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The Case of the Disappearing Mauser

by
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THE RESEARCH DOCUMENTED below began, as much of my work does, by accident. During the past two years I have been instrumental in assisting various members of *Dealey Plaza UK* to obtain examples of deactivated firearms associated with the JFK Assassination. This, I hasten to add, is not because I am some sort of arms dealer, or even that I am an authority on weapons, but simply due to my geographic location. My home town of Nottingham, and the Midlands area of England in general, is known for its many weapons dealers. This may be due in part to its industrial heritage but probably has more to do with the siting of the Royal Ordnance Factory on the outskirts of the city (not the sort of place you want to live next to in the event of a pre-emptive nuclear strike - thank God the Cold War is over).

Firearms regulations being far stricter in Britain than in the US, all the weapons I have obtained have been deactivated. By far the easiest of these to come by are examples of the .38 Smith & Wesson Victory Model Revolver with which Oswald allegedly despatched Officer J D Tippit. These are quite common in

their, five-inch barrel, original state. Several Mannlicher Carcanos have also been found and put to good use as demo models at group meetings.

It was at one such meeting that the Chairman of *Dealey Plaza UK*, Richard Livingstone, voiced his interest in obtaining a Mauser similar to the one allegedly found on the sixth floor of the TSBD after the Kennedy assassination.

On the surface this did not seem too difficult a task. After all Mausers were presumably more common, and indeed a better all round weapon, than the Carcano. My initial questioning of a local arms dealer quickly altered my perspective.

The rifle found on the sixth floor had been initially identified, not just as a Mauser, but specifically as a 7.65 mm calibre Mauser and this description persisted for many hours.

At 1.22 pm Deputy Sheriff Eugene Boone accompanied by Deputy Constable Seymour Weitzman found, hidden between some boxes, a bolt

action rifle with telescopic sight. According to their Warren Commission testimonies, neither of these two men handled the weapon but Weitzman stated to the Warren Commission that he described it as looking like a 7.65 Mauser.(1) It was later described as a 6.5 mm Mannlicher Carcano of Italian manufacture. This discrepancy in identification gave rise to various theories over the next thirty years. Some said that there were two rifles found on the sixth floor, others that there had been a switch of weapons. Few of the critics were prepared to accept the possibility of a simple mistake.

Very quickly present at the discovery site were Deputy Sheriff Luke Mooney, Lt Carl Day, R L Studebaker and Captain Will Fritz. The bolt mechanism was operated by Fritz and he ejected one live round from the chamber, making four rounds in total. One live round and three empty shell casings which had been found earlier by the window.(2)

Was it Likely?

One of the first questions to be asked in this instance is "Was it likely that a conspirator/assassin would leave a second weapon hidden in the TSBD?" Firstly if one accepts that Oswald was in some way a 'Patsy' as he claimed to be, then someone went to a lot of trouble to link both Oswald to the weapon and the weapon to the crime. If this is seen as a conspiracy and not a "lone nut" scenario, then it was planned and executed well, witnessed by the fact that no-one has yet been successfully prosecuted for it. What reason could there be for leaving a second weapon on the sixth floor? That it was left by accident or panic seems unlikely. Anyone who had arranged the planting of both the Carcano in the TSBD and a bullet at Parkland Hospital was hardly likely to have botched the job having a

rogue Mauser left lying around screaming conspiracy to the first member of Dallas' finest to stumble across it. This would seem to leave only two options.

1) Deliberate planting of a second weapon

What reason could there be for leaving obvious evidence of conspiracy for the police to find? One immediately springs to mind. If there was a Mauser found, it must have been intended that the *fact* of conspiracy became public knowledge very quickly. This raises the possibility of two conspiracies; one to kill the President using shooters from the TSD and grassy knoll (and possibly other sites), the second - to cover up the first.

In this scenario, one weapon, the Carcano, that was definitely linked to a pro-Castro, communist sympathiser would be left. A bullet would be planted that linked the crime to the weapon. A second weapon, untraceable, would also be discovered thus indicating a conspiracy not a lone assassin scenario. This would be done in the hope that the blame would be laid firmly at the door of Fidel Castro

and public opinion would force a US invasion of Cuba (This would explain the initial charge that Oswald "assassinated the President of the United States as part of an International Communist Conspiracy") It is possible that, accepting this scenario, Johnson and his advisers feared a global conflict would ensue should this knowledge become public. A cover up may have been instigated to prevent this, thus the existence of a second weapon had to be denied.

2) Mistaken Identity

Is it conceivable that the Carcano was, initially, wrongly identified and that for several hours the mistake remained unrectified?

