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NATION

DNA Tests On A JFK Bullet?

Relatives may give samples

By Michael Dorman
STAFF WRITER

Federal officials said yesterday they may soon ask blood relatives of President John F. Kennedy and the late Texas Gov. John Connally to submit body-tissue samples for DNA tests aimed at resolving lingering questions about the Kennedy assassination.

Officials at the National Archives — custodian of Kennedy assassination material — disclosed in August they had asked the FBI to conduct tests on a bullet nose discovered in the presidential limousine after the Dallas assassination. The tests, 35 years after Kennedy's murder, were intended to shed light on such issues as whether a previously unknown fourth bullet had been fired at the presidential motorcade. If so, investigators had long agreed, there must have been a second shooter.

Officials wanted to check whether such a bullet passed through either man or perhaps Kennedy's necktie, which bore a nick. FBI tests, dealing chiefly with a fibrous substance discovered on the bullet nose, have now been completed. "The FBI laboratory was unable to identify the material," an Archives official, Steve Tilley, said in an interview yesterday. "We know the material is organic — that is, human or plant life — but that's about it. The next step is for the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology to conduct DNA tests."

Susan Cooper, a spokeswoman for the Archives, said: "We haven't yet gotten a DNA sample from the material. If we can extract a sample, we're going to see if we can get body-tissue samples from members of the Kennedy and Connally families. Then we'd try to match the DNA between the

that reportedly struck Kennedy in the back of the neck area, passed through his body and then wounded Connally. The bullet nose and other fragments found in the limousine were presumed to have come from the fatal bullet that later struck Kennedy in the back of the head.

However, if the mysterious debris was a piece of the tie, officials said, it would tend to reflect that four bullets had been fired, not the three reported by the Warren Commission appointed to investigate the assassination. The fragment under investigation could not have come from the fatal bullet and struck the tie, since its known trajectory was far higher than the neck. And that would almost certainly mean there was a second shooter. Tests showed that the gun owned by presumed assassin Lee Harvey Oswald could not have fired more than three bullets in the time allowed. One bullet missed the motorcade.

Lem Johns, a former assistant Secret Service director in charge of all the agency's protective operations, was an agent riding in the Dallas motorcade. "If you get the tie nicked by a different bullet, you've got a second gunman — simple as that," Johns said. "I've never thought that was out of the question." Most Secret Service officials and agents from that period have said they considered Oswald a lone assassin.

National Archives officials said the fibrous material could have come from Kennedy's clothing, from material in which the bullet fragments were wrapped or other sources. Archivist of the United States John Carlin said the existence of the material has



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THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Jasper, Texas — Dragging-death defendant John William King once talked about "taking a black out" — committing murder — as a way to get into a white supremacist gang, a former fellow inmate testified yesterday.

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Susan Cooper, a spokeswoman for the Archives, said: "We haven't yet gotten a DNA sample from the material. If we can extract a sample, we're going to see if we can get body-tissue samples from members of the Kennedy and Connally families. Then we'd try to match the DNA between the fibrous material and the relatives."

An assistant to Kennedy's son, John F. Kennedy Jr., said: "He won't have any reaction. He doesn't really discuss the assassination at all." His sister, Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg, did not respond to a request for comment. Melody Miller, a spokeswoman for Kennedy's brother, Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), said: "It would be premature to consider such a decision before the testing is completed. No request may be forthcoming."

Connally's brother, Merrill, of Floresville, Texas, said: "This is the first I've heard of it, so I haven't figured out yet whether I'd want to give a sample."

Until the revelation about the DNA investigation, attention had centered on Kennedy's necktie. Although the tie was apparently nicked by a bullet, previous investigations concluded it was the so-called magic bullet

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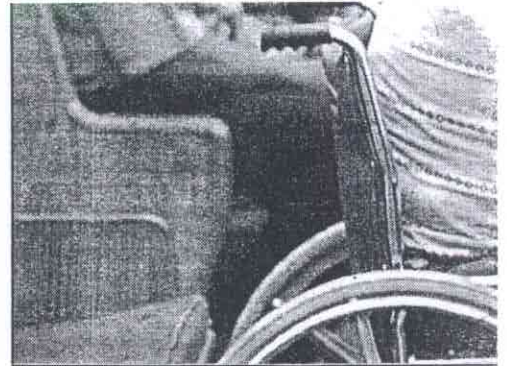
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National Archives officials said the fibrous material could have come from Kennedy's clothing, from material in which the bullet fragments were wrapped or other sources. Archivist of the United States John Carlin said the existence of the material has been known for years, but the new investigation was decided on only after the discovery that the House Select Committee on Assassinations — although it did not refer to the matter in its 1979 final report — had recommended such tests.

How long the DNA tests on the fibrous material will take is uncertain. When the new investigation was revealed in August, officials said the FBI laboratory results should be known in September. They have been released only now.

A tiny drop of material can form the basis of a DNA investigation. Typically it is "cooked up" to a larger batch of material. Attempts are then made to compare the known quantity with samples to determine possible matches with relatives. DNA testing did not exist at the time of the Kennedy assassination, and no such tests have been made up to now.



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"To help new recruits get initiated, take somebody out and kill them. You have to spill blood to get in and give blood to get out, I guess," convicted robber William Hoover testified, recounting what he says King told him while they were both in prison a few years ago.

King, 24, is the first of three white men to go on trial in the slaying of James Byrd Jr., a 49-year-old black man who was abducted last June, chained to a pickup truck and dragged three miles until his body was torn to pieces. King could get the death penalty.

It wasn't clear from Hoover's testimony about the prison conversation who would do the killing or what gang they were talking about. But prosecutors have said that King killed Byrd to gain credibility for a racist group he was organizing.

Hoover, 28, said the idea described by King was to abduct a black man, "kidnap him maybe, put him in the trunk of a car,

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Some of John William's tattoo Confederate and Nazi symbols.

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