

**POSNER'S SINGLE BULLET THEORY  
OR  
HOW TO IGNORE THE FACTS WHEN YOU REALLY TRY**

By J. Gary Shaw --Copyright, November 1993

In his book Case Closed, and its U.S. News and World Report excerpt, Author Gerald Posner attempts to prove that the single bullet theory is correct and that "conspiracy theorists" are wrong in their contention that one bullet could not have caused the seven wounds to the two men, President Kennedy and Governor Connally. Posner calls his reconstruction of the theory "the shattered myth." In reality, what Posner has created is his own version of the magic bullet myth. He has done so by perverting the evidence while parroting the fraudulent Warren Commission "lone gunman" parody. He has also, quite successfully, created his own "masterful myth." The following is a summary of some of the flaws and fallacies of that myth:

Posner's - "The shattered myth"<sup>1</sup>

Posner: "Oswald's second shot, the first to strike [occupants of the limousine]..."

Here, Posner, in a giant leap of faith, makes the assumption that Oswald was the shooter--the only shooter--and that his first shot missed. Truth is, there is very little--if any--solid, uncontested evidence to support these assumptions.

Posner: "Its [Posner's second shot] trajectory, based on the Failure Analysis computations and the Zapruder film is reconstructed here."

In his book, Posner refers often to this study by Failure Analysis Associates, a firm commissioned by the American Bar Association to reconstruct the assassination for its 1992 mock trial of Lee Harvey Oswald. Using computer enhancements, Failure Analysis provided evidence and expert testimony for both the prosecution and the defense. Drawing only from the prosecution's case, Posner neglects to tell the reader that Failure Analysis' CEO, Roger McCarthy, testifying for the defense, provided what the trial's host portrayed as "a compelling argument" for more than one gunman. According to McCarthy, the shooter "gave up some awfully good shots to take some awfully bad shots" in order to allow "the quarry into a second shooting" by another gunman. The trial's host further reported that "...no one, not even Failure Analysis, is ready to say conclusively who killed President Kennedy." The mock trial ended in a hung jury--a significant fact which Posner purposely, and prejudicially, fails to mention.<sup>2</sup>

"KENNEDY [WOUNDING]"

Posner: "Bullet speed 1,700-1,800 feet per second"

This estimate of the bullet's velocity at first impact is acceptable.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. News & World Report, Aug. 30/Sept. 6, 1993, p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> San Francisco Chronicle, "Assassination Enigma Never Ends," by Patricia Holt, Sept. 6, 1993.

**Posner: "Entry wound in back 6.5 mm in diameter"**

The wound in the President's back was not 6.5 mm in diameter. Though originally reported by the Bethesda pathologists to be 7 x 4 mm,<sup>3</sup> it was actually much larger. The HSCA medical panel determined the wound to be irregular shaped and 9 x 9 mm (3/8" X 3/8") in size.<sup>4</sup> This size is confirmed by the fact that one of the pathologists at Bethesda probed the wound with his finger.<sup>5</sup> Posner fails to inform the reader of the fact that the only people to see, and probe, this wound stated that the bullet entered the back at a downward angle of 45 to 60 degrees (and, had "...no point of exit").<sup>6</sup> This is an impossible trajectory for a shot from the TSB's 6th Floor southeast-corner window at Z-Frames 223-4, which was an angle of only about 20 degrees.<sup>7</sup> Posner's computer-generated drawing negligently omits all mention of angles of trajectory (see Posner's "View from above" below).

**Posner: "Bullet grazed tip of a vertebra in the neck, slightly splintering the bone."**

Complete speculation. The only firm evidence in the record of a bullet having entered the back located the wound near the third thoracic vertebra—several inches lower than Posner's reconstruction—and nowhere near his "vertebra in the neck" assertion.<sup>8</sup>

**Posner: "Cavity momentarily caused by bullet's passage."**

Hypothetical. The bullet may very well have caused such a cavity, but there is no evidence for such an occurrence in the record.