Mauser was, and is, a German company but it allows many other countries to produce "Mauser" weapons under licence. Mausers have been made in their various forms since the late nineteenth century.(3)

Because of Weitzman's specific description of the calibre, my research concentrated on 7.65mm Mausers, but included an examination of any other likely candidates in the Mauser stable. Was it even possible that Craig

saw the rifle he described? Did such a model even exist? There were several 7.65 m models made and I have physically examined examples of all of these.

Belgian

The first was the Belgian *Fabrique Nationale Fusil FN-Mauser Rifle 7.65 FN*. This weapon is indeed a Mauser and was first produced in Belgium in 1889. It was made in two versions, rifle and carbine (carabine). I quickly dismissed the rifle as being a ringer for the Mannlicher as it has a 51 inch total length, compared to the Italian weapon's 40 inches. The FN Rifle's length would instantly give away its early production date and would render it unable to be confused with any later production Mauser or Italian Carcano. An 11 inch difference in overall length would surely be an indication to any knowledgeable observer of its age (certainly well before WWII). (4)

Its sister weapon, the carbine is simply a shorter version of the rifle and was originally intended for use by cavalry. This firearm is superficially similar to the Mannlicher-Carcano Model 1938 6.5 mm (Oswald's alleged weapon). Its length matches the Italian weapon to within an inch or so. The bolt arm bends downward, again similar to the Carcano and unlike most other Mausers (including the rifle mentioned above, which has a straight bolt arm), and most importantly, the Belgian Carbine has a box magazine below the stock, in front of the trigger guard which mimics the alleged murder weapon. It



Fig 1. The Belgian *Fabrique Nationale Fusil FN-Mauser Carbine 7.65*



Fig. 2. The Argentine Model 1891 Carbine

must be said that it also has features which are most dissimilar to a Carcano. The FN - Fusil Carbine 7.65mm has a sleeved barrel, meaning that the barrel of the gun is, effectively a tube within a tube. This was designed so that if the wooden stock of the gun should warp due to damp conditions, the accuracy of the weapon would not be affected. The overall visual effect of this design feature is to give a noticeably fatter barrel. (5)

Argentine

The only other 7.65 Mauser that comes close to fitting the bill is the Argentine Model 1891 Carbine (Fig. 2). Once again this is the shorter Cavalry version of the 1891 Argentine Mauser 7.65 Rifle. It also has the box magazine forward of the trigger, and the bolt arm bends downwards as in the Carcano. The

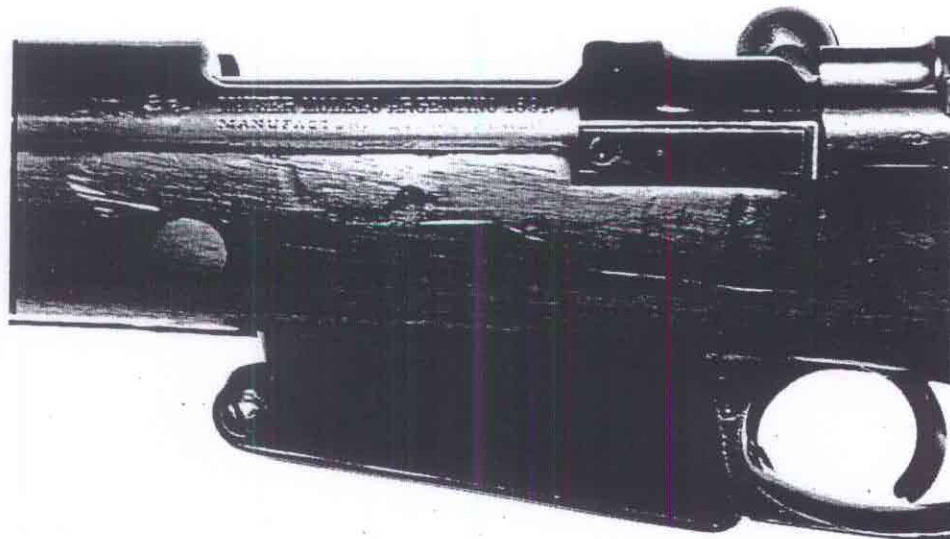
similarity ceases at the business end of the gun. Whereas the Carcano's woodwork finishes a couple of inches short of the end of the barrel, the woodwork on the Argentine weapon extends to its full length. (6)

There was one other 7.65 Mauser weapon which was similar to the Argentine Carbine, a Turkish Model,

