THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 1992

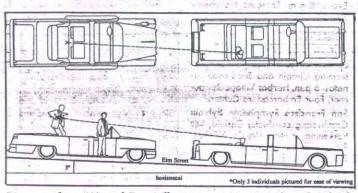


Diagram from 'Mortal Error' illustrates contention that the third, and fatal, shot was fired from the Secret Service follow-up car

Expert points to errant Secret Service bullet

By Stephen Hunter Baltimore Sun

Towson, Md.

It's a tale of two rifles. It's a tale of three bullets.

It's a tale of a dead president, a still-grieving nation and a thou-

sand unanswered questions. But most of all it's a tale of a

Towson, Md., man's obsession with finding the truth.

It's Howard Donahue's tale, contained in a just-released book titled "Mortal Error: The Shot That Killed JFK," by Bonar Menninger, which chronicles Donahue's odyssey through the thickets of ballistic evidence, governmental obstructionism and what he views as media indifference.

The book embraces Donahue's conclusion that although Lee Harvey Oswald shot at and hit Presi-



Ballistics specialist Howard Donahue: 'friendly fire' idea

dent Kennedy with bullets from a 6.5mm Mannlicher-Carcano rifle, the fatal bullet that destroyed the president's skull came from another source.

Kennedy, Howard Donahue believes, was killed by friendly fire.

And in the book, he names the friend who fired, a Secret Service agent who was in the follow car in the Dallas motorcade and rose he roically to return fire on the assassin but instead accidentally fired a round in the wrong direction.

Donahue's contention has invited immediate scorn and puts him at odds with other groups' theories about the assassination.

Theory Dismissed

"The theory is, like all the others, just wrong," says David W. Belin, the former Warren Commission counsel.

And Bob Snow, a spokesman for the Secret Service, said, "If I used the word 'ridiculous,' that would be the mildest thing I could say." He would not give out any-information on the agent in question, citing employee confidentiality.

Attempts by Donahue, Menninger and Thomas McCormack, chairman of the book's publisher, St. Martin's, to approach the agent in question were rebuffed with silence or threats of lawsuits.

McCormack said he drafted a letter last November to the agent, now retired and living in the Washington area.

"I figured the allegation was very distressing to the man," Mc-Cormack said. "Basically, I said (in the letter) that if he could have talked us out of it, we wouldn't have published the book. But we never heard back from him."

No Libel Meant

McCormack contends that since "Mortal Error" does not say the former agent acted out of negligence or malice, the assertion that he accidentally fired a shot that hit Kennedy is not libelous.

But J. Hamilton Brown, executive director of the Former Agents of the Secret Service Association, based in Alexandria, Va., said the

Page E4 Col. 1

Book Claims Secret Service Agent Shot

From Page E1

about seeking legal action.

Meanwhile, in Dallas, Larry former agent has talked to him

Howard, director of the JFK Assassination Center and a firearms consultant on the film "JFK," that the killing shot came from the consultant on the film "JFK," called the idea "absolutely ridicugrassy knoll. hit by at least three riflemen and lous." He claims the president was

smile: At least people are paying him some attention, when for years he has toiled in obscurity. But Donahue, 69, can only

a Maryland ballistics laboratory. In that testing, filmed by CBS, he firpart in tests with a Carcano rifle at digation since 1967, when he took He has been pursuing his inves-

> shot, could have pulled it off. doubted that Oswald, a mediocre shots were to make, Donahue to fire. But knowing how hard the perts say was the time Oswald had than the 5.6 seconds that most exshots on a moving target in less ed three times and hit three head-

cluded that Oswald, acting alone, shot and killed Kennedy. He missed with one shot, hit both Kenbullets recovered in the limousine the third shot that exploded the president's skull. Fragments of Connally with a second, then fired were all traced to his rifle. nedy and Texas Governor John The Warren Commission con-

theorist; in fact, he embraces many of the commission's conclu-sions. But he believes that subtle Donahue is not a conspiracy

> er direction. head-shot bullet came from anothballistic evidence shows that the

day, according to Donahue: Here is what happened that

dorses the "magic bullet" theory. studied the assassination who enone of the few people who has and Connally, as the Warren Com-mission said. In fact, Donahue is neck (probably a mortal wound) let," penetrated the president's struck Kennedy in the head. The with fragments, one of which second, the so-called "magic bulment and sprayed the limousine nedy. His first bullet struck pave-Oswald fired only twice at Ken-

stood up with an AR-15 assault riagent in the follow-up Cadillac At that point, a Secret Service

striking the president on a left to-right axis high in the head, frag-School Book Depository, he slip fle. As he turned toward the Texas menting inside his brain and blow-Donahue says. ing out the right side of his skull ped backward and the rifle fired

source. to have come from some other skull meant that the fatal shot had ed Donahue's notice for years, mission testimony, though it eludly on that the bullet angles in the even though he had concluded earknowledged in some Warren Com-That rifle's presence was ac