

THE SHOT THAT MISSED

One mystery the Warren Commission left unresolved is titled in the report, "The Shot That Missed."

Having decided that three shots were fired, that one wounded President Kennedy and Gov. Connally, and that another inflicted the President's fatal head wound, the commission said "it follows that one shot probably missed the car and its occupants."

No such bullet was ever found, and the commission presented an arguable case for each of the three shots as the one that missed.

"A Hurried Shot

"If the first shot missed," the report speculates, "the assassin perhaps missed in an effort to fire a hurried shot before the President passed under the oak tree, or possibly he fired as the President passed under the tree and the tree obstructed his view. The bullet might have struck a portion of the tree and been completely deflected.

"On the other hand, the greatest cause for doubt that the first shot missed is the improbability that the same marksman who twice hit a moving target would be so inaccurate on the first and closest of his shots as to miss completely, not only the target, but the large automobile."

Eyewitnesses, including Gov. Connally and a Secret Service man in the follow-up car, believed the first shot missed.

"The possibility that the second shot missed is consistent with the elapsed time between the two shots that hit their mark," the report states.

From the timing evidenced by an amateur's movie film the report continues, there was an interval of from 4.8 to 5.6 seconds between the shot that hit the President's neck and the one that hit his head.

The interval could not be more precisely determined, because a street sign blocked the camera's view of the President for 8/10ths of a second. When he reappeared, he was just beginning to react to the neck wound.

Perhaps the strongest argument against the second shot missing is that the gunman would have had to work the hand-operated bolt and take aim at very nearly the minimum possible time—2.3 seconds between shots—to have fired the three shots within 4.8 to 5.6 seconds. The commission concluded, however, that it was "entirely possible for him to have done so."

Last Possibility

The report continues: "The last possibility, of course, is that it was the third shot which missed.

"This conclusion conforms most easily with the probability that the assassin would most likely have missed the farthest shot, particularly since there was an acceleration of the automobile after the shot which struck the President's head. The limousine also changed direction by following the curve to the right . . ."

Most eyewitnesses, however, described the head shot as the final one, the commission noted.