

LEVEL 1 - 6 OF 8 STORIES

Proprietary to the United Press International 1992

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HEADLINE: Book says Secret Service agent shot Kennedy

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BODY:

A new book based on research by a former Towson, Md., gun shop owner, concludes President John F. Kennedy was killed by friendly fire from a Secret Service agent, The Baltimore Sun said Sunday.

Howard Donahue, 69, claimed ballistic evidence indicates the agent was responding to the sound of gunshots on Nov. 22, 1963, and hit Kennedy by mistake.

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Donahue's story is in the book "Mortal Error: The Shot that Killed JFK," written by Bonar Menninger and published by St. Martin's. It will be released Wednesday with an initial printing of 125,000 copies.

Various assassination experts and Secret Service officials discounted the book and David Belin, former lawyer to the Warren Commission, said it is "just wrong," the Sun said.

"I hate the word 'cover-up,'" Donahue told the Sun. "It sounds so sinister. But the government was between a rock and a hard place. They did not want to admit that Kennedy was shot in the head by their own man. They tried to cover it up with the Warren Commission."

Donahue believes Lee Harvey Oswald, the lone gunman identified by the Warren Commission, shot at Kennedy but did not kill him, the Sun said.

Donahue said an agent riding in the follow car of the Dallas motorcade "rose heroically to return fire on the assassin but instead accidentally triggered a round in the wrong direction," the newspaper said.

The newspaper said the agent has retired and lives in the Washington, D.C., area but did not use his name. He did not cooperate in writing the book, Press Alt-H for Help or Alt-Q to Quit.

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the Sun said.

Larry Howard, director of the JFK Assassination Center in Dallas and a firearms consultant on the film "JFK," said Donahue's theory is ridiculous. He

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said the fatal shot came from the grassy knoll.

Donahue, a firearms enthusiast who took part in a 1967 re-enactment of the assassination for CBS, operated a Towson gun shop for 12 years. In 1981, he left the business and became a firearms examiner, investigating accidents and testifying in court.

The Sun said Donahue believes Oswald fired twice -- not three times -- at Kennedy. His first bullet struck the pavement, spraying the limousine with fragments, including some that struck Kennedy in the head.

A second, the so-called "magic bullet," penetrated Kennedy's neck (probably a mortal wound) and hit Texas Gov. John Connally.

At that point, the newspaper said, an agent in a follow-up Cadillac stood up with an AR-15 assault rifle, later to be known as the M-16. As he turned toward Oswald's perch in the Texas School Book Depository, he slipped backward and the gun fired, striking Kennedy, Donahue says.  
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"It has the pattern of the classic gun accident," Donahue told the Sun. "As freakish as the odds may seem, many gun accidents involve fantastic odds."

The Sun said Donahue has evidence to support his thesis:

--Examination of the line between entry wound and exit portal in the skull, suggesting the fatal bullet moved from left to right, exploded out the right side of the president's head; a bullet from the Book Depository would have moved from right to left, exploding out his face.

--The behavior of the fatal shot, which was consistent with a small caliber, thin-jacketed, high-velocity round. It ruptured inside, leaving metal droplets throughout the tissue that can be observed in autopsy X-rays.

--The width of the entrance wound in the president's skull, measured at the autopsy and from X-rays, was 6 millimeters, highly unlikely for a 6.5mm shell from the Mannlicher-Carcano weapon used by Oswald.

--Several witnesses smelled gunpowder after the shooting, highly unlikely from a rifle shot from five floors up and 88 yards away.

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--Testimony placing the AR-15 rifle in the agent's hand at the time of a third shot.

--Testimony from several witnesses that the sound of the shots came from the cars.

--Testimony from Connally that the third shot was the loudest.

--Initial testimony -- later recanted -- from witnesses within the Texas Book Depository that they only heard Oswald fire two shots.

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