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WGBH Science Unit

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FIFTY YEARS AFTER THE ASSASSINATION OF JOHN F. KENNEDY, NOVA ASKS: COULD MODERN SCIENCE AND INVESTIGATORS DO BETTER?

COLD CASE JFK

Premieres Wednesday, November 13 at 9PM/8c on PBS

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[BOSTON] -- The 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy has fueled dark rumors of conspiracies for decades. Now, 50 years later, what can modern science tell us about the shooting in Dallas—and the investigations that followed? NOVA and a team of foremost experts employ exclusive tests and sophisticated new technology to reconstruct and review the evidence in ***COLD CASE JFK***, premiering on Wednesday, November 13 at 9PM/8c on PBS (check local listings).

COLD CASE JFK is part of a series of specials airing in November on PBS to commemorate the 50th anniversary of President John F. Kennedy's death. This collection provides viewers with a comprehensive slate of programs that deliver fresh, unbiased perspectives on a defining historical moment of the 20th century. This programming is part of an ongoing collaboration among PBS documentary, science, news and public affairs programs to bring audiences trustworthy, factual content tied to relevant national conversations.

In ***COLD CASE JFK***, NOVA follows a unique group of experts trying to unravel the lingering mysteries of the Kennedy assassination. What should have been a homicide investigator's best-case scenario—a crime that occurred in broad daylight in front of hundreds of witnesses—instead became a forensics nightmare in a case plagued by a mishandled crime scene, a controversial autopsy, and a prime suspect gunned down while in police custody.

NOVA combines cutting edge technology and contemporary scientific techniques with archival footage and expert interviews to recreate the crime and the Warren Commission's investigation--examining the shooting, the assassination scene, the medical information and wounds, and the evidence found on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository.

The film features several exclusive elements: For the first time since the original investigation by the FBI laboratory, forensic scientists trained and experienced in both firearms identification and shooting scene reconstruction review and evaluate the ballistics evidence in the JFK assassination. These experts apply new technology, not available until recently, to this historic crime.

Forensic innovations featured in ***Cold Case JFK*** include:

- Test-firing the exact model of rifle and ammunition used by Lee Harvey Oswald
- High-speed videography to understand how these particular bullets behave in flight and in human tissue
- Multiple wound ballistics and tissue stimulants to test the Warren Commission's controversial "magic bullet" theory
- New ballistic Doppler radar, not yet available in major crime labs
- Measuring the sounds of Carcano gunshots and supersonic bullets at various distances--useful for analyzing "ear witness" testimony
- Contemporary 3-D laser scans to recreate and analyze the physical crime scene and possible bullet trajectories, including "the grassy knoll"
- Virtual autopsy of JFK's body

To execute the forensic tests, NOVA calls on several leading experts—including father and son firearms experts **Lucien and Michael Haag**; private investigator **Josiah Thompson**; medical examiner and forensic neuropathologist **Peter Cummings**; laser scanning specialist **Tony Grissim**; legendary newsman, **Jim Lehrer**, and historian and leading JFK assassination expert, **John McAdams**.

The most controversial aspect of the Warren Report is the "single bullet theory," which says that one shot wounded both President John Kennedy and Governor John Connally, causing seven separate wounds in the two men. The bullet which the Warren Commission claimed did all this damage was discovered on a gurney at Parkland Hospital, looking virtually pristine, leading critics to deride it as "the magic bullet." Yet the single bullet theory is essential to the Warren conclusion that Oswald acted alone.

To test the single bullet theory, the film travels to a shooting range in New Mexico where criminalists **Lucien and Michael Haag**, experts in firearms and ballistics, reconstruct the shooting. The Doppler radar used by the father and son duo is a technology so new and unique that even the FBI and BATF forensic laboratories do not yet possess it. The Haags are convinced that the only hope of understanding what really happened in the assassination lies in reexamining the physical evidence: the weapon, the bullets and the wounds. They have studied Oswald's rifle and discovered that both the gun and the ammunition it uses have some extremely unusual properties-–documented with high-speed video and shooting tests--which may shed new light on the controversial single bullet theory.

The Haags also pursue the question of whether there was a second shooter who fired from the grassy knoll, as the 1979 House Select Committee on Assassinations concluded. Working with laser scanning expert **Tony Grissim**, they use state-of-the-art 3D laser scanning to build a three-dimensional virtual model of Dealey Plaza

With this model, accurate to the millimeter, they can evaluate any and all possible trajectories and determine what shooting positions were – or were not – possible.

Renowned JFK assassination expert and professor **John McAdams** weighs in on the findings of the original Warren Commission, the deficiencies of the medical and autopsy evidence, and the lack of understanding on the part of the Kennedy camp on the need for a forensic autopsy at the time.

Veteran investigator **Josiah Thompson** also studies the most famous "eye witness" account of that day: the 8mm Zapruder film—perhaps the best known "home movie" in history--which captures the shooting and wounds sustained by both the president and the Texas governor as their motorcade rides through Dealey Plaza in downtown Dallas.

The assassination of President John F. Kennedy was a defining moment in our nation's history and one that continues to perplex us. It was also the murder of a man. A half-century later, the shooting remains controversial to a majority of the public that doubts the Warren Commission findings that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone. In ***Cold Case JFK***, NOVA shows viewers the importance of re-examining the evidence of prior eras using the technology and tools of today to try to unlock the secrets of the past and yield important new insights.

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Now in its 40th season, NOVA is the most-watched prime time science series on American television, reaching an average of five million viewers weekly. The series remains committed to producing in-depth science programming in the form of hour-long (and occasionally longer) documentaries, from the latest breakthroughs in technology to the deepest mysteries of the natural world. NOVA airs Wednesdays at 9pm ET/PT on WGBH Boston and most PBS stations. The Director of the WGBH Science Unit and Senior Executive Producer of NOVA is Paula S. Apsell.

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