

Connally aide backs theory

By EARL GOLZ

A chief aide of Gov. John Connally in 1963 agreed with a Dallas surgeon that the bullet which wounded Connally shattered after a direct hit and did not first strike President John F. Kennedy.

A forensic pathologist who examined the X-rays and photographs of Kennedy and Connally and other assassination evidence for the Rockefeller Commission in 1975, however, told The News he concurs with the Warren Commission that a single slug passed through Kennedy and Connally and emerged in almost perfect shape.

The first public disclosure of Dr. Robert Shaw, the surgeon who operated on Connally's chest, that Connally and Kennedy were not struck by the same bullet has set off renewed controversy about whether accused assassin Lee Harvey Oswald could have fired all the shots in Dealey Plaza on Nov. 22, 1963.

The Warren Commission and most critics of the Warren Report agree Oswald would not have had enough time to first shoot Kennedy in the back and then shoot Connally, who was in an open limousine on a jump seat just in front of Kennedy. A subsequent fatal blast hit Kennedy in the head.

Bill Stinson, former administrative assistant to Connally and present with Dr. Shaw in the operating room at Parkland Memorial Hospital, told The News the extensive bone shattering inflicted upon Connally's ribs and right wrist "would have destroyed the bullet."

Dr. Werner Spitz, the forensic pathologist and chief medical examiner for Wayne County (Detroit), Mich., said he saw "no bony structure that was involved in the wound track, even if you consider Kennedy's and Connally's wounds, that would be large enough or thick enough or resistant enough to cause damage to a jacket that is as solid and as complete as the jacket of the slug that was used in this case."

"I would think that for all that bullet had to go through that it would have disintegrated into little bitty pieces," Stinson said.

The Warren Commission concluded the 6.5 caliber slug was fired from a Mannlicher-Carcano rifle from the sixth floor of the Texas School Book

Depository Building about 70 yards away. The bullet lost only about 2 of 161 grains after it struck Kennedy in the back and exited from the throat without hitting a bone, the Warren Report said, and then shattered a rib of Connally's, smashed into a wrist bone and finally glanced off a thigh. A fragment of the bullet remains today.

The bullet was found after it fell from a stretcher at Parkland Hospital after Connally and Kennedy were taken into the operating rooms.

Darrell C. Tomlinson, the senior engineer at Parkland who found the slug, told The News he "could never say for sure whose stretcher that was . . . I assumed it was Connally's because of the way things happened at Parkland at that time."

Tomlinson acknowledged he was not asked to identify the bullet when he testified before the Warren Commission in 1964. He said some federal agents earlier "came to the hospital with the bullet in a box and asked me if it was the one I found. I told them apparently it was, but I had not put a mark on it . . . If it wasn't the bullet it was exactly like it."

Stinson said he had not publicly commented earlier on his doubts that a single bullet struck Kennedy and Connally because no one, including the Warren Commission, had asked him.

"I guess the Warren Commission thought I couldn't make any material contribution," Stinson said. "But I was there (commission hearings in Washington). I knew Lee Rankin (chief counsel for the commission) and all the other people and I sat in the room. It certainly wasn't because I wasn't available. They just never asked me about it."

Stinson is now running a public relations firm in Washington, D.C. He was with the nurse in charge of the operating room when she placed several bullet fragments from Connally's wrist into an envelope to be delivered to proper authorities.

The nurse, Audrey N. Bell, told House Assassinations Committee investigators last month she handled more than the three fragments the Warren Commission asserted were removed from Connally's wounds. Miss Bell, who was not questioned by the Warren Commission, has been marked as a key

witness in the House committee's probe.

"There was more than one fragment (placed in the envelope)," Stinson said. "I don't remember how many."

Dr. Shaw said he didn't know how many fragments were removed from Connally, but he does "know that the amount of metal that was obviously in the wrist and the small fragment that was in the tissue of the thigh was not consistent with the appearance of the bullet that was found on the governor's stretcher."

Stinson still maintains Oswald could have fired the Connally shot, plus two that struck Kennedy.

"I think the first bullet nicked his (Kennedy's) neck," Stinson said. "The second one hit Connally and the third one popped Kennedy's head open. It's that simple."

However, the frame count of the Zapruder film of the assassination, which was used by the Warren Commission to time the reaction of the bullets striking the victims, showed between .5 and 1.5 seconds elapsed between Kennedy's and Connally's reactions.

The commission tested the Mannlicher-Carcano rifle and determined it could not be fired twice consecutively in less than 2.3 seconds. The commission stated "there is very persuasive evidence" that a single bullet passed through Kennedy and Connally and later fell from Connally's stretcher in almost pristine shape.

Dr. Spitz said the metallic dust he saw in X-rays along the path of the bullet in Kennedy's neck could not be weighed because they were too small to retrieve.

"I don't know at what point it (bullet) started hitting bony structures," Dr. Spitz said, "maybe in the president, maybe in Connally. But at any rate there is a portion of lead which extruded from the slug through the base as a result of this wobbling or skidding of the slug from its straight course."

Because the bullet apparently was tumbling when it first hit Connally, Dr. Spitz said, "I am not sure that the slug really struck a bony structure with its tip. It was totally undamaged . . . except for its base." He said Connally's wrist was "badly fractured," but the slug struck "the joint area (which) is spongy, whereas the rest of the bone is very solid."

Dr. Shaw said he didn't "think it (bullet) was tumbling when it entered the chest because the skin opening in the posterior chest was just a little over a centimeter, about a centimeter and a half long . . . To me the wound of entrance was consistent with a bullet that had not struck anything else before it struck the cloth of the suit and then went through the chest." He also said the bullet "shattered the main bone of the right wrist, the radius."

Dr. Spitz was part of a 5-member team which examined the assassination evidence in the National Archives for the Rockefeller Commission in 1975 and came up with the same conclusion. The commission was appointed by President Gerald Ford, himself a member of the Warren Commission, to investigate charges of domestic spying by the Central Intelligence Agency.

"I don't know who pulled the trigger," Dr. Spitz said. "I don't think I'll ever know because this is not my line of work. But I understand the injuries and I understand what I saw."