

Origin of shot that killed King remains unverified by tests

By JIM ADAMS

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House assassinations committee was told yesterday that scientific tests failed to prove whether the bullet that killed Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. came from the window of a boarding house or the bushes below.

The panel heard the testimony as it prepared for today's appearance by James Earl Ray, who pleaded guilty to slaying King on April 4, 1968, while the civil rights leader stood on the balcony of a Memphis hotel across from the boarding house. Ray has since recanted his plea and now maintains he did not fire the shot that killed King.

In another development, civil rights leader Jesse Jackson, declaring that "Ray appears to be a small cog in a large wheel," asked the Justice Department to reopen its investigation into the assassination.

A rifle shot from the bushes would be a major contradiction of eyewitness testimony and the conclusion of Memphis police that Ray assassinated King with a rifle shot from the bathroom window of the boarding house.

The committee refused to say whether that question will be settled. But Rep. Samuel Devine, R-Ohio, said he thinks hearings scheduled for November will leave no doubt that the fatal shot came from the window.

Dr. Michael Baden, a spokesman for a team of committee pathology experts, testified that engineer measurements and a review of Dr. King's autopsy estab-

lished that the shot could have come from the window.

But he also told the panel that a shot from the bushes below would have been only 2 to 5 degrees lower, and that the experts could not establish the direction of the shot that precisely.

"At the moment of firing of the weapon the barrel of the gun had to be somewhat slightly upward from the chin," Baden said.

But he said King's head was down as he talked from the balcony of the Lorraine Motel to a follower below, and thus "upward" could have been the bushes as well as the boarding house window.

The pathologist said the autopsy and X-rays taken at the time clearly show the path the bullet took through Dr. King's cheek and neck and into his shoulder. He said the panel of experts was also able to establish from eyewitnesses King's position — leaning forward against the balcony talking to someone below.

Two engineers hired by the committee then measured the bullet's path through the body to determine where it came from, he said.

But Baden said that even if the experts had had a photograph showing King's precise position when he was shot, their measurements could not have proven whether the shot came from the bathroom window or the bushes.

To repeated questioning on that issue, Baden said the findings are consistent with the shot coming from the window but his experts

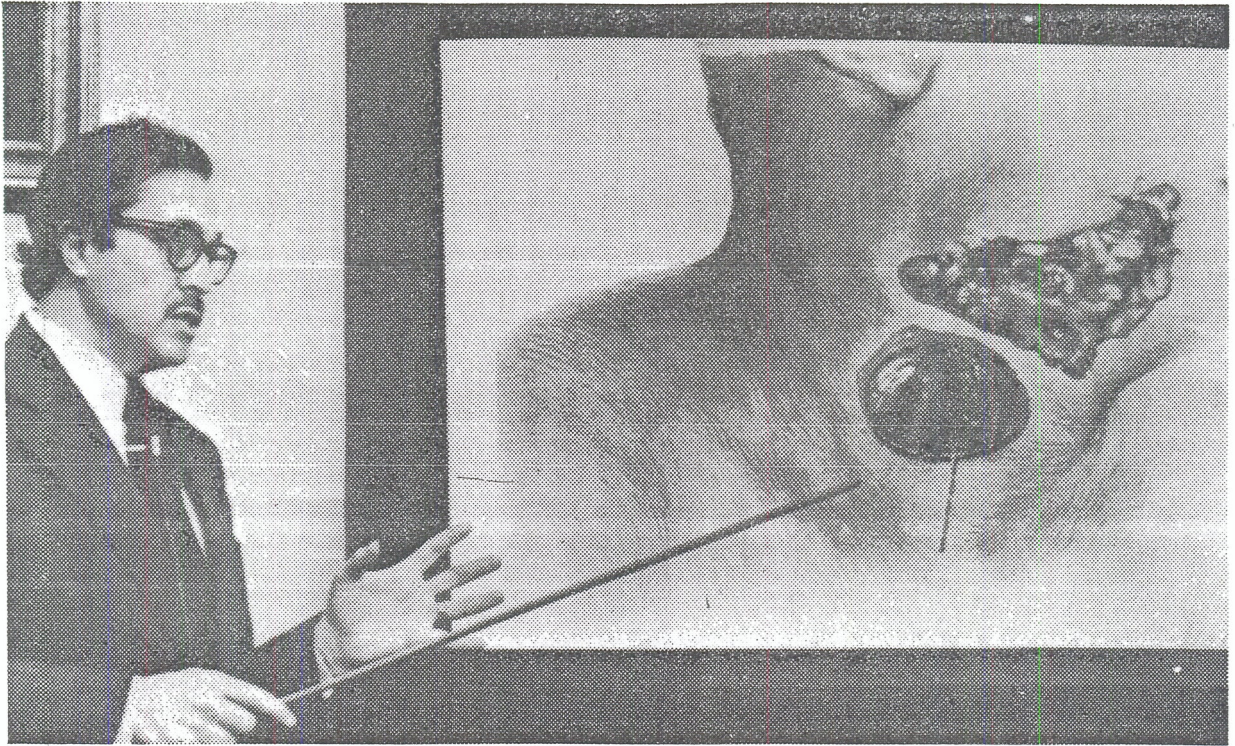
could not say for certain that it did.

Rep. Louis Stokes, D-Ohio, and the committee's chief counsel, G. Robert Blakey, refused to tell reporters whether the committee already has other evidence proving where the bullet came from.

But Devine, the committee's ranking Republican, said, "I think other testimony will remove any doubt that it came from the bathroom window."

A committee investigator, who did not want to be named, said one witness will testify someone ran from the bushes after the assassination. But he said other witnesses have been testifying since the time of the assassination that they saw a man come down the boarding house hall from the bathroom with a rifle after the assassination.

In asking for a new Justice Department investigation, Jackson said, "there is overwhelming circumstantial evidence that he {Ray} did not act alone." Jackson said one way to get at the truth would be a new trial for Ray.



Dr. Michael Baden, a New York medical examiner, describes the path of the bullet that killed Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Baden testified before the House Assassinations Committee yesterday in Washington. (AP)