

Police Challenge Tape Cited by Kennedy Panel

BY JERRY COHEN
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DALLAS—Dallas police Thursday challenged the evidence used by a House committee to support its conclusion that President John F. Kennedy probably was killed in a conspiracy.

The House Assassinations Committee reported last week that a "stuck microphone" on a Dallas policeman's motorcycle had produced "acoustical evidence" that a second gunman fired at Kennedy in Dealey Plaza on Nov. 22, 1963.

But Dallas police said Thursday they had determined that the motorcycle was more than two miles away from the shooting.

The committee agreed with the Warren Commission's finding that Lee Harvey Oswald fired the fatal shots from the Texas School Book Depository, above and behind Kennedy. But it maintained that an analysis of the tape produced by the stuck microphone showed that a second gunman fired a shot at Kennedy from in front.

Dallas Police Capt. J. C. Bowles said his department's own analysis of the tape, which he originally transcribed 15 years ago for the Warren Commission, indicated to police that the motorcycle with the microphone stuck in open position was not in Dealey Plaza at the time of the gunfire, but was 2½ miles away.

He said he had told a committee investigator last summer in Dallas that he could refute the committee's acoustical evidence. He said the committee investigator seemed impressed but he was never called to Washington to testify.

Instead, the captain said, the committee called the motorcycle officer, H. B. McLain, to testify.

The committee's acoustics experts said McLain's motorcycle had the open mike.

McLain said Thursday, after listening to the tape for the first time, that

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"it just couldn't be me. There was no way my mike was stuck."

McLain said committee members had not played the tape for him Friday in Washington but instead had shown him three photos of a motorcycle, which he indentified as his.

He said he did not realize until later that the pictures were taken outside Parkland Hospital, where the fatally wounded Kennedy was taken, and that the photographs were made long after the gunfire in Dealey Plaza.

The hospital is about 2½ miles from Dealey Plaza.

McLain said Thursday that the photos showed his microphone was receiving on a channel (Channel 1) which the acoustics experts contended had recorded four gunshots. But he said that when he had traveled through Dealey Plaza he was receiving on a second channel (Channel 2) being used by officers escorting the Kennedy motorcade.

He said the channel had been switched much later, outside the hospital. The switch was made, he said, as officers began to monitor news of the slaying of officer J. D. Tippit, whom Oswald killed while trying to escape.

What's more, Bowles said, "nothing ever went out on No. 155's (McLain's) mike" on the day of the assassination.

However, Bowles said, the department's conclusion that the open microphone was not in Dealey Plaza at the time of the fatal gunfire is not based on McLain's recollections. He said this conclusion resulted from an analysis of "time, distance" and sounds and "casual conversations" picked up by the microphone and recorded in the communications room at Dallas Police Headquarters.

He said, for instance:

—The sounds of an idling motorcycle "were not consistent" with the raucous noises that would have been produced by a police escort suddenly accelerating on an emergency run to Parkland Hospital at "speeds of 70 to 80 miles an hour."

—No police sirens could be heard on the tape. Nor could the screams that followed the gunfire. (Bowles said McLain was so close to panicked spectators when he was traveling through Dealey Plaza he literally "could reach out and touch them.")

—The Dallas police analysis of the tape recording indicated, from the voices of officers and times and places they were known to be after the shooting, that the motorcade already was nearing the hospital during the moments analyzed by the acoustics experts.

Bowles said that the tape reproduced the voice of a police dispatcher advising:

"There is a motorcycle officer up on Stemmons with his mike stuck open on Channel 1. Could you send someone up there to shut it off?"

Stemmons Freeway was part of the route taken by the speeding motorcade to Parkland Hospital after the shooting.

Bowles said all evidence suggests the motorcycle with the open microphone probably was parked outside the Dallas Trade Mart, where a number of officers

were stationed in anticipation of a presidential party lunch there that day.

Bowles played the tape for reporters from The Times and the Dallas Times-Herald. No shots were audible.

The House committee acoustics experts said new technology had permitted them to enhance the sounds of the tapes to detect shots and that "echo patterns" established that four were fired on the fatal day in Dealey Plaza.

Bowles, who has been a police communications officer here for a decade, said that when he first heard about testimony of one of the three acoustics experts who appeared before the House committee last summer, "I said pooh, pooh." It was then, he said, that he began his own analysis of the tape, using a stop watch as one of his techniques.

He said he had waited until Thursday to refute the committee so that McLain could hear the tape.

"As a police officer and a citizen, I have no idea whether there was or wasn't a conspiracy . . . My position now is the truth must be found," Bowles said.

But, he said, "this approach (the testimony of the acoustics experts) is not the method" by which a conspiracy could be proved or disproved, "to the extent that they put the stuck mike in Dealey Plaza."

None of the three acoustics experts who appeared before the committee could be reached for comment Thursday. However, one, Mark Weiss, a professor at City University of New York, had said earlier that because of "echo patterns," the sounds of the tape, including the gunshots, could have come from nowhere but Dealey Plaza or a site "identical to it."

Bowles is commander of the Dallas Police Department's Inspection Division which monitors all aspects of the department's behavior except for the conduct of individual officers.

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