

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

NAA & JFK: CAN REVISIONISM TAKE US HOME?

BY JOHN E. FIORENTINO

Occasionally during the course of the human learning experience we are faced with an anomaly. An aberration of sorts, which try as we might, defies appropriate classification. The recent paper by Spiegelman et al.—*Chemical and forensic analysis of JFK assassination bullet lots: Is a second shooter possible?*—is one such aberration. It is riddled with both misconceptions and errors of fact.

Purporting to cast doubt on the NAA (neutron activation analysis) work conducted by Dr. Vincent Guinn in the investigation of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, it fails miserably.

The paper offers two central conclusions, one which is demonstrably false, and the other which is specious.

The authors opine; “*If the assassination fragments are derived from three or more separate bullets, then a second assassin is likely, as the additional bullet would not be attributable to the main suspect, Mr. Oswald.*”

This statement relating to the likelihood of a second assassin based on the premise of three or more separate bullets is demonstrably false. The available evidence indicates that Oswald fired three shots, one of which is believed to have missed. However, on the off chance that all three shots hit (even though there is absolutely no other supporting forensic evidence for such a notion) those three shots alone in no way would indicate then that “a second assassin is likely.” The authors’ erroneous conclusion was achieved because they have either been misled (which I personally believe is the case) or they simply aren’t familiar with the evidence.

The second fatal flaw is the use of a rather uncomplicated formula based on Bayes Theorem. Through this formula the authors conclude: “thus the critical ratio = .53 over .80. *Since this ratio is less than 1, Dr. Guinn’s testimony that the evidence supports two and only two bullets making up the five JFK fragments is fundamentally flawed.*”

Several problems immediately present themselves. The authors are using the method known as Bayes Factors; this is legitimate and the equation they quote is derived from Bayes’ law. The first term is the posterior odds of 2 bullets versus 3; the second term is what is known as the “likelihood ratio,” not “ratio of probabilities” as the authors claim. It makes no sense to talk about probabilities of evidence; but this is a matter of fundamentals not methodology. The third term is the prior