

# JFK panel staff knew motorcycle wasn't there

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Two days before they said otherwise, the staff of the House Assassinations Committee had evidence no police motorcycle was in a position to record the sound of a fourth shot fired at President John F. Kennedy, The News has learned.

On Dec. 26 three days before acoustics experts testified that an open microphone on a Dallas police motorcycle 200 feet behind the presidential limousine recorded the sound of a shot from the grassy knoll, former committee staff consultant Richard Sprague was asked to help identify the vehicle. The request was made by committee deputy chief counsel Gary Cornwell, who could not be reached for comment Saturday.

Sprague said he examined movie films of two newsmen riding in the motorcycle well behind the Kennedy

car and found no motorcycle on Elm Street except those four riding close by the side of the limousine on Nov. 22, 1963.

The films were taken by NBC cameraman David Weigman, who was riding at least 220 feet behind the president at the time of the grassy knoll shot, and by WFAA-TV cameraman Mel-

## FBI not convinced of conspiracy

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colm O. Couch, who was trailing two cars behind Weigman and about 250 feet from the president's car, according to Sprague. Other photos show the first of four police motorcycles nearest the 200-foot acoustical range was behind Couch's car at the time.

Sprague said he talked to Cornwell two days before the acoustics evidence hearing in Washington and told him, "Gary, I got bad news for you. Not only did I not find any films or photos show-

ing your motorcycle, I found two films showing that it wasn't there." Slides Sprague made of frames of the film proving his finding were picked up later that day for viewing by the staff in Washington.

A staff member the next day told Sprague his slides didn't "prove anything one way or another," Sprague said.

The staff opted to rely on a film taken earlier, showing a motorcycle supposedly trailing the presidential limousine by about 120 feet as the cycle turned onto Houston at Main. The motorcycle a few seconds later fell a considerable distance farther behind the Kennedy car on Houston, however, when the Couch car glowed down to permit photographers to get out and take some film of the motorcycle in Dealey Plaza, Sprague said.

The preliminary acoustical analysis last September placed the open micro-

phone 120 feet behind the president's car at the time of the shots, but this was limited Dec. 29 to 200 feet.

Meanwhile, an aide to committee chief counsel G. Robert Blakey had telephoned a Dallas resident on Dec. 26, one day before the hearing, and inquired about the sighting of any motorcycles in film he had taken seconds after the shooting. The 176 frames of film were shot on the other side of the triple underpass just west of Dealey Plaza and were discovered by authorities only a month ago.

The amateur photographer's film shows a motorcycle trailing the presidential limousine by about 100 feet just as the car emerges from the underpass shortly after the shooting.

The motorcycle, however, apparently was one of the four flanking the president's vehicle when the shots were fired seconds earlier. It would have been too close — at 10 feet or less

— to have been the source of the open microphone that recorded the sound of the shots, according to the acoustics firm of Bolt, Beranek and Newman of Cambridge, Mass.

H.B. McLain, the Dallas policeman whom the committee staff identified only days before the Dec. 29 hearing as having the open microphone on his motorcycle, subsequently has denied it. McLain said he remembered having his siren wide open as he sped from Dealey Plaza to Parkland Memorial Hospital after the shooting, but the 5-minute tape recording over the police radio during that time doesn't reflect such a noise.

McLain's denial, if proven true, would not necessarily destroy the acoustical evidence of four shots because three other motorcycles were grouped around him behind the third

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# Evidence might wreck alibi

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camera car from which Couch filmed. Sprague's finding, however, is devastating because if the committee staff had been honest about it and presented evidence showing they were no motorcycle where these guys (acoustics experts) said the motorcycle was supposed to have been, it would have implied that their original assumption about the 6th-floor window — as the source of three shots — was incorrect.

And they didn't want to do that because they had tied everything down to the 6th-floor window, except the one shot from the knoll. So I believe that Cornwell and Blakey in those two days, knowing there was no motorcycle there, decided the only thing they could do with the time left was to fudge it, in order not to destroy their single-bullet thesis and all the other stuff they had established.

Blakey acknowledged during the Dec. 29 hearing that acoustics experts had predicted that the motorcycle with the stuck microphone was located in an area where neither they nor the committee had seen a motorcycle. If it could be proved that no motorcycle was in the predicted location at the time of the shots, then serious doubts

would be raised about the reliability of the acoustics project.

He said the "first efforts" at finding the motorcycle "were disappointing." The committee eventually found film that the acoustics project suggested it would be," he said, but it showed McLain riding on Houston, not from "several car lengths" behind the presidential limousine.

Sprague said he asked the acoustics experts what would result if the sources of the shots were changed. He said they told him "it would change everything. We would have to start all over and find where the motorcycle was."

The former committee consultant noted that during the re-enactment in Dealey Plaza last summer, sharpshooters fired from only two points — from the 6th-floor window in the southeast corner of the Texas School Book Depository building and from behind the wooden fence atop the grassy knoll in Dealey Plaza.

Sprague also suggested test firing from other possible sniper's positions such as the southwest corner of the book depository, which was allowed to

the target that the Oswald building and from the old Dallas building across the street east from the Oswald window.

The acoustics experts said they heard 15 noise blips on the 5-minute tape recording made at the Dallas police station and eliminated six as being possible gunshot.

They determined that four were highly probable as shots — three from the 6th-floor depository window and one from the fence behind the grassy knoll. However, they didn't address the possibility that the five other shots may have come from other sources because they hadn't test fired from other locations.

Sprague said he believes someone recorded the sound of at least four rifle shots in Dealey Plaza, but he questions whether only four were fired and from only two locations.

"I can see how other sounds may be simulated by something else, but there's no way you are going to simulate those spikes (noises imputed) on those tapes that were created by the somebody was firing a rifle over an