

'Friendly fire' in Dallas?

Book: JFK killed by Secret Service

By **STEPHEN HUNTER**
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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 thousand 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 soon-to-be published book titled "Mortal Error: The Shot that Killed JFK," by Bonar Menninger, which chronicles Donahue's long 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 hit President Kennedy with a 6.5mm Mannlicher-Carcano rifle, the fatal bullet that destroyed the president's skull came from another source.

Kennedy was killed by friendly fire, Howard Donahue believes.

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

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

"The theory is, like all the others, just wrong," says David W. Belin, the former Warren Commission counsel who is the commission's most vocal defender.

Meanwhile, in Dallas, Larry Howard, director of the JFK Assassination Center and a firearms consultant on the film "JFK," called the idea "absolutely ridiculous."

A dedicated hunter and firearms tinkerer, Donahue operated

DONAHUE'S EVIDENCE

- Examination of the line between entry wound and exit portal in the skull, which suggests that the fatal bullet moved from left to right and exploded out the right side of the president's head; a bullet from the Texas 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 in the tissue that can be observed in autopsy X-rays.
- The width of the entrance wound in the president's skull, as measured at the autopsy and from X-rays, was 6 millimeters, highly unlikely for a 6.5mm shell.
- Several street-level witnesses said they smelled gunpowder immediately after the shooting, a highly unlikely consequence of a rifle shot from five floors up and 88 yards away.
- Testimony placing the AR-15 rifle in the agent's hand in the immediate time frame of the third shot.
- Testimony from witnesses that the sound of 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.
- Oswald's own befuddlement and declaration that he was a "patsy" at the time of his arrest and interrogation.

a Towson gun shop for 12 years. Since 1981, he has since earned his living as a firearms examiner, investigating accidents and testifying in court.

Donahue is not a conspiracy theorist; in fact, he embraces many of the commission's conclusions. But he believes ballistic evidence shows that the bullet which shattered Kennedy's skull came from another direction.

Here is what happened that day, according to Donahue:

Oswald fired only twice at Kennedy. His first bullet struck pavement, and sprayed the limousine with fragments, one of which struck Kennedy in the head. The second, the so-called "magic bullet," penetrated the president's neck — probably a mortal wound — and Connally, as the Warren Commission said. In fact, Donahue is one of the few who has

studied the assassination who endorses the "magic bullet" theory.

At that point, a Secret Service agent in the follow-up Cadillac stood up with an AR-15 assault rifle. As he turned toward the Texas School Book Depository, he slipped backward and the rifle fired, striking the president on a left-to-right axis high in the head, with the bullet fragmenting inside his brain and blowing out the right side of his skull, Donahue says. The moment was captured on frame 313 of the Zapruder film.

That rifle's presence was acknowledged in some Warren Commission testimony, though it eluded Donahue's notice for years.

"It has the pattern of the classic gun accident," said Donahue. "As freakish as the odds may seem, many gun accidents involve fantastic odds."