SOFTWARE & TECH

Mortal Error The Shot That Killed Jfk

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The Single Bullet That Changed History: Unpacking the Mortal Error

For over six decades, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas, has remained a subject of intense debate, speculation, and investigation. While the official Warren Commission concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone, firing three shots from the Texas School Book Depository, a powerful counter-narrative has persisted. Among the many theories, one stands out for its specific focus on ballistics and forensic pathology: the argument that the fatal shot was not a calculated act of a lone gunman, but rather a tragic accident—a **Mortal Error The Shot That Killed JFK** was, in fact, a friendly fire incident or a ricochet. This theory, most famously articulated in the book *Mortal Error: The Shot That Killed JFK* by Bonar Menninger, based on the research of Howard Donahue, posits that President Kennedy was killed not by Oswald, but by a Secret Service agent firing a weapon from the follow-up car. This article delves deep into the evidence, the arguments, and the enduring controversy surrounding this provocative claim.

The Foundation of the Mortal Error Theory

The **Mortal Error The Shot That Killed JFK** theory hinges on a meticulous re-examination of the forensic evidence. Proponents argue that the traditional "lone gunman" and "magic bullet" theories are physically and ballistically implausible. The core of the argument is that a single bullet from Oswald's rifle could not have caused the complex pattern of wounds seen in both President Kennedy and Texas Governor John Connally. The theory suggests that Oswald did fire a shot that struck Governor Connally, but the fatal headshot came from a different source entirely.

The Role of the Secret Service Weaponry

Central to the hypothesis is the presence of an AR-15 rifle in the Secret Service follow-up car, driven by Agent George Hickey. According to the timeline reconstructed by Donahue and Menninger, after the first shot from the Book Depository, the presidential limousine slowed down. In the confusion, Agent Hickey allegedly grabbed the AR-15 to return fire or defend the President. The theory claims that as the car lurched forward, Hickey lost his balance, and the weapon discharged accidentally. The bullet, traveling at a high velocity, struck the President in the back of the head at a trajectory consistent with a downward angle from the follow-up car, which was directly behind the presidential limousine.

This scenario, proponents argue, perfectly explains several anomalies:

- The Backward and Leftward Head Snap: The famous Zapruder film shows President Kennedy's head snapping violently backward and to the left. Critics of the lone-gunman theory have long argued that a bullet from the rear (from the Book Depository) should have propelled the head forward. A shot from the front-right (from the follow-up car's position) would logically cause the backward snap observed in the film.
- The Severe Wound to the Back of the Head: The autopsy photos and reports describe a massive, avulsive wound to the back right of the President's skull. The Mortal Error theory suggests this is consistent with the

high-velocity, soft-point ammunition used by the Secret Service, which would expand and cause catastrophic damage upon entry.

- The Trajectory Puzzle: The angle of entry for the fatal headshot has been a point of contention. While the Warren Commission placed the fatal shot from the sixth-floor window, many independent experts have concluded that the angle is too steep for a shot from that location, given the height of the limousine and the position of the President's head. The angle from the follow-up car aligns more closely with the autopsy evidence.

Examining the Ballistic and Photographic Evidence

To truly understand the **Mortal Error The Shot That Killed JFK** theory, one must look closely at the physical evidence that the theory claims to reconcile. The official record has always struggled to explain how a single bullet (the so-called "magic bullet") could cause seven wounds in two men before emerging nearly pristine. The Mortal Error theory sidesteps this by proposing a second shooter, but with a crucial twist: the second shooter was not a conspirator but a well-intentioned bodyguard.

The Zapruder Film Analysis

Frame 313 of the Zapruder film is the most analyzed 26 seconds in history. It shows the fatal shot striking President Kennedy. Many analysts, including Howard Donahue, pointed out that the direction of the spray of blood and tissue appears to be forward and to the right, indicating that the bullet entered from the rear. However, the head snap is backward. The Mortal Error theory reconciles this by arguing that the bullet causing the massive exit wound did indeed enter from the back, but from a position directly behind and slightly to the right of the limousine. This position is exactly where the Secret Service follow-up car was located. A bullet from that angle would cause the bullet to travel through the brain and exit the front right of the skull, creating the backward head snap as a result of the explosive pressure and the jet effect of the exiting tissue.

