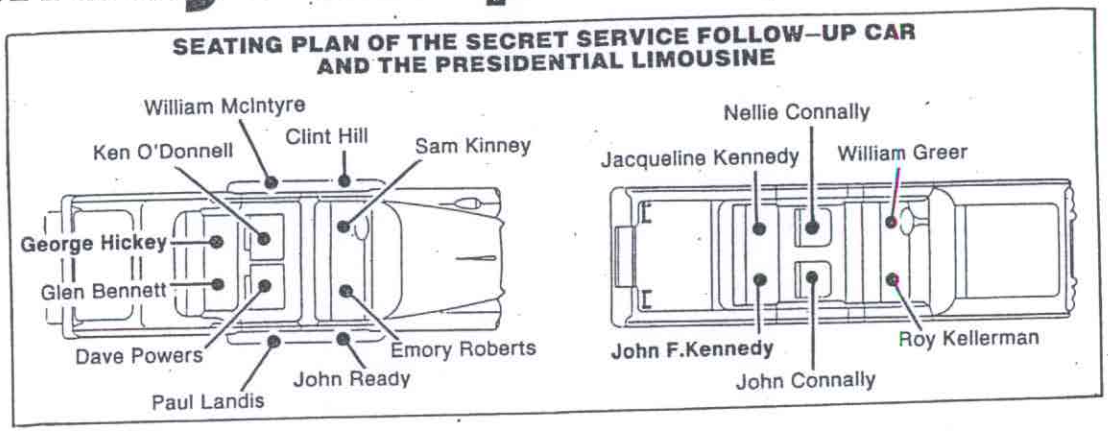
Kennedy: the publisher's case

The American publisher of *Mortal Error* (see Page 1) explains his support for Howard Donahue's theory



Donahue's ballistics argument is the strongest yet put forward, and it accounts for all the essential data accounted for by the government theories plus a good deal more. More than that, his reconstruction explains many details from Dallas that no one has otherwise explained.

For those who wonder what Lee Harvey Oswald might have had in mind when he declared he was just a "patsy", Donahue's theory allows an answer that does not entail the likes of a New Orleans conspiracy (such as the one depicted in Oliver Stone's *JFK*): Oswald, thinking himself to be a lone gunman, nevertheless saw Kennedy killed by a shot he knew he did not fire. But he was the only one arrested. He did not know how they did it, but he was convinced, wrongly, that somehow he had been used.

Through all the examination of the technical factors at Dallas, we knew that we had not touched on the aspect of Donahue's thesis that would excite the greater scepticism: There were nine other people in that follow-up car. Why had none of them ever said anything? Did Donahue or Menninger ever ask them? Yes, they did. Or tried to.

As the potential publishers, we were intensely concerned about the matters that were not technical but human. We had to get our questions straight. What did the others around Hickey know? What did Hickey know?

We read the statements of in the Warren Commission Report. The statements are startling in their variety of eye and ear witness accounts. The agents testify to hearing different numbers of shots, from different directions. Dealey Plaza was an echo chamber, reflecting cheering crowds, motorcycles, shots and cries of horror. To this was added the mind-scrambling shock of seeing the president being shot.

Could the explosive sound of an AR-15 possibly go off within a few feet of these men and they not register it, or at any rate, believe it came from elsewhere? The strict answer is yes, it is possible. Since starting our investigation, we have heard numerous accounts of shooting experiences that corroborate that possibility.

More than that, we have heard two first-person accounts from people who *themselves* discharged a rifle and were unaware of it. Hickey himself might have, in that most head-jangling moment of his life, fired his gun and never realised it. What the mind registers in a moment of such utter extremity is unpredictable. There were eye witnesses along Elm Street who claimed they heard a gunshot sound that originated right there in the Plaza. But others said no, it was from the grassy knoll. There were two shots, three shots, four shots. They all sounded alike. No one sounded markedly different. They were evenly spaced in time. No, the last two shots were almost simultaneous.

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It seems unlikely that his fellow agents and even Hickey himself would not be aware of the AR-15's going off, but the possibility exists. The government has never said if or when or by whom a post-event gun-examination was carried out.

Inevitably we are pushed to consider the next possibility: that at least some others in the follow-up car were aware that the AR-15 went off. If they were aware, where did they think the shot went? In Donahue's reconstruction, Hickey, jumping to his feet on the soft seat-cushion of a moving car, tipped backward while clutching the AR-15. The chance of his accidental shot's hitting the president probably seemed so remote that they never actually considered it. (Donahue, when asked why he immediately assumed the shot was accidental and not intentional, says that the chances of such a shot being planned and executed are so small that he could never take that scenario seriously. Asked if the chances of an accidental shot's hitting the president in the head 24 feet away did not seem equally small, he says of course they do — until you consider the evidence. First, he points out, he didn't approach his investigation with any idea that it would lead to the AR-15. He considered the data, and the data pointed him to the follow-up car. You cannot convince any experienced shooter — and certainly not one who as a firearms expert has regularly testified in court about bizarre coincidences that have produced gunshot fatalities, as Donahue has — that the apparent unlikelihood of the result of an accidental shot should be enough to persuade him it didn't happen.) If another agent knew the AR-15 went off, and he thought it went skyward, just possibly he would judge it an irrelevant but potential nasty complication to any subsequent investigation, and thus not worth mentioning. We can know none of this — if anyone knew, who that anyone might be and what went through his mind.

Donahue and Menninger *tried* to know. A large part of *Mortal Error* recounts their efforts to contact the other car occupants, and, repeatedly, George Hickey.

Before making the fina decision to publish, we felt w had to make our own efforts On November 1, 1991 w wrote to George Hickey. W said that we were going t publish. We told him that th book was premised o Donahue's contention tha the behaviour of the bullet i the president's skull wa much more consistent wit that of a bullet fired from a AR-15 rifle than from Mannlicher-Carcano rifl such as the one used b Oswald and on an analysis o the trajectory of the bullet. W told Hickey that Donahu was by no means accusin him of any wrongdoing. W emphasized Donahue's belie that the president would in al likelihood have died from th wound caused by one o Oswald's shots even if th bullet in question had not hi the president in the head. W urged Hickey to put forwar his side of the story. He di not respond.

We do not unanimousl feel that Donahue has prove his AR-15 case beyond shadow of a doubt. His con viction is strong but we can not say his argumen absolutely precludes the pos sibility that he is wrong. Ou own search was begun in a effort to uncover anything that might disqualify tha argument. We now feel tha Donahue's command of an reasoning about the har facts of Dealey Plaza are the strongest that we have seen. and if we cannot be certain i may be because of a natura reluctance to concede that such bad luck, so unlikely an chaotic an accident, can prevail in this world. But t *dis*believe solely because i was a long shot is its ow species of irrationality.

THOMAS MCCORMACK