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ASSASSINATION

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NEWS ANALYSIS

THE LONG TRAIL OF EVIDENCE POINTING TO A SECOND JFK ASSASSIN

By Peter Dale Scott
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(Peter Dale Scott, a professor of English at the University of California-Berkeley, has authored or edited numerous articles and books on covert politics, foreign and domestic, including most recently The Assassinations: Dallas and Beyond (Random House, 1976) and Crime and Cover-up (Westworks, 1977). He is one of the foremost independent researchers on the history of the Kennedy assassination.)

The conclusion of Congressional acoustics experts that shots were fired at President John F. Kennedy from more than one location provides the first scientific corroboration to the long-argued theory that a second gunman was involved in the Dallas murder. It also raises serious questions as to why the Warren Commission gave such scant attention to--or overlooked entirely--critical evidence contradicting the single assassin theory.

According to the Warren Commission, Lee Harvey Oswald fired three and only three shots from a location behind the President--the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository. Commission experts determined that Oswald could not have fired more than three shots at the President with the gun he used.

But new analysis of tapes recorded by the Dallas police at the time of the shooting has now led acoustics experts for the Congressional Subcommittee on Assassinations to conclude that a fourth shot was fired from a grassy knoll in front and to the right of the President.

The Commission, which examined only transcripts of the police tapes, had never analyzed the original recordings. According to independent researchers, the Commission investigators--who had already offended the highly sensitive Dallas police in preliminary interviews--were anxious to avoid further offense by demanding the original tapes instead of the transcripts.

From the start, however, the Commission was aware of other evidence which cast doubt on--if not completely refuted--the theory that only three bullets were fired, and all from the

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School Book Depository.

*Many, perhaps most, of the witnesses in Dealey Plaza who testified about the origin of the shots pointed not to the Book Depository but to some position further west, along the grassy knoll. One testified he had actually seen someone suspicious leaving the scene. And a Dallas policeman told the Commission he had met a man on the knoll who had identified himself as a Secret Service agent--although there were no Secret Service agents in the area.

*The three films taken by eyewitnesses of the incident confirmed that many bystanders--including a motorcycle policeman from the parade--ran up to the railway yard at the top of the knoll, immediately after the shooting.

*Orders by law enforcement officials recorded in the transcripts of the Dallas police tapes directed their men to the railroad yard and to the top of the triple underpass--points both farther west and in front of the President's cavalcade rather than to the rear and the area of the School Book Depository.

*Doctors who first treated the President at Parkland Hospital reported that he had been struck from the front by a bullet in the throat. Dr. Malcolm Perry, in sworn testimony supported by other doctors in the trauma room, told the Commission that the throat wound was "rather clean cut" and thus characteristic of an entrance wound rather than an exit wound.

In addition to these facts perhaps the most compelling evidence available to the Commission suggesting that more than three shots were fired was the existence of nine injuries resulting from the shootings: three to the President, five to Governor Connally and one to James Tague, a bystander.

The explanation evolved by the Warren Commission for how three bullets inflicted all nine wounds hinged on what critics have called the single bullet theory: one bullet accounted for seven wounds suffered by both the President and the governor. That bullet was allegedly recovered unscathed on a stretcher in Parkland Hospital where it had fallen out of Governor Connally's thigh.

But many experts have since questioned this theory, including Dr. Cyril Wecht, the coronor of Pittsburgh and a member of the panel of medical experts convened by the present House Committee. Wecht points, in particular, to the testimony of Connally, both immediately after the shooting and in subsequent interviews, that he was shot some time after the

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first bullet hit the President.

Connally's recollection is strongly corroborated by the famous Zapruder film, one of the three films taken by bystanders during the shooting, which shows the governor reacting to the impact of being shot not simultaneously but just after the President.

Besides challenging the "single bullet" theory, the Zapruder film also supplied visual evidence to corroborate those witnesses who claimed shots had been fired from the front rather than the rear of the President.

That evidence is the so-called head snap suffered by the President after the fatal shot which shattered his skull. Immediately after the 313th frame of the Zapruder film--where this shot clearly occurs--the President's head is unmistakably snapped with considerable energy to his left and rear, as if hit from the right and in front by a marksman standing somewhere on the grassy knoll. This head snap is so obvious on a reasonably good print of the film that its significance was brought to the attention of authorities by numerous citizens who saw it.

While the head snap of the Zapruder film indicated a frontal shot, the official autopsy report prepared by military doctors in Bethesda, Maryland--after the Parkland surgeons' preliminary examination--concluded the opposite. According to the Bethesda doctors, whose findings were subsequently accepted by both the Parkland doctors and the Warren Commission, Kennedy had been struck by two bullets from behind. Medical experts convened by the House Assassination Committee, in examining the medical evidence contained in the National Archives, had also concluded that it was incompatible with the theory of a frontal wound of entrance.

Since 1964, experts in fact have disagreed about the significance of the head snap and have put forward both ballistic and neuromuscular explanations to reconcile a snap to the rear with the theory of a shot from the rear.

Nonetheless, the fact that the Commission knew of the head snap yet never dealt with it reinforces questions about how open-endedly it pursued the possibility that a second gunman was involved, shooting from a position other than the School Book Depository.

In general, the Warren Commission's evasiveness concerning the case for a gunman on the grassy knoll may well have been counter-productive. Critics immediately asked why many witnesses had never been interviewed who in previous statements had supported the grassy

knoll theory. They attacked as misleading an Appendix to the Report which strengthened the case against Oswald by ruling out the possibility of a gunman on the railway bridge, without revealing that most of the witnesses it cited had actually argued in favor of a gunman on the grassy knoll. Allegations of an official cover-up in this area began within months of the publication in September 1964 of the Warren Report. They were strengthened as bootleg prints of the Zapruder film were screened, at first to college audiences but eventually on national television and to Congressmen and their staffs.

Meanwhile over the years assassination researchers listened carefully to private copies of the official tapes of the two Dallas police radio channels during the assassination. It was one of these tapes on which a researcher claimed to have detected as many as seven shots that was forwarded to the House Assassination Committee and its acoustics experts. Although this tape was eventually ruled to have no evidentiary value, the Committee's inquiries to the Dallas police department resulted in the provision of tapes and dictabelts of better quality for analysis.

It was from acoustical analysis of this material--analysis using simple and straightforward techniques available in 1963--that experts now have concluded, with 95 percent probability, that a shot was indeed fired from the grassy knoll.

Acceptance of this analysis may well represent the most powerful impact the science of acoustics has ever had on human history.

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