**Posner: "Exit wound in throat"**

False. The only witnesses to view this wound prior to its being altered by surgery have stated on record and under oath that this was a wound of "entry," or "puncture,"<sup>9</sup> and that the bullet came at the President from the front. The wound was described as being 5 mm in diameter, and consistent with

<sup>3</sup> CE 397, p. 45 (Autopsy Face Sheet)

<sup>4</sup> VII HSCA 85.

<sup>5</sup> CD 7 (Sibert-O'Neill report).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> CE 894 & 896.

<sup>8</sup> Page 2 of the official "Certificate of Death," (Signed by Dr. Burkley, the President's chief physician).

The HSCA medical panel, with access only to photographs, noted that "The original Pathologist's localization of this wound by measurement to body landmarks which change with different body positions, and their failure to localize this wound relative to usually accepted fixed body landmarks such as the heel, preclude reconstruction of the exact entrance point." (VII HSCA 87) Therefore, the only accurate and verifiable localization of this wound is that which is reported in the death certificate and verified by the President's chief physician: "...at about the level of the third thoracic vertebra."

<sup>9</sup> See David Lifton's *Best Evidence*, pp.55-69.

a wound of entry.<sup>10</sup> There is absolutely no uncontroverted evidence that the throat wound was one of "exit" as Posner states here.

Posner: "By frame 226 the President began to show a neurological reflex—known as the Thorburn position<sup>11</sup>—to spinal injury. His arms jerked up to a fixed position, hands nearly at his chin, elbows pushed out."

Complete speculation. First of all, the "spinal injury," as seen on the x-ray, occurred at the sixth cervical process,<sup>12</sup> several inches higher than the back wound's "official" point of entrance, near the third thoracic vertebra. Perhaps a better hypothesis would be that the damage to the cervical process was caused by a bullet which struck the President in the throat—from the front. The projectile was then stopped by the hard, gristly area at the rear of the President's neck, causing the damage to the cervical process. This would not be an unusual occurrence. In fact, a similar condition is seen with the wound suffered by Dr. Martin Luther King. In Dr. King's case, a larger and faster bullet (.30-06) than the 6.5-mm cartridge entered near his chin "with a total transection of the lower cervical and thoracic spinal cord and other structure of the neck."<sup>13</sup> The spent bullet was recovered lodged just "beneath the skin near the shoulder blade on the left."<sup>14</sup> It is noteworthy that military snipers are taught to aim for this particular point of the human anatomy. It is called "Crossing the T," and is considered to be one of the deadliest of kill shots.<sup>15</sup>

With this as an alternate hypothesis, Posner's highly speculative "neurological reflex" and "Thorburn position" suppositions become moot points.

Such a hypothesis would also help explain the mysterious "butchery" performed on the President's throat following his departure from Parkland Hospital.<sup>16</sup>

Posner: "Bullet tumbling"

Again complete speculation. This statement assumes that the bullet which struck Kennedy is the same bullet which wounded Connally, and that the missile's passage through the President caused it to begin a "tumbling" action upon exiting his throat. There is no factual evidence that such action occurred.

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<sup>10</sup> III WC 388.

<sup>11</sup> The medical term given to the instantaneous reaction experienced by some victims of spinal injury. It is said to result in the victim's arms being jerked upward into a fixed position. According to Posner, this is what occurred to the President, who would then be unable to lower his arms until his neural control centers were destroyed by the head shot. Of course, the Zapruder film demolishes this theory as President Kennedy's arms can be seen coming down by approximately 45 degrees before he receives the fatal head shot.

<sup>12</sup> VII HSCA 98, Figure 11.

<sup>13</sup> Newton, Michael, The King Conspiracy, p. 67.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>15</sup> Conversation with former Marine sniper Craig Roberts (Vietnam, 18 confirmed kills), co-author with Charles W. Sasser of One Shot-One Kill.

<sup>16</sup> See David Lifton's Best Evidence, pp. 271-294.