The Autopsy Report and the X-Rays

The official autopsy report, conducted at Bethesda Naval Hospital, is described by some as incomplete and, at times, contradictory. One of the key pieces of evidence cited by proponents of the Mortal Error theory is the location of the small entry wound on the back of the President's head. The autopsy doctors initially described this wound as being in the occipital region, near the hairline. This location, combined with the low angle of the wound track, is difficult to reconcile with a shot from the sixth floor of the Book Depository. The Mortal Error theory posits that this wound is perfectly consistent with a shot fired from a weapon held by an agent in the car directly behind the President. The agent, standing up in a moving vehicle, would have been at a lower height than a sixth-floor window, creating a flatter, more horizontal trajectory.

Arguments Against the Mortal Error Theory

No theory is without its detractors, and the **Mortal Error The Shot That Killed JFK** hypothesis has been met with significant skepticism from mainstream historians, official investigators, and even many conspiracy researchers.

The Official Investigations and the HSCA

The House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA) in the late 1970s reinvestigated the JFK assassination. While they concluded that there was a "high probability" of a conspiracy based on acoustic evidence (the infamous "dictabelt" recording), they did not endorse the friendly-fire theory. In fact, the HSCA specifically looked into the possibility of a second gunman on the grassy knoll, not in the follow-up car. Furthermore, the FBI and the Warren Commission conducted extensive interviews with Agent George Hickey, who consistently denied firing his weapon. He testified that he grabbed the AR-15 but did not fire it because the car was moving and he was worried about hitting bystanders.

Ballistic and Trajectory Challenges

Critics of the Mortal Error theory argue that the trajectory of a bullet from the follow-up car does not perfectly align with the wound. While the angle might be shallower than the Book Depository shot, it would still require a specific and precise positioning of the President's head at the exact moment of the shot. Furthermore, the AR-15 is a powerful rifle. If a bullet from that weapon had struck the President in the back of the head from a short distance, the damage would have been immense and the bullet would likely have exited with tremendous force. The bullet that struck Governor Connally, which some tie to Oswald, was later found on a hospital stretcher in relatively good condition. The proponents of the Mortal Error theory argue that the official evidence is either misinterpreted or suppressed, but skeptics maintain that the physical evidence is more consistent with a single shooter.

The Character of George Hickey

Perhaps the most difficult hurdle for the Mortal Error theory is the human element. Agent George Hickey was a respected Secret Service agent who spent the rest of his life denying the accusation. His family also denied the theory. To accept the Mortal Error theory, one must believe that the Secret Service, the FBI, the Warren Commission, and multiple other government agencies engaged in a massive cover-up to protect Agent Hickey and the reputation of the Secret Service. While some researchers believe this is plausible given the stakes, others find it more likely that the facts are simply as they were reported: Oswald fired the fatal shots.

The Enduring Legacy of the Theory

Regardless of its veracity, the **Mortal Error The Shot That Killed JFK** theory has forced a deeper look at the forensic evidence. It highlights the inconsistencies in the official narrative and challenges the public to think critically about what they see in the Zapruder film. The theory has been featured in documentaries, books, and online forums, ensuring that the assassination of JFK remains an open wound in American history.

Why the Theory Persists

The persistence of the Mortal Error theory can be attributed to several factors:

1. Specificity: Unlike vague conspiracy theories involving the Mafia, the CIA, or the military-industrial complex, the Mortal Error theory relies on a specific, verifiable piece of evidence: the position and actions of a known individual (Agent Hickey).
2. Forensic Plausibility: The theory attempts to solve specific forensic puzzles that the official theory has difficulty explaining, such as the backward head snap and the low entry wound.
3. Psychological Appeal: The idea of a tragic accident is, in some ways, more palatable to some than the idea of a successful conspiracy or a single deranged gunman. It suggests a cascade of human errors rather than cold-blooded murder.

Conclusion: The Shot That Remains Unanswered

The assassination of President John F. Kennedy is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma. The **Mortal Error The Shot That Killed JFK** theory offers a compelling and specific alternative to the official story. It suggests that the most consequential event of the 20th century might have been a result of tragic human error rather than calculated malice. While the vast majority of officialdom rejects the theory, the questions it raises about the physical evidence, the Zapruder film, and the behavior of the Secret Service remain unanswered for a large segment of the public. Whether one believes it was a mortal error by a scared agent or a deliberate act by a lone assassin, the shot that killed JFK continues to echo through history, a reminder that sometimes, the most important moments are the ones we understand the least. The debate over that single shot, and its ultimate origin, is a testament to the enduring power of a moment that changed the world forever.

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