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FBI's tape study casts doubt on JFK theory

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WASHINGTON — The FBI said Monday that its own scientific research contradicted the House assassinations committee's assertion that more than one gunman was probably involved in the 1963 slaying of President Kennedy in Dallas.

The FBI, which based its conclusion on laboratory tests of a five-minute tape that was recorded through a transmitter on a police motorcycle thought to be near Dealey Plaza at the time Kennedy was killed, called the committee's work "invalid."

In 1978, independent acoustical experts testified before the committee that their examinations of the same tape indicated there was a "high probability" that two assassins fired at least four shots at Kennedy's motorcade on Nov. 22, 1963. After analyzing test data collected in August 1978, during a re-enactment of the assassination in Dallas, the experts concluded that the fourth shot was probably fired from behind the grassy knoll at Dealey Plaza.

Chances appear dim the Justice Department will reopen its investigation into the 1963 assassination now that the FBI has rejected the acoustical reports of a second gunman.

Officials said privately the finding weakened chances the Justice Department will order a reopening of the 17-year-old case, a move requested by the now-defunct House panel, which spent \$5.5 million probing the assassination.

But Justice Department spokesman Dean St. Dennis stressed the National Academy of Sciences, in a separate study funded by the department, still is examining the tape and it would be "premature" to make a decision on reopening the probe.

But in the 22-page report released Monday, the FBI said the evidence presented to the House committee

never scientifically proved that the recording "contains the sounds of gunshots or any other sounds originating in Dealey Plaza."

The FBI's conclusions support the bureau's original finding, which was affirmed by the Warren Commission in 1964, that Lee Harvey Oswald killed Kennedy by firing three shots from the Texas School Book Depository.

To determine the validity of the evidence presented to the House committee, the FBI said it conducted tests to assess whether the acoustics experts had scientifically proved that the tape-recorded sounds — inaudible to the human ear — must have originated in or very near Dealey Plaza. The FBI also ran tests to determine if the sounds on the tape were positively gunshots, not other "electrical impulses produced internally by the DPD (Dallas Police Department) radio system."

The FBI said its extensive tests, conducted over a nine-month period, indicated that the acoustics experts had not proven either premise.

In an effort to determine if the tape could have recorded sounds coming from somewhere other than Dealey Plaza, the FBI's signal analysis unit, compared the recorded sound impulses from the Dallas tape to impulses found on recordings of the recent shootings of five Communists in Greensboro, N.C. and found the impulses were similar. That proved, the FBI said, the sounds on the 1963 tape were not unique to Dealey Plaza.

While it appeared that the comparison of the Dallas tape and the Greensboro tape, which was recorded by television cameramen who witnessed the event, might indicate that the similar sounds heard on both tapes were gunshots, the FBI said separate tests indicated the sounds on the Dallas tape could have been gunshots or electrical impulses internally produced by the DPD radio.

"Since both necessary premises were not proven by Bolt Beranek and Newman, Inc., Mark R. Weiss, and Ernest Aschkenasy (the acoustical experts who testified before the House committee), then their findings must be considered invalid. They neither proved that the impulses on the DPD recording were generated within Dealey Plaza nor that they were the sounds of gunshots," the FBI concluded.

"Therefore, the committee's finding that 'scientific acoustical evidence establishes a high probability that two gunmen fired at President John F. Kennedy' is also invalid," the FBI said.

The FBI said it has the necessary expertise to conduct further, more sophisticated tests on the Dallas tape, but did not recommend such a study because "it would take at least two to three years, require 10 to 12 man-years of work, cost in excess of \$1 million" and is not likely to "produce valid results."

A separate study of the controversial tape is being conducted by the National Academy of Sciences and is expected to be completed early next year. Six scientific experts in such fields as acoustics, ballistics and audio recordings, whose names have not been revealed, are conducting the study which is being funded by a \$23,360 grant from the National Science Foundation.

Rep. Louis Stokes, D-Ohio, who served as chairman of the assassinations panel, said he was disappointed the FBI did not conduct its own scientific analysis of the recording.

Stokes said he had asked the committee's scientists to review the FBI report, and, "Meanwhile, I will put my faith and credit by whatever report is made by the National Academy of Sciences — I'll rely on that."