

Art Pence, a competition firearms expert, told the author, "If a 6.5mm bullet struck a hard tree branch, it could tear itself apart by its own rotational speed. It would then fragment, with maybe the largest fragment, the tip, being up to one third of the bullet, flying off. And if the tree was oak"—it was—"it has tremendous compressive strength, and the wood could easily suffer less damage than the bullet that hit it."

"When the lead core separates from the jacket, the core fragment is compact, and more aerodynamically stable, and tends to follow a straight course, whereas the jacket is light and will be very destabilized."³⁸

What is likely is that after the bullet fragmented against a tree branch, the stable lead core remained in a straight line from the Depository and struck the curb, over five hundred feet away. The destabilized copper jacket hit the pavement, giving Virgie Rachley the impression of sparks. Neither fragment was ever recovered.**

If the first shot was near frame 160 and the third one at 313, when was the middle shot? And was it possible for that second bullet to have caused both the President's neck wound and all the governor's wounds, the so-called "single-bullet theory"?

On an unenhanced version of the Zapruder film, when the presidential car emerges from behind the road sign at frame 225, President Kennedy's right arm appears to be rising in response to a bullet wound. Governor Connally does not appear to show any reaction to his wounds until his mouth opens at frame 235. That

*When Dr. John Lattimer performed shooting experiments with the same 6.5mm ammunition as that used by Oswald, he discovered that the lead core "often" separated from the jacket.

**There is a photograph of deputy sheriff Buddy Walthers, crouching over a manhole cover in Dealey Plaza, and this led to speculation that another bullet was found. But Walthers denied he ever found or saw any bullet fragment. What he did find was a small bone fragment, part of the President's skull (Sheriff Jim Bowles, interviewed by author, March 1992; Gus Rose, interviewed by Earl Golz, undated).

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"small objects, and ricochet for no apparent reason except they hit and all the pressures are in on one side and it turns the bullet and it goes off at an angle. . . . There may have been a shot which deflected from a limb or for some other reason and was never discovered."²⁷ But the Commission never studied the large oak tree that blocked the sniper's view for almost 2.5 seconds—a simple examination might have revealed if a bullet had struck a limb.*

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While the main part of the tree blocked Oswald's view after frame 166, some branches impeded his sight before that. They are evident in photos taken by the Warren Commission in 1964. Robert Kraus, a firearms expert, told the author, "The bullet definitely could have hit something, especially if you are firing close to a tree. Tests have been run over the years, by shooting bullets into baffle boxes into branches, and almost every type of bullet, whether heavy or not, is deflected even by grazing a tree branch. The bullet could have grazed it and put a groove in the branch, or could have drilled right through it without knocking the branch off. Remember, trees aren't brittle, they are living things. If it hit the branch head-on it might have separated the bullet from the jacket."²⁸

Virgie Rachley worked at the Book Depository and watched the motorcade from its front steps. Just after the car passed, she heard the first noise and "I saw a shot or something hit the pavement. . . . It looked just like you could see the sparks from it and I just thought it was a firecracker . . ."²⁹ Whatever it was, she was certain she saw it before she heard a second shot.³⁰

Five hundred and twenty feet from the Book Depository, in a straight line from the sniper's nest and the tree, James Tague had stopped his car and was standing under the southern end of the Triple Underpass. After the assassination, a deputy sheriff, Buddy Walthers, asked him why he had blood on his face.³¹ "I remembered something had stung me during the shooting," recalls Tague. "And he said, 'Where were you standing?' And I

*A tall streetlamp also temporarily blocked Oswald's view after the limousine turned the corner. However, it is unlikely that the first shot hit it, since none of the witnesses recall the sound of a bullet striking metal.

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