**"CONNALLY [WOUNDING]"**

Posner: [Bullet speed] "1,500-1,600 feet per second"

Again, Posner attempts to mislead the reader with his speculation that the bullet first hit Kennedy, thereby, decreasing the bullet's velocity by 200 feet per second. This "theory of decreased velocity," of course, is crucial to Warren Commission apologists in attempting to resolve the troubling "pristine bullet"<sup>17</sup> question.

Posner: "Entry wound in right shoulder was 1-1/4" long—the exact length of the bullet—indicating the bullet was tumbling end over end."

False. This wound was oval-shaped 0.8 x 1.5 cm (5/16" x 19/32") and was, according to Connally's attending physician, Dr. Robert Shaw, "...a puncture type wound, as if a bullet had struck the body at a slight declination [i.e., not at a right angle]." The wound edges were surgically cut away, effectively enlarging the wound, and then sutured. It is only the Governor's post-operative scar was 1-1/8" long.<sup>18</sup> This is apparently where Posner derived his erroneous "1-1/4" long" wound.

Posner: "Traverses chest and shatters right fifth rib"

Correct. But Posner fails to note that the bullet was determined to have traversed Connally's body at a 10 degree downward angle,<sup>19</sup> which is totally inconsistent with the 45 to 60 degree downward trajectory of the bullet which struck Kennedy in the back. This fact alone destroys Posner's fabricated straight-line trajectory reconstruction.

Posner: "Exit wound below the right nipple was large—nearly 2 inches in diameter—and ragged; the bullet was still tumbling"

Correct, except for the speculation that the bullet was "tumbling" on its path through Connally's body. It may have been. However, a mutilated, fragmented, or mushroomed bullet can, and often does, propel bone and tissue along its path which can also create an exit wound such as the one described.

<sup>17</sup> The term "pristine bullet," as we all know, is somewhat of a misnomer. That bullet CE 399 is slightly "flattened" is unquestioned. Posner, of course, contends that this minor mutilation is the result of the decreased bullet velocity which he says occurred in connection with the multiple wounds experienced by the two victims. However, Posner himself calls this scenario into question with his theory that the first shot missed because the bullet hit a tree branch and "fragmented" (p. 326). Contrasting this bit of theorizing with his hypothesis that a bullet which struck both a rib and wrist had remained completely intact and only slightly mutilated, is extremely puzzling.

Following this inconsistent speculation, Posner further muddles the issue by noting that test bullets which were fired into two different species of wood were recovered "undamaged." (p. 335) Again, however, had he inquired a little more, he could have learned of tests in which the same type bullet, when fired into a stack of newspapers, generated a totally different result; the bullets recovered were badly mutilated.

It stands to reason then, that the only conclusion which may be drawn from these variant test results is that they are invalid and have absolutely no value with regard to a simulation of the single bullet theory. The only valid test is one which will replicate and duplicate the accumulative effect that occurs to a bullet when it produces seven wounds to two men as argued by single bullet theory proponents. All other "tests" are fruitless and irrelevant.

<sup>18</sup> VII HSCA 142-143.

<sup>19</sup> VII HSCA 152.

Posner: [Bullet speed] "900 feet per second"

Here, Posner selectively decreases the velocity of the bullet by 600-700 feet per second upon passing through Connally's chest. However, actual ballistic tests have determined that a 6.5-mm bullet would experience only a 21 percent reduction in velocity when effecting a wound such as that suffered by the Governor.<sup>20</sup> This means a decrease in velocity of only 315-330 feet per second, or a continued velocity of 1185-1270 feet per second, not the 900 feet per second speed Posner erroneously postulates.

Posner: "Entry wound at top of right wrist was ragged and irregular. The bullet, now traveling backward, fractured the radius bone."

Correct, except for the bullet "traveling backward." This is complete speculation based on absolutely no evidence. The wound could also be said to be typical of one caused by a mutilated, fragmented, or mushroomed bullet.

