

New Report Shows Doubts

On Second JFK Gunman

3/16/74
By Jeremiah O'Leary
Washington Star Staff Writer

The final report by House Assassinations Committee acoustics experts shows that they now have substantial doubts about their earlier conclusion that a second gunman fired a shot at President Kennedy in Dallas.

The report, to be released March 30 with the panel's comprehensive report on the murders of Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., contains some language that one committee member said can only be described as "waffling."

The report by scientists Mark R. Weiss and Ernest Aschenasy also contains inconclusive deductions and alternative possibilities to the second gunman theory that apparently dilute considerably their testimony last December. Acting on the basis of the Weiss-Aschenasy testimony and

other evidence, the committee announced that it was probable there was a second gunman firing from a grassy knoll, and therefore a conspiracy to kill the president.

Since then the 12-member committee has received dissents to the panel's conclusions on a variety of grounds from half of the panel membership. Concurring reports have been submitted by five committee members.

IN THEIR extended report to the committee, a copy of which was obtained by The Washington Star, the scientists said the Dallas Police Department radio dispatching system which picked up the sounds from a mobile transmitter at the time of the Kennedy assassination, was not designed to handle the intense sounds of a gunshot and is likely to have recorded such sounds with very poor fidelity.

"Consequently, it is possible that these static-like sounds are distorted gunshot sounds," they wrote. "On the other hand, they could have been generated by a number of other sources, some acoustic, some related to electrical or mechanical disturbances in the DPD radio transmission reception or recording equipment."

"The DPD recording contains a wide variety of sounds — speech, clicks, whistles, motor noises, sirens and even the sound of a carillon bell. If the microphone was on a Dallas Police motorcycle in the motorcade, most of the very weak echoes of the muzzle blast would have been obscured by the noise of the motorcycle engine."

See JFK, A-9

JFK

Continued From A-1

"While it is possible that the impulse noises are the distorted sounds of a gunshot, it is also possible that they could have been generated in other ways. For example, they could be the sounds of misfiring of the motorcycle engine. They could be static-like impulse noises generated by the motorcycle's ignition system and picked up by the transmitter."

"The microphone that was stuck on the 'on' position could itself have been the cause of the impulses if from time to time it became unstuck and turned off briefly and then immediately was turned on again. Impulse noises audible in the recording could also have been due to scratches in the Dictabelt on which the recording was made. Other components of the communication system could have been malfunctioning, producing electrical or mechanical disturbances that would have been recorded as clicks."

WEISS AND Aschenasy said that if a gun was fired from the grassy knoll during the assassination, it could have been either a rifle or a pistol since the target would have been less than 150 feet away.

There is no recollection that when Weiss and Aschenasy gave their dramatic testimony in December about the possibility of a second gunman they made any mention of a pistol.

Their testimony was that a rifle, firing supersonic bullets, must have been used by the second gunman. Skeptics, including members of the committee, also were troubled by the imprecision of the scientists' information about where the motorcycle with the stuck transmitter was, about the so-called eyewitness and earwitness recollections of where they thought the shots came from, and about a variation of as much as 25 feet in the position from which the second gunman was supposed to have fired.

Some of the hundreds of people in Dealey Plaza when Kennedy was killed heard shots from behind the motorcade in the Texas Schoolbook Depository, but others thought the sounds may have come from the knoll.

No one was ever found by the FBI or police who may have had a weapon ahead of the Kennedy motorcade on the knoll, but Lee Harvey Oswald's rifle and three empty cartridge cases were found on the sixth floor of the school book depository building.

"It is uncertain where the Dallas Police shooter (in acoustics tests made in Dealey Plaza) stood at each shot fired from the grassy knoll," the scientists wrote. "Consequently, it is likely that the gun and the microphone locations that were used for the echo-delay time predictions are slightly in error. . . . They said that the assumed location was suffi-

ciently accurate for the purpose of this test. But the scientists also pointed out that the Dallas police recorder was running slow when the recording was made. Before the test measurements could be used, they added, they had to be multiplied by a time-correction factor to correct for an error in the speed of the DPD recording.

"The high degree of correlation between the impulse and echo sequences does not preclude the possibility that the impulses are not the sounds of a gunshot," the scientists said. "It is conceivable that a sequence of impulse sounds, derived from non-gunshot sources, was generated with time spacings that by chance corresponded within one one-thousandth of a second to those echoes of a gunshot fired from the grassy knoll. The probability of such a chance occurrence is about 5 percent. . . . The probability is 95 percent or more that the impulses and echoes have the same source — a gunshot from the grassy knoll."

THE COMMITTEE'S conclusion, based on the 11th-hour testimony of the acoustics experts in December, was that four shots were fired at Kennedy, the first from the schoolbook depository by Oswald missing its target, the second also from the depository wounding both Kennedy and Texas Gov. John B. Connally, the third from the grassy knoll missed and the fourth from the school book depository inflicting Kennedy's fatal head wound.

It was on the basis of this testimony at the last public hearing of the panel that Chairman Louis Stokes, D-Ohio announced the probability of a second gunman and therefore a conspiracy to kill Kennedy.

But since then the dissents have all but turned the committee around. If Rep. Stewart McKinney, R-Conn., who is out of town, also dissents, a majority will be in disagreement with the conclusion.

2D-GUN VIEW GAINS IN KENNEDY KILLING

2 Acoustics Experts Firm in Draft
of Final House Panel Report

P. 6 — 3/17/79
WASHINGTON, March 16 (AP) — In a draft of the House assassination committee's final report, two acoustics experts stand by their assertion of a 95 percent likelihood that a second gunman fired at President Kennedy on Nov. 22, 1963.

Several of the 11 committee members have said they disagree with that conclusion, even though the acoustics finding contributed in large part to the panel's earlier assertion that Mr. Kennedy "probably" was the victim of a conspiracy.

In the draft of the final report, released today, the two experts, Mark R. Weiss and Ernest Aschkenasy, emphasized that the 95 percent likelihood of a second gunman also meant that there was about a 5 percent chance that the suspected gunshot sound, unaccounted for earlier, was only a motorcycle backfire or some other noise.

In a rare public response today, G. Robert Blakey, the chief counsel of the House Select Committee on Assassinations, said "it is not true" that the two experts had backed off in any way from their conclusion. "Everything we've had since their testimony tends to confirm it," he said.

The draft report also says that immediately after the assassination the President's brother Robert suspected that Jimmy Hoffa, former president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, might have been involved.

"The committee learned that Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy and White House Chief of Staff Kenneth O'Donnell contacted several associates about the possibility of teamsters union or organized crime involvement," the draft report said.

However, House investigators have no direct evidence that either Mr. Hoffa or mob leaders conspired to assassinate the President, according to the draft material.

Robert Kennedy was himself slain at a Los Angeles hotel in June 1968. Sirhan B. Sirhan, a Palestinian immigrant, is serving a life term for Robert Kennedy's slaying. Mr. Hoffa disappeared on July 30, 1975 and has not been seen since.