

JFK panel never called 2 witnesses

Dallas pair's testimony would have disputed single-bullet conclusion

By EARL GOLZ 1978

Two key Dallas witnesses whose testimony would have contradicted the concept that the same bullet struck President John F. Kennedy and former Texas Gov. John Connally never were interviewed by a panel of forensic pathologists that upheld the single-bullet theory this week for the House Assassinations Committee in Washington.

The surgeon who operated on Connally's chest after he was wounded in Dallas in 1963 also said Friday he never has "been able to accept the fact that the bullet that went through the president's neck was the one that hit Gov. Connally."

The panel, by an 8-1 vote, concurred with the Warren Commission that Kennedy and Connally were not struck by separate bullets. Separate hits would have made it impossible for accused assassin Lee Harvey Oswald to have done all the shooting with a bolt-action rifle from the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository building.

NEITHER THE pathologists panel nor committee investigators interviewed Charles W. Harbison, a state highway patrolman who told The News in April 1977 that he recalled turning over to an FBI agent more than the three bullet fragments the Warren Commission asserted were removed from Connally's wrist wound.

Harbison said he was guarding Connally's recovery room in Parkland Memorial Hospital on either Nov. 25 or 26, 1963, when someone stepped from the room into the hall and gave him more than three metallic fragments purportedly taken from Connally's wounds.

Harbison's story takes on added importance when it is known that Miss Audrey N. Bell, then supervisor of the operating room at Parkland, remembers she also placed four or five bullet fragments from Connally's wounds in an envelope at least three days earlier, on Nov. 22. They were delivered several hours later to Capt. Will Fritz, chief of Dallas police homicide.

The committee panel concluded a .6-caliber slug fired from a Mannlicher-Carcano rifle struck Kennedy in the back and exited from the throat without hitting a bone, then entered Connally's back, shattered a rib, smashed several bones in a wrist and glanced off a thigh.

The bullet, which lost only 2 of 151 grains, was found after it fell from a

stretcher at Parkland Hospital after Connally and Kennedy were taken into operating rooms, according to the Warren Commission.

Neither Miss Bell nor Harbison had told their stories to the Warren Commission, which stated in 1964 it had "very persuasive evidence" a single bullet passed through Kennedy and Connally and later fell from Connally's stretcher.

Miss Bell was interviewed briefly by investigators for the committee in March 1977. This was three months before Robert Blakey took over as the committee's chief counsel from the ousted Richard Sprague and gave the investigation a different thrust with the appointment of the pathologists panel.

Miss Bell said the two investigators interviewed her briefly with a tape recorder. No stenographer was present for an official deposition, she said.

She said she hasn't "heard anything" from the committee since the interview and has "been kind of wondering if anything was going to come of it."

"I don't guess they have talked to anybody," Harbison said Friday. "I haven't heard a cotton-picking word from anybody."

Committee spokesmen could not be reached Friday for comment.

Harbison said "it's a mystery to me" why his fragments "turned up so late" and where they went after he gave them to a man who represented himself to be an FBI agent in the hospital hallway. He also said he is still mystified at who had possession of the fragments for several days before they were placed in his cupped hands.

Miss Bell said she placed her fragments in an envelope and gave it to government agents.

Robert Nolan, a state highway patrolman, said he took the envelope to Fritz early on the morning of Nov. 23. Nolan, now retired, said Friday no one from the congressional committee has ever talked to him.

DR. MICHAEL BADEN, chief medical examiner of New York City and chairman of the pathologists' panel, told the committee this week that Dr. Robert Shaw, the Dallas surgeon who operated on Connally's chest, "still feels he finds the single-bullet theory untenable."

"But the basis for it essentially is what was told to him by Gov. Connally and Mrs. Connally at the time he treated the governor in Parkland as to what they heard, they observed, they perceived," Baden said. "He does not

make that determination on the basis of medical, surgical or pathological findings. And, in discussing the matter with him, he feels that on the basis of what he saw at surgery, this could be consistent — that this is consistent — and could be due to a single bullet," Shaw said.

"I think it is absolutely ludicrous for them (the panel) to say that it took the governor three seconds to react to a massive wound such as he had."

The surgeon acknowledged he was "strongly influenced by that (Connally's) recollection of hearing the shots and time of impact of the bullets," because they were there.

"It seems rather ludicrous to me for people to reconstruct things and find out that things are not as they were (said to be) by people who were actually there and when it took place," Shaw said. "That is what bothers me."

"Of course I am influenced by what Gov. and Mrs. Connally said. As far as the single-bullet theory is concerned, they say that isn't the way it happened. And they were sitting in the limousine."

Shaw said it would be possible for a single bullet to pass through Kennedy and cause all the wounds to Connally without losing more than two grains, "but that doesn't mean I believe that's the way it happened."

Single-bullet theorists, Shaw said, "are presuming it took the governor almost three seconds to react, as far as his body actions were concerned, to the impact of that bullet."

"Have you seen the picture when Oswald was shot? Did it take him three seconds to react to that? No, sir, he reacted immediately, not even a second."