Posner: "[Bullet speed] "400 feet per second"

Here, Posner continues his assumption of the bullet's velocity having been slowed upon previously passing through the bodies of the President and the Governor. Then, in arbitrary fashion, Posner further reduces the bullet's velocity by 500 feet per second upon exiting Connally's wrist. It should be noted, however, that tests have shown that a 6.5-mm bullet lost less than 5 percent of its original velocity when fired through the wrist of a human cadaver.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, even while using Posner's hypothetical and erroneous 900 feet per second as the bullet's velocity upon exiting Connally's wrist, the bullet would still be traveling at a speed of about 855 feet per second—the equivalent of the muzzle velocity of a .38 Special handgun bullet.<sup>22</sup> When Ruby shot Oswald with a similar weapon, the bullet passed almost completely through the accused assassin's body. It stands to reason, then, that a bullet traveling at such speed would, in all likelihood, have passed completely through Connally's thigh. It would not, as Posner contends, have been "...just able to penetrate skin." (See below).

Posner: "When the bullet came to rest in Connally's left thigh, having lost more than 80 percent of its velocity, it was just able to penetrate skin."

As noted above, this is complete speculation. It is based on assumption and error. The exact nature and cause of Connally's thigh wound is still in question. Posner's statement that the bullet had

<sup>20</sup> *Edgewood Arsenal Report on Wound Ballistics of 6.5-mm Mannlicher-Carcano Ammunition*, pp. 15-16. In the tests, bullets with an average striking velocity of 1,900 feet per second were fired into the carcass of a "freshly-killed" goat. The report states that "[i]n only one animal...did the bullet strike and pass along the rib in a manner similar to the one that wounded Governor Connally..." and that the "...pristine bullet that struck the goat lost 265 ft/sec velocity in passing through the animal. The bullet that struck the Governor, if pristine, would have lost about 400 ft/sec velocity because of the thicker torso."

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14. In this study, "amputated arms from human cadavers were used in an attempt to simulate the wrist wound received by Governor Connally." The "average striking velocity" of the bullets, which were fired from a distance of 70 yards, was determined to be "1,858 ft/sec." Upon exiting the wrist, the bullet had an "average velocity loss" of "only 82 ft/sec."

<sup>22</sup> 1963 *Gun Digest*, p. 293.

"lost more than 80 percent of its velocity" has already been shown to be erroneous in the the preceding paragraphs. The actual loss of velocity for Posner's single bullet hypothesis would be closer to 50 percent—not 80.

There is a reasonable, alternative explanation for the type of wound Connally suffered to his left thigh. Upon striking dense material, i.e. a rib and/or wrist bone, a bullet will often break apart. The resultant fragments will continue on, but may be deflected in various angles. The velocity of these projectiles may also be greatly diminished. If this occurred with the Governor, which is highly probable, and a large fragment had exited from his chest or wrist and struck him in the leg, it could have caused a wound such as the one described to the Governor's thigh. A large, flattened or mushroomed fragment, with a greatly diminished velocity, could cause a large, shallow, entry hole. It would also be possible for a small piece of metal from that fragment to have sloughed-off upon impact. Because of its smaller size, this piece would have penetrated farther into the flesh than its much larger counterpart. This is not an unusual or unheard-of occurrence with gunshot wounds. Such an hypothesis could also account for the inconsistency of a very small fragment, which was reportedly buried deep in the governor's leg, having been found beneath such a large entry hole in the Governor's thigh.

Of course, Posner never addresses the issue of how such a small fragment, reported to be approximately 1.5 mm wide at its greatest width and 2 mm. in length<sup>23</sup> (or, about 1/16" X 3/32"), could create such a large entry wound, described as being 1 cm.<sup>24</sup> (or, about 3/8" in diameter)—at least thirty-three times larger than the small fragment. Certainly an unmutated 6.5mm (1/4") projectile could not cause a 1 cm (3/8") wound.

Therefore the only feasible explanation for this wound is that it was caused by a badly mutilated and/or mushroomed projectile. Where is this badly mutilated projectile?

