

Reno Is Urged to Recover Bullet Pieces From Connally

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John F. Kennedy assassination researchers asked the Justice Department yesterday to try to recover bullet fragments from the body of the late Texas governor John B. Connally before he is buried.

Connally was wounded while riding with President Kennedy when he was killed in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963. The Warren Commission concluded that one shot hit both men almost simultaneously before Kennedy was hit by another, fatal bullet.

In a letter to Attorney General Janet Reno, the head of the non-profit Assassination Archives and Research Center, James H. Lesar, said that if this one bullet did not cause all the wounds the two sustained before the fatal shot, "then more than one assassin must have hit the president." Lesar pointed out that Connally himself maintained that he and Kennedy were hit by separate bullets.

Lesar was joined in his request by Cyril Wecht, a forensic pathologist and longtime critic of the Warren Commission's work, and five other doctors. They said that neutron activation analysis and other tests of the fragments "may be able to resolve the controversy as to whether President Kennedy was assassinated as the result of a conspiracy."

The "single bullet" theory is crucial to the Warren Commission's findings because one gunman could not have wounded both Kennedy and Connally with separate shots in the chaotic, split-second interval when they were hit.

Tests for the House assassinations committee in 1978 matched fragments of metal taken from Connally's wrist with the nearly intact bullet that was found on a stretcher at Parkland Hospital and was believed to have dropped out of Connally's thigh. But questions about the authenticity of those fragments arose because they did not match any of the fragments tested years earlier, and inconclusively, by the FBI. The FBI fragments had disappeared.

Other fragments were not removed from Connally. The researchers said they knew their request "may seem inappropriate" to Connally's bereaved family and friends, but they argued that the public interest "is paramount" and that it is Reno's duty "to recover evidence of a crime."

Justice Department spokesman Carl Stern said the request was forwarded to the FBI's Dallas Field Office for a determination. "If they feel this is important," Stern said, "they presumably would have some discussions with the [Connally] family. Obviously we want to proceed as sensitively as possible."