

LEVEL 1 - 5 OF 8 STORIES

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Correction Appended

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HEADLINE: New book says JFK accidentally shot by Secret Service agent

BYLINE: JAMES ROSEN; NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

DATELINE: NEW YORK

KEYWORD: JOHN KENNEDY BOOKS ASSASSINATIONS USA

BODY:

There was a second gunman that day in Dealey Plaza - a Secret Service agent who accidentally fired his new M-16 prototype rifle and hit President John F. Kennedy, according to a new book.
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The startling assertion is made in *Mortal Error*, based on the 25-year research of Howard Donahue, one of 11 marksmen used by CBS News in 1967 to try to duplicate assassin Lee Harvey Oswald's three-shot feat on Nov. 22, 1963.

Donahue, now 69, bettered Oswald's purported three-shot feat in time and accuracy.

But Donahue and author Bonar Menninger say Oswald fired only twice. His first shot missed Kennedy; the second hit the president high on his back.

The third shot - the one to Kennedy's head - came from Secret Service agent George Hickey, riding in an open security car about five feet behind Kennedy's open limousine, they say.

"There was no conspiracy," Donahue, a Maryland ballistics expert, told the Daily News. "It was a sheer ... accident."

Hickey could not be reached for comment.

Thomas McCormack, head of St. Martin's Press, which is publishing the book due for release in the U.S. on Wednesday and March 1 in Canada, said he and the authors made extraordinary attempts to discuss the theory with Hickey, but the Press Alt-H for Help or Alt-Q to Quit.

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former agent would not co-operate.

Attorney David Belin, former chief counsel to the Warren Commission and author of two books on the assassination, dismissed Donahue's theory.

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"It's another example of people who exploit the public," Belin told the Daily News.

Robert Johnson, a research director at the JFK Assassination Centre in Dallas, also rejected Mortal Error. He doubts Hickey's colleagues could have kept the secret.

Mortal Error theorizes that as Oswald opened fire from the Texas School Depository to the rear, Hickey turned, reached down for the rifle and flipped off the safety. As he tried to stand up on the soft back seat of the car, the book says, he lost his balance - accidentally pulling the trigger of his M-16, then called an AR-15.

Hickey testified to the Warren Commission that he didn't pick up the rifle until Oswald's "last report" - the sound of the last shot - and then only "cocked and loaded (the M-16) and turned to the rear."

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But agent Glen Bennett, next to Hickey, said Hickey "already had picked up the AR-15" by the time Bennett heard the second shot.

S.M. Holland, a civilian witness on an overpass the motorcade was approaching as the shots rang out, said in 1967 that he saw an agent with "a machine gun" stumble in one of the limos as the cars abruptly sped away, the book says.

An Associated Press photo taken as the cars raced to Parkland Hospital shows an agent the authors identify as Hickey standing in the chase car and holding an M-16/AR-15.

The 350-page book uses extensive ballistic, trajectory and photographic analysis and studies of Kennedy's mortal wounds to make its case that Oswald fired only twice - and Hickey's misfire was the third shot.

But official investigators said they found three empty bullet casings from Oswald's bolt-action rifle. If he only fired twice, where did the third empty shell come from?

Donahue said that casing bore signs it had been used for practice and was not fired that fatal day.

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Another problem: the Secret Service told Donahue, in writing, several years ago that none of its agents fired any weapon that day. Donahue said it was possible that, with all the commotion, Hickey at the time may not have realized his rifle had discharged.

Or, he said, it's possible the Secret Service was aware of Hickey's alleged fatal goof - and covered it up to avoid embarrassment.

CORRECTION-DATE: March 3, 1992

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