The answer to this question may lie in a recent disclosure by Governor Connally; one which seems to shed new light on the entire single bullet issue. As is well known, both the Governor and his wife have, through the years, consistently and emphatically dismissed the idea of his having been struck by the same bullet that hit the President. Recently, the Governor has "dropped the other shoe"—so to speak—regarding the single bullet question. In an excerpt from his recently released biography, he casts further doubt and suspicion on the authenticity of the so-called "magic bullet." He writes:

"...the most curious discovery of all took place when they rolled me off the stretcher and onto the examining table. A metal object fell to the floor, with a click no louder than a wedding band. The nurse picked it up and slipped it into her pocket. It was the bullet from my body, the one that passed through my back, chest, and wrist, and worked itself loose from my thigh." (Emphasis added)<sup>25</sup>

That this episode, as described by the Governor, did, in fact occur, appears to be confirmed during the testimony of Parkland Hospital Nurse Jeanette Standridge<sup>26</sup>. Ms. Standridge, the charge nurse in major surgery, assisted in removing Governor Connally's clothes upon his being brought into Trauma

<sup>23</sup> VII HSCA 162

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>25</sup> See "I Knew I Had Been Hit," by John Connally with Mickey Herskowitz, *Texas Monthly*, Oct. 1993, p.203.

<sup>26</sup> Nurse Standridge, the wife of a Dallas policeman in 1963, is, unfortunately, deceased, and cannot be questioned about her intriguing Warren Commission testimony.

Room 2 for emergency treatment. In her testimony, Ms. Standridge had the following exchange with Warren Commission counsel Allen Spector:

"Mr. Spector: Did you notice any object in Governor Connally's clothing?  
 Miss Standridge: Not unusual.  
 Mr. Spector: Did you notice a bullet, specifically?  
 Miss Standridge: No.  
 Mr. Spector: Did you hear the sound of anything fall?  
 Miss Standridge: I didn't."<sup>27</sup>

Governor Connally's revelation that a bullet had fallen from his stretcher while he was in Trauma Room 2 is suspicious in itself. That the Warren Commission knew of, and concealed, this incident, is not only suspicious, it is outright criminal. If the Governor's account is true, and there is no reason to doubt that it isn't, then the presence of this hitherto unreported bullet completely destroys the authenticity, credibility, and validity of the mysterious 6.5-mm Carcano "Oswald" bullet which was reportedly found and turned over to authorities by Parkland Hospital engineer Darrell Tomlinson. It also destroys the Government's, and Posner's, single bullet theory, and raises sinister implications about their "lone-nut" predilection.

#### Posner's - "View from above"<sup>28</sup>

Posner: "The trajectory, plotted in accordance with the exact (emphasis added) postures of both men, was not significantly altered until the bullet was slightly deflected by Connally's rib."

Here, Posner's computer-generated graphic portrays Connally to be leaning far to his left while turning slightly to his right. It is an attempt to align the bodies of the two victims in a manner consistent with Posner's own straight-line theory of trajectory. It is erroneous and misleading. It is also in conflict with the photographic evidence. Connally, at Z-Frame 224 is nowhere near the position portrayed in the graphic. Furthermore, since Posner has chosen to omit all references to the various angles of trajectory for this miraculous bullet, his graphic cannot really be defined as a "plotted trajectory"--and it is certainly not "exact."

#### Posner's - "Flip" Flap

Posner places great emphasis on the sudden movement of Governor Connally's coat lapel and hat as seen in Z-Frames 224 and following. Using these movements as solid evidence of a bullet having passed through the Governor at this exact moment, he writes:

Posner: "At 224, the right front of the Governor's suit lapel flips up from his chest."<sup>29</sup>

No argument here. The lapel does "flip."

Posner: "A film enhancement of that same frame shows that the Governor's light-colored Stetson hat, which

<sup>27</sup> VI WC 117.

<sup>28</sup> U.S. News & World Report, Aug. 30/Sept. 6, 1993, p. 94.

<sup>29</sup> Case Closed, p. 329.

he was holding in his right hand, near his chest, started rising. It flipped quickly up during frames 227 and 228 and then at 229 it started coming down rapidly...<sup>30</sup>

Again, no argument. The hat is "flipped quickly up" at these frames.