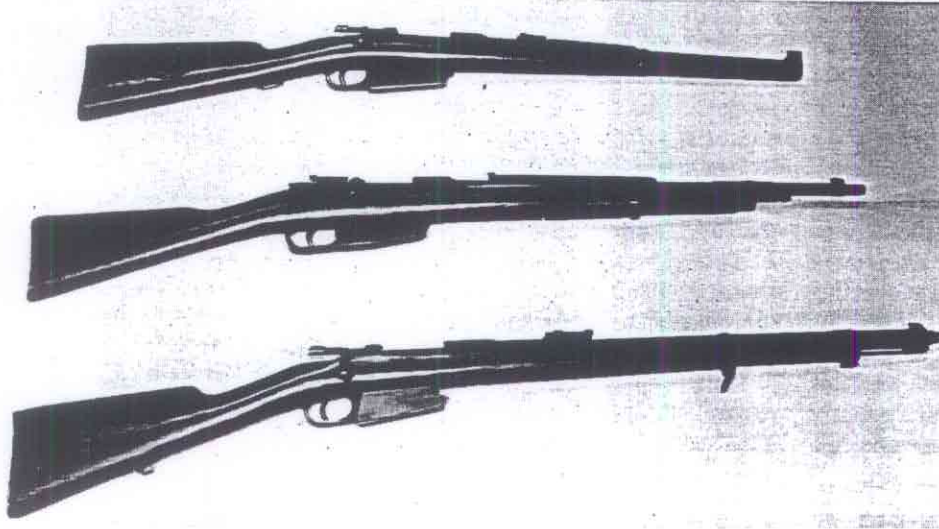
but this had prominent Arabic engraving on it which would have been easily recognisable. (7)

Examining the Warren Commission testimonies of all those who were either present at the finding of the weapon, or arrived within a very short time, it would seem that the responsibility for identification (correctly or not) rests with Deputy Constable Seymour Weitzman.

Officers Boone, Mooney, Studebaker, Day and Fritz all deny identifying the rifle whilst Weitzman offers that he said "it looks like a 7.65 Mauser".(8) Let's examine that statement. The first thing that it implies is that Weitzman had seen a 7.65mm Mauser before, otherwise how would he know what a 7.65mm Mauser looked like? We



The "Mauser" stamp on the side of the receiver where the bracket for the telescopic sight would have to be seated.



Top: Argentine Mauser 7.65 Carbine. Middle: Mannlicher Carcano 6.5mm Bottom: Belgian Fabrique Nationale Fusil FN-Mausers Carbine 7.65

note: because of the wide angle lens used to photograph these weapons they appear to differ greatly in length. In fact this is not the case. There is only approximately an inch difference between any of them.

are assured that he did not handle the gun, so we must assume his tentative identification was made on a brief visual inspection. Weitzman had worked in "the Sporting goods business" previous to being a Deputy Constable.(9) It is therefore assumed that he had a good knowledge of firearms. This is no doubt true, but most of these would have been hunting weapons, not military small arms. During the fifties and early sixties, large numbers of surplus European military small arms were shipped to arms dealers in the United States. Many of these were "Sporterized" before resale. (See the advert page from which LHO allegedly ordered his rifle; a war surplus British Lee Enfield .303 is advertised and displayed in its sporterized state).(10) The term "sporterized" means effectively altering the appearance of a military weapon to make it appear more like a conventional civilian hunting rifle. This involves removing the woodwork, which on most military rifles, extends to the end, or near to

the end of the barrel, shortening and modifying it. Then complete removal of any wood work which may be on the top part of the barrel. After these operations, if professionally carried out, the weapon appears more like a sporting rifle than a military one. In fifties and sixties America, many people possessed such weapons. Warren Caster, an employee of the TSBD actually brought a "sporterized" Mauser into the building only two days before the assassination.(11) Weitzman would have been very familiar with this type of weapon, but possibly not so familiar with the original military specification.

There were ten different models of Mannlicher Carcano weapons in use in 1963, and many more than that of Mauser design.(12) Certain weapons used the best design features of both and although officially not using the name of either company were, nevertheless, commonly referred to as Mausers. To expect Weitzman to be familiar with all these is stretching credulity too far. If we are to believe

his Warren Commission Testimony, all he said was "it looks like a 7.65 mm Mauser" and depending on which Mauser Weitzman had previously seen, his statement could well be true. As we all know, once an incorrect statement has been made, it seems to take on a life of its own and it may be possible that other officers, perceiving Weitzman as something of an expert, simply accepted his speculation as fact.

So what are the main reasons for rejecting this theory? The two main arguments against this are:

a) That the Mauser Identification existed long after it should have been possible to have positively identify the weapon.

b) Roger Craig, a Dallas Police officer, stated in a filmed interview with Lincoln Hall, in 1974, that the word Mauser and the calibre 7.65mm were both stamped on the barrel. Damning evidence indeed.

