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Dealey Plaza, Nov. 22, 1963: New readings of an old recording opened the question of conspiracy again

## JFK: A Telltale Tape?

The job was practically done—an eighteen-month, \$5 million investigation by the House assassination committee into the murder of John F. Kennedy. The panel had carefully reviewed the conspiracy theories that have grown up in fifteen years since Kennedy's death and found them sorely lacking. A 600-page final report had even been drafted, concluding, as had the Warren Commission, that Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, had fired the shots that killed the President. Last week, however, a New York audio expert named Mark Weiss dropped a bombshell. At an executive session of the committee, Weiss said there was evidence on an old tape recording that Kennedy had been fired at four times by two different gunmen—and thus dramatically reopened the question of conspiracy. "I don't know how in the name of heaven we're going to handle this evidence in our summarizing report," said committee member Harold Sawyer.

Weiss applied sophisticated computer analysis of a tape recording made at Dallas police headquarters when a motorcycle cop accidentally left his radio transmitter on during the assassination. According to committee sources, Weiss said he was "95 per cent" sure that he detected four shots: three from the Texas School Book Depository, where Oswald had set up his sniper's post, and one—the next to last—from the now famous grassy knoll in Dealey Plaza where some eyewitnesses thought they heard shots. Many conspiracy theorists who have analyzed motion pictures of the knoll, taken during the shooting, also claim to see shadowy figures that could be assassins.

"We now have scientific corroboration of what people have said all along," said a top committee staffer.

It was not all that clear-cut, however. Many people may question the use of arcane mathematical and computer techniques to recreate complex physical events from a crackly tape. The recording, buried in the files of the Dallas police for years, was never made available to the Warren Commission, and some Dallas police authorities still doubt that the motorcycle was really in a position to pick up the shooting.

**Shots:** The latest finding is a refinement of evidence presented last summer by audio expert James Barger—who testified there was a 50 per cent probability that four shots were recorded on the tape. Barger had recorded test firings at various points in Dealey Plaza, then compared them with the motorcycle recording. The greatest similarity was produced by two shots from the book depository, one from the knoll and another from the depository. But Barger did not draw firm conclusions because he could not pinpoint the policeman's motorcycle; his estimate could have been 18 feet off in any direction. Weiss, whose equipment screened out more background noise, says he was able to locate the motorcycle within 2 or 3 feet of its actual position, and he also detected four shots. It was "tantamount to finding a fingerprint," Weiss told the committee.

Those findings delighted many assassination buffs. "It would seem to vindicate us," said Jeff Goldbert of the Assassination Information Bureau. "But there is still a long way to go in resolving what happened." Indeed, those who believe

that a shot from the knoll killed Kennedy generally claim it was the first or the fourth—not the third, as the tape experts testified. "I don't think this is conclusive proof," said David Lifton, another student of the Kennedy shooting. "I want to see more evidence that the mike [and the motorcycle] was in Dealey Plaza."

**Gunman:** Even if the recording has been analyzed accurately, it provides no clues to the identity of a second gunman. The committee consensus is that whether or not there was a shot from the knoll, Oswald shot and killed Kennedy from the depository. G. Robert Blakey, chief counsel to the assassination committee, told members last week that his staff had done all it could to track down theories involving a gunman on the grassy knoll. Many witnesses who said they heard shots from the knoll have been questioned, but none actually saw a gunman. Still the committee does plan to run a "jiggle analysis" of Abraham Zapruder's film of Kennedy's assassination—on the theory that Zapruder, standing near the knoll, would have flinched unconsciously if a shot was fired behind him.

The committee planned to hold a public hearing on the telltale tape this week, before its charter runs out on Dec. 31. "It's got to be made public," said committee member Christopher Dodd. "It obviously is causing deep concern among the committee." But with its staff about to disband, and its members eager to close the case, an extensive new investigation by the panel seemed unlikely. After all the hours of interviews, analysis of evidence and televised testimony, the committee may end up by raising more public doubts about the assassination than there were at the start.

—DAVID M. ALPERN with HENRY W. HUBBARD, DIANE CAMPER and DAVID C. MARTIN in Washington