However, are these sudden movements of the Governor's coat lapel and hat the solid evidence of a shot Posner would have us believe? Or, is there another, more reasonable explanation for this occurrence? Most definitely! Anyone who has ever attempted to wear—or carry, for that matter—a hat on a windy day knows that there is. And, as Posner himself acknowledges, there was a "stiff" north wind with gusts to 20 mile-per-hour during the motorcade.<sup>31</sup> (Note: At the time Zapruder was filming, the limousine was traveling in a westerly direction. Both the lapel and hat "flip" in a southerly direction.)

Also, the very fact that Connally continues to remain fully upright after Z Frame 224, and does so for a period of more than three seconds (until Z-Frame 289) before he finally begins to crumple and fall toward his wife, is strong evidence that he has not been hit. During this three second period, the Governor was able to maintain his hold on the Stetson hat and turn almost completely around in his seat to face the President—a clear indication he has not suffered the hammer-like blow which would be delivered by a bullet to his back. These movements by the Governor, while showing no trauma whatsoever, is sufficient proof that a bullet through his chest was not the cause of the lapel and hat flips.

Posner is neither blind nor stupid. He had to have taken note of Connally's total lack of traumatic reaction—for three full seconds—to an alleged shot at Z-224. This appears to leave only one alternative explanation for Posner's blatant exercise in misinformation: to deceive the American people. The ulterior motive behind this deceitful action bears further scrutiny.

#### Posner's "The [trajectory] cone[s]"<sup>32</sup>

Posner: "Using computer enhancements of the Zapruder film, Failure Analysis Associates calculated the trajectories of the two bullets that struck their target." The result of these calculations, after having worked "backward, and allowing for a margin of error..." and with a computer having "...calculated a line through the entrance and exit wounds..." then the "...trajectories could then be splayed into..." cones. These "cones," according to Posner, provide us with the origin of the shots—the 6th Floor southeast-corner window of the Depository.

Simply put, if Posner had been honest, he would have admitted that the only "official" angle of trajectory for a bullet fired into the President's back was the 45 to 60 degrees downward angle reported by the Bethesda pathologists. In doing so, though, his resultant "cone" calculations at Z-224 would have provided a trajectory for a shot which could only have originated from high overhead, and, therefore, totally inconsistent with a shot from any of the buildings surrounding Dealey Plaza. Perhaps Posner, in his diabolical attempt to make Oswald the lone and unaided assassin, should have considered having him shoot at the President from a hovering helicopter.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 330.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>32</sup> *U.S. News & World Report*, Aug. 30/Sept 6, 1993, pp. 90-91.



With his single-bullet-theory reconstruction, Posner: ignores and/or distorts the unwavering testimonies of Governor and Mrs. Connally; misrepresents portions of the photographic evidence; erroneously reports key points of the medical findings; fabricates the bullet trajectory; and, manipulates the ballistics evidence. Together, when properly analyzed, these evidentiary elements clearly demonstrate that:

- (1) Kennedy was hit in the upper back, not the neck; and the angle of trajectory for this wound is inconsistent with any version of the single bullet theory.
- (2) The President was shot in the neck from the front; an impossible shot from the so-called "Oswald window" to the rear.
- (3) Governor Connally was un-injured and remained in a fully upright position for three seconds after both he and the President are alleged to have received their wounds; an impossibility for anyone who has, according to the single bullet theory, already received major gunshot wounds to their upper body.

Posner's approach to the Kennedy assassination is simply an updated, 1990's version of the Warren Commission's "one-nut" scenario. His heavily-flawed application of computer-generated information and images in attempting to reconstruct the shooting is a perfect example of the old computer adage... "garbage in, garbage out." This new, revisionist version of the single bullet theory is analogous to the old, farcical, "Jack-leg" builder's standard specifications: "Cut to suit, bear to fit, paint to match."

Is the case closed? If Posner's erroneous, illogical, and misguided work is representative of the best the "other side" has to offer, then this case is far from closed—in fact, it is WIDE open.