Roger Craig's assertions seem to clinch the investigation in favour of a deliberate but suppressed plant. So let us re-examine the 7.65mm Mausers and see if any of them actually do have the name and calibre stamped on them.

Neither the Belgian FN, nor it's smaller sister have any makers name or calibre markings on them. As we have already rejected the Turkish 7.65 because of it's conspicuous arabic markings, that leaves the Argentine Mauser. This weapon does indeed have the word Mauser clearly

stamped upon the side of the receiver, It also clearly states that the gun is of Argentine origin. This would tend to support Craig's statement, except that Craig also agrees the weapon had a telescopic sight fitted. On a bolt action rifle, any scope has to be mounted on the side of the receiver chamber away from the bolt, in this case covering up the Mauser stamp. Therefore if the rifle had indeed been 7.65mm Mauser Carbine (the only one with the name stamp) then that name could not have been seen by Craig, or anyone else, without the removal of the scope. None of the weapons mentioned above have any calibre markings on them, although it has been suggested that American importers may have added a calibre stamp themselves to avoid the possibility of anyone attempting to load and fire the more common 7.62 mm ammunition through them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, what do we have? If the Mauser was a deliberate plant, then the cover-up had to be massive and includes Boone, Studebaker, Day, Mooney and Fritz at the very least. Also the lifting of the gun from its hiding place was filmed by cameraman Tom Aleaya.(12) Any cover up had to include him as well because the weapon shown being lifted from between the boxes in his film is definitely a Mannlicher Carcano.

It seems unlikely that anyone would want to involve so many low level individuals in what can only have been a very small part of a much larger plot. If indeed this did happen why was Roger Craig allowed to slip through? Why was he not bribed or despatched much earlier? How did Craig, who admits that he did not handle the weapon see the Mauser markings which should have been hidden by the scope mounting. Why did the conspirators coincidentally choose a second weapon which was superficially so similar to a 1938

Model Mannlicher Carcano? So similar, in fact that when asking in a pawn shop for Mannlicher Carcanos, author and firearms expert Craig Roberts was offered two 7.65 Mausers because the owner thought that they were Mannlichers. (13) Malcolm Price, working at a gun range in 1963, had difficulty in differentiating between the two weapons when testifying before the Warren Commission. As a then current employee of a Texas Gun Club, he should surely have had as much experience as Weitzman.(14) It therefore seems plausible that Weitzman made an error (or possibly not if we re-examine his statement: "It looks like a 7.65 Mauser". It can be argued that the Carcano did bear more than a passing resemblance to a 7.65mm Mauser Carbine) and that the error was perpetuated by shoddy police work, to which no-one wanted to admit at a later date.

The stumbling block is Roger Craig. If the Mauser did not exist then why did Craig make such categorical statements about seeing the stamps on the barrel. The only reason that I can suggest is that after his fall from grace at the Sheriff's Department, Craig felt very bitter towards his former employer and colleagues. He believed wholeheartedly in a conspiracy and had no audience left except for the critics who had befriended and supported him. He may have felt it only natural to tell them what he thought they wanted to hear. We will never know as Craig died, an alleged suicide, in 1975. So all we can now do is look at what evidence is available and try and make a reasonable judgement based on that. My own opinion, for what it's worth, is that there was no Mauser. Weitzman made an error and Craig believing, almost certainly correctly, that conspiracy was afoot, assumed that the mistaken ID was part of it. To force those he believed involved into

the open he lied, thus creating a "red herring" that will not go away.

Footnotes

1. 7H 108 Weitzman
2. 4H 205 Fritz
3. Small Arms of the World *Joseph E Smith Stackpile Books* 1966 pp 71.
4. Small Arms of the World pp 218 - 220.
5. *ibid* and Author's own examination of weapon at *The Ministry of Defence Pattern Room, Royal Ordnance PLC, Kings Meadow Road Nottingham. NG21EQ. January 23rd 1996.*
6. *ibid*
7. *ibid*
8. 7H 108 Weitzman
9. 7H 108 Weitzman
10. *American Rifleman February 1963*
11. 7H 387 Caster
12. *Small Arms of the World* pp 475
13. email to author from Craig Roberts 21 Dec 1995.
14. 10H 374 Price

Acknowledgements

My thanks go to Ian Griggs for accompanying me to examine the various weapons discussed and for supplying all the photographs used in this article.

I must also thank Custodian, Mr H J Woodend, Assistant Custodian Mr R D Jones and their staff at the *Pattern Room, Royal Ordnance PLC* for their help and hospitality.

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