

Firearms Expert Says New Tests Bolster Finding That Oswald Alone Fired Shots

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WASHINGTON—The House Assassinations Committee disclosed Friday that sophisticated new tests had matched fragments of metal from the wrist of former Texas Gov. John B. Connally with the so-called "magic bullet" from Lee Harvey Oswald's rifle.

The linkup of the bits of metal from Connally with the nearly intact bullet found on his stretcher at Dallas' Parkland Hospital 15 years ago was made during neutron-activation tests conducted last fall at the University of California at Irvine.

A panel of firearms experts confirmed in separate tests at the police firearms laboratory here that the bullet from Connally's stretcher—known to assassination buffs as CE (Commission Exhibit) 399—came from the 6.5 mm. Mannlicher-Carcano rifle found in the Texas School Book Depository after President John F. Kennedy's assassination.

In a compelling scientific detective story that unfolded in a largely deserted hearing room, Vincent P. Guinn, a UC professor of radiochemistry, told the committee the tests he conducted also left little doubt that fragments of metal from Kennedy's brain, as well as all other fragments turned over to him, came from another Mannlicher-Carcano bullet.

Guinn said there was no evidence that any other bullets struck the presidential limousine in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963.

Ironically, Guinn told the committee, the FBI had much the same data from earlier, more primitive neutron activation tests in 1964, but evidently did not know how to interpret the results.

The Warren Commission kept the fact a secret that the earlier neutron tests had even been conducted. Critics charged the results had been suppressed because of fears that they might upset the commission's "single-bullet" theory—that one shot wounded Kennedy and Connally simultaneously before the President was hit by a second bullet, which was fatal.



WITNESS—Ballistics expert Larry Sturdivan holds model of bullet found on stretcher of John Connally. Another expert said new tests match bullet with metal fragments found in Connally's wrist. A panel confirmed the bullet came from Lee Harvey Oswald's rifle.

AP Wirephoto

Guinn said the FBI data, finally released in 1973 as the result of litigation under the Freedom of Information Act, baffled him at first—until he conducted his own experiments as a committee consultant.

"I initially could not make any sense of it," Guinn said of the FBI data. But with the "hindsight" of his own tests, he reviewed all of the old numbers again and found they jibed substantially with his own findings.

"I was frankly surprised to see even their data fell right into the same picture," he told the committee.

Neutron-activation tests are experiments carried out with the help of a nuclear reactor and sophisticated detection equipment to determine whether samples of various materials, such as bullet lead, might have a common origin.

Guinn, a neutron-testing expert who has testified in dozens of court cases, said he was helped by the fact that the Mannlicher-Carcano ammunition made in this country had a much lower antimony content than most bullets. It also varies widely from one Mannlicher-Carcano cartridge to the next, even within the same box of 20.

This is not true of most of the bullet leads he'd ever looked at before, Guinn told the committee. He said his tests showed that the "pristine bullet" from Connally's stretcher had traces of antimony and other elements, such as silver, strikingly akin to the fragments doctors had taken from Connally's wrist.

Similarly, Guinn testified, a large mashed bullet fragment found in the front seat of the President's limousine and smaller fragments found on the rear floor were clearly similar to three fragments he tested that had been taken from the President's brain.