

FBI Lab to Study Material On Bullet That Killed JFK

By JOSEPH SCHUMAN
Associated Press

An FBI crime lab will try to identify thread-like material found on a fragment of the bullet that killed John F. Kennedy.

The material's relevance to investigations of the Nov. 22, 1963, assassination is unknown, said officials from the National Archives, which has custody of all evidence from the assassination. But in announcing the examination yesterday, they said it would clear up a discrepancy left from a previous inquiry.

In an initial, typed report in 1979, the Firearms Examination Panel of the House Select Committee on Assassinations recommended testing the material found on the nose of the bullet. However, the recommendation was omitted from the House committee's final printed report.

An Assassination Review Board established in 1992 to increase public access to the records of Kennedy's assassination said it was unable to determine the cause of the omission.

"We're following up on a recommendation made almost 20 years ago," said Review Board spokeswoman Eileen Sullivan. "We would like to see that the record is complete regarding commission exhibit No. 567."

The FBI most likely will test the material at its laboratory in downtown Washington in September, said archives spokesman Steven Tilley.

Gerald Posner, author of a 1993 book, "Case Closed," which investigated Kennedy's death and the inquiries sur-

rounding it, said he doubted the testing would shed new light on the case. But he said it could help alleviate a public impression that the government "has dragged its feet" in releasing all information on the assassination.

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National Archives officials took more than 18 months to decide to let the bullet undergo examination after the review

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board requested the test. Tilley said preservationists first had to determine whether the tests were worth risking damage to what they consider to be a piece of history.

The bullet, which tore through Kennedy's head and caused the fatal injury, was retrieved from the president's limousine by Secret Service agents shortly after the assassination.

To assassination buffs, it is known as the "seat bullet." A second shot, the so-called "magic bullet," hit Kennedy and then Texas Gov. John B. Connally, while a third hit a nearby curb.

The bullet, now in five fragments, is kept in a plastic bag inside an acid-free wooden box at an archives facility outside Washington.

Preservationists are unwilling to speculate publicly on what exactly the fibrous material is, Tilley said. It is unclear from FBI photos taken at the time of the shooting whether the material was on the bullet then or somehow adhered to it later. At one point, the bullet was stored in cotton wadding after it was taken into evidence.

Also to be examined are four other fragments, pieces of unidentified organic material that once were considered to be part of the bullet. Archives preservationists believe they could be wax, perhaps the kind used to hold displays for photographers. They know only that the fragments are not metal.

Tilley stressed that, like the review board, the National Archives' concern is only to make public all information about the assassination.

"We're not in the business of trying to reinvestigate the assassination," he said. "What effect it may have on the interpretation of what happened in Dallas is, I think, up to others."

The review board will close Sept. 30, regardless of the new test's results, Sullivan said.