

Dallas 'sniper' scare at Ford motorcade

Associated Press

DALLAS — The window of a patrol car escorting Vice President Ford into Dallas was shattered yesterday, prompting a report by police — later denied — that the car had been fired on.

The Secret Service blamed heat expansion for the incident while state police tended to believe the window was shattered by a rock perhaps thrown up from the roadway by another car.

It was one of several conflicting reports about the incident that prompted President Nixon, in Key Biscayne, to call Ford to find out what was going on.

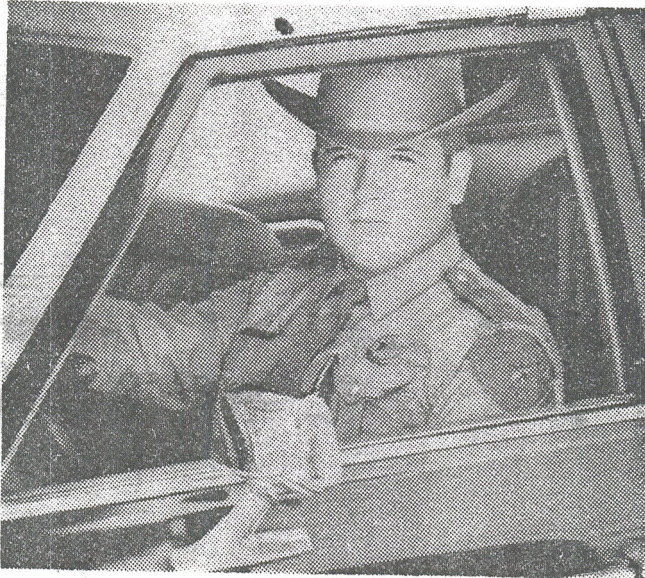
Ford was in Texas for dedication ceremonies at the Dallas World Trade Center, the same complex of buildings to which President Kennedy was headed when he was assassinated in 1963.

William A. Hawthorne, a Secret Service spokesman in Washington, said: "A complete examination of the area and of the vehicle resulted in this conclusion: It was heat expansion. There was no bullet."

Some state officials said they doubted that the 92-degree temperature, normal for summer in Dallas, was high enough to have caused the shattering of the left front window in the air conditioned car.

They noted there was a large hole in the window and said it shattered inward, leaving the driver with "a lapful of glass."

The Department of Public Safety — which initially reported that a shot had been fired by a sniper — issued a statement at midafternoon saying: "Since a bullet was not found, we lean toward



—UPI Photo

TEXAS TROOPER JIM BRYAN

In car he drove, shattered window removed

the theory that the hole was caused by a flying rock, perhaps kicked up by a car."

Trooper Jim Bryan, the driver of the car, which also carried a Dallas policeman and a secret service agent, said after the window shattered "all three people in the car thought we were under fire and I notified the lead car we were under fire."

He said he then left the highway followed by a Secret Service car. At the time, the car was about 100 yards behind the one in which the vice president was riding.

The car was impounded briefly and the shattered glass was removed. Later it was parked at state trooper regional headquarters in Dallas.

Secret Service Agent in Charge Walter Coughlin said: "All this came from

simple heat expansion . . . It was a new car, the first time it had been used."

The Department of Public Safety said, however, that the car had been put into service Feb. 1, and had 12,255 miles on it.

Ford was about halfway between the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport and the Trade Center — a distance of about 15 miles — when the incident occurred.

The patrol car involved was the third from the end of the motorcade which was driving through open country at the time of the incident. There were five other cars and a bus between Ford's limousine and the patrol car.

The vice president continued on to the center for a news conference and the rest of his schedule. Bill

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Roberts, the vice president's press aide, said that when Ford was told of the incident "he just laughed. He thought it was kind of funny."

The first report of the incident came from Jim Robinson at the Texas Department of Public Safety in Austin. He said a sniper reportedly fired at the car and shot out one of the windows.

Some time after the incident, Robinson issued this statement:

"At 10:40, the driver's side window suddenly shattered and has a hole in it which has been described as about the size of a fist. We have been unable to find a bullet in the car. We cannot definitely determine that it was a bullet. No one can say. The initial reaction was that there had been a shot."

Immediately after the initial report, authorities on foot, in helicopters and with search dogs combed the open country from which a shot could have been fired. They found no sign of a sniper nor did they discover any spent ammunition.

Local authorities said they spotted a trailer, a bulldozer and other heavy construction equipment. The trailer was locked, but officials searched it anyway, finding nothing.

A Secret Service source said there were five law enforcement officers on the scene within a minute after the first report. "They just smothered the area as far as the question of any suspect getting away," the source said.