.e. 4 cartridges) would invite possible loading difficulties. If Oswald could buy 4 cartridges, why not 6?

Also curious is why no effort seems to have been made to trace the gun with which Oswald is alleged to "have shot himself in the elbow." If, as is recorded, a Court Martial was involved- what happened to the gun itself- as well as its serial number?

There is a 91/38 Carcano that would fit into the paper "bag" that was found- the Moschetto version which is four inches shorter than the evidence gun. Did Oswald have more than one Carcano?

A witness (William Stinson) is on record as saying that while he was in Governor Connally's operating room a bullet was removed from the Governor's thigh. No such bullet is listed in the exhibits!

The controversial Parkland bullet was in the FBI Laboratory about 11:50 PM, 22 November '63, the day of the assassination. Prior to microscopic examination, "it was washed with Hydrosol, a blood solvent" thus eliminating any useful attempts at blood tests or groupings.

The utterly careless handling of the Presidential car is weird; it was apparently cleaned before any expert examination- and then it took two separate searches to uncover bullet fragments!

The record includes the following (re fingerprints): "Poor quality of ... metal would cause rifle to absorb moisture from the skin, thereby making a clear print unlikely." -Thus contradicting itself!

The record notes that Dr A G Olivier (seven years of wounds ballistic research") was surprised at the head wound attributed to the evidence bullet.

The tests to determine whether a single assassin could have fired the presumed number of shots within the time span should have been conducted under circumstances as identical as possible; kneeling; moving target; four cartridges in gun; etc. The tension on the feeding lever lessens as cartridges are consumed- and the function of a test is to test, period.

In addition to the Mitrigliada bullet, there are at least two other bullets that should have been considered: the "paliottola frangibile" (a fragile bullet), and the "ridotta" (reduced load), a short-range but multiple-composition bullet.

To this day, the Warren Investigation has not yet been able to prove how many shots were fired as a President of the United States, in broad daylight, in the presence of government officials, Secret Service Agents, assorted Police personnel and hundreds of spectators.

Now that the "dermal nitrate" or paraffin test is being exposed for the dangerous fraud it presents (at last- ~~now~~ at least by informed technicians) it is to be regretted that the Kennedy investigation is laying ~~the~~ a foundation for another triumph of Logic over Truth; labeled "neutron activation analysis" whereby "atomic scientists" are able to identify submicroscopic particles, the technique is offered as a means of determining whether or not a suspect has discharged a firearm. This was attempted on Oswald; it proved that the rifle was discharged by a pound of paraffin wax- so it was recorded as not establishing anything.

Some years ago a movie named BOOMERANG entertained millions of Americans. This was based on fact- on an almost miscarriage of Justice in Connecticut. The courageous District Attorney (Dana Andrews) depicted Homer Cummings- who eventually became an Attorney General of the United States- but while District Attorney he had the integrity to expose false "ballistic evidence" that was about to convict an innocent defendant in a murder trial... Is the record of the Warren Committee going to BACKFIRE some day?

Note might be taken that the tracing of the guns involved was completed in a matter of hours; compliance with current firearms regulations results in adequate records.

Unfortunate or otherwise, a detective division is as good as its informers; in its failure to recognize this "fact-of-life" and carp at the Dallas Police Department because of its tolerance of Ruby and similar "buffs" -the Warren Commission betrays its ignorance and exhibits reckless cruelty; long after the Warren Commission is forgotten, dedicated policemen will aspire for transfer to the detective division- and detectives will need information... while Joe Citizen screams for satisfaction.

The Model 1891 Carcano and its 6.5 Cartridge (Mauser #473) have certain remarkable features and have been consistent winners at the 300 meter International Military Matches for years. The Japanese alteration (substituting the Arisaka for the Mannlicher magazine) resulted in a superb military bolt-action rifle.