

In Memoriam:
Vernon John Ritchson 1952–2005

[Editor's note: *John Ritchson died on 13 August 2005 and was buried on 18 August 2005. The official cause of death is "heart attack", but he had told Assassination Research editor Jim Fetzer of his experience of being run off the road by a black SUV with tinted windows a few months ago, which left him severely injured. He thought it could be related to his recent efforts to study the man who carried JFK's "football" (the Presidential controls for the U.S. nuclear weapons network), CWO Robert M. Powell. It might also have been related to his work on ballistics, however, as a warning signal that he should not keep it up. He did persist, with great courage and integrity, and now he is dead. His work on the ballistics was extremely good and powerfully discredits the official government account. Jim Fetzer spoke with John's father and learned that he had been drinking with friends and came home and fell asleep without connecting his oxygen mask, which he had had to use since his automobile accident. He apparently suffocated from lack of oxygen. In this issue of Assassination Research we are not only publishing two of John Ritchson's studies of the ballistics evidence, but also, below, a brief biographical sketch, in his own words, and his last comments posted to JFKresearch.com and to The Education Forum.*]

Biographical Sketch: Vernon John Ritchson

In his own words: February 2005

Born Vernon John Ritchson on 14 May 1952 in Havre, Montana of Celtic, Norse, and American Indian ancestry.

Raised on the family farm/ranch between Chinook and Harlem, Montana, near the Ft. Belknap Indian Reservation.

Attended school in Chinook, Montana as well as learning the farm/ranch business, and was taught gunsmithing and ballistics from my father, Vernon W. Ritchson.

I was also taught field craft by my Indian grandfather, Herbert W. Phipps, whose mother was a full blooded Assinaboine Medicine Woman of the Fox Clan.

Enlisted in the US Army in November of 1969 and served nearly two tours of duty as a Special Operations Scout before being discharged for medical reasons.

After my recovery I spent several years wandering the world in a sort of Vision Quest trying to find myself, my place in this world, and garner some purpose to my existence, an endeavor I'm still working at.

In the end I decided to return home, attend college, get married and return to my craft.

Ultimately, I settled in Black Eagle, Montana and opened up the Black Eagle Gunworks with my father where I continue to abide although we are now both pretty much retired, my father being invalid and requiring home care, and I having never completely recovered from my war injuries.

I was interested in the JFK assassination from the very beginning although I didn't join the Assassination Research Community until 1995.

Since that time, however, I've been involved in the examination of the physical evidence from the ballistics standpoint, an endeavor which I intend to pursue until there is a final resolution and closure to this case.

His Last Comments

Posted on JFKresearch.com, 1 June 2005

Greetings all:

I am seeking any information on the whereabouts and activities of CWO Robert M. Powell who was JFK's personal attaché and carried the "football" chained to his left hand. For those of you needing clarification—the term, "football" is the codeword for the case which allows the President to conduct WWII from anywhere on earth, and thus would never under any circumstances would be very far from the President.

What this man was doing before, during and after JFK's murder is of extreme importance because the "football" is more important than even the President in terms of national security, and its bearer is in actually the most powerful individual on earth, and in terms of loyalty, integrity, and responsibility must be beyond reproach.

What he knew, witnessed, or surmised, to my knowledge, has never been explored by the assassination community, and I can find no mention of him in any official document that I have examined. What I have seen, however, is a letter of personal commendation written by JFK, on official White House stationery lettered in gold leaf and signed by JFK, who called him "my friend and companion".

Please feel free to personal-message me with any info you may possess.

Thanks and Best Regards ☺

John Ritchson (SSGT. 499th TC USATC HG US Army Class of 69)
(GunSmith/Ballistician, Black Eagle Gun Works)
(Survivor, SE Asian Games, 11BRAVO7, Tet 1970)

His Last Comments

Posted on The Education Forum, 10 August 2005

K.B. wrote [snip]:

Paul, you have any cites to back this up? I am not as knowledgeable as you when it comes to ballistics, etc., and I do not have an expert as Sam does to call re information John has posted, but I do have a few books and a bit of experience reloading and I have won my fair share of Turkey-shoots and as far as I have seen, John Ritchson is right on with everything he has posted that I have read. So who are your Carcano enthusiasts?

Greetings,

One of the areas Mr. Burke and the rest of the lone-nutters are real short on is authoritative cites in the relevant areas being discussed. Rather, their agenda appears to be one of debasement and denigration as exemplified by their references to me as a faker, fraud, cowardly dog, and buffoon, all in a sophomoric attempt to trivialize and obfuscate the importance of my and other researchers' work in this case. These sort of tactics represent the last resort of those who know in their hearts the essential weakness of their case and are thus reduced to *ad hominem*, having failed to produce any real rebuttal. For the record, I am constantly garnering feedback and opinions from qualified professionals in the field of firearms ballistics to absolutely minimise any possibility of error before I even post an article.

I also make every effort to clearly separate qualified facts and opinions from speculation and/or guesswork. Occasionally I will fail in this effort, as is the norm, but the body of my work remains intact and presents a damning indictment to those who would perpetuate the lone-nutter myth. Looking at the lone-nutter contingent, one sees an impressive array of individuals with credentials and qualifications in every area but the field of firearms ballistics, joined at the hip with the spook crew who post from positions of anonymity. Together, they would have us believe they represent a united front espousing the truth of the JFK assassination, when in fact they are nothing more than a collection of bags of mostly hot air with about as much substance as a fart in the wind.

Personally I think they know they have already failed to prevent the truth from coming out, and are simply engaged in damage control by saturating this forum with BS in an ineffectual attempt to keep relevant discourse to a bare minimum, as well as using their under-handed tactics to create an unsavory atmosphere whereby new readers will be put off from joining in the discourse. Be that as it may, I'm resolved to undo that sort of mischief, at least as far as the ballistic evidence is concerned, by adding a relevant professional perspective to the JFK case. To that end, I've gained the support of a number of world-class people with impeccable credentials and unassailable reputations in their various fields of expertise. A list of those who have contributed to my work is as follows:

Alan Horst, German action specialist and old world gunsmith who declares that

one may spend over a thousand dollars reworking a M38 surplus Carcano and still be left with a hundred dollar gun. (Note: For a verifiable professional alternative opinion of the WWII M38, Alan can be reached at 406-454-1831.)

Frank de Haas, who started out in this business as a hobbyist after WWII and ultimately became a world renowned authority on center-fire turnbolt action rifles with the publication of his book, *Bolt Action Rifles*, which is now an almost universally held reference manual on the subject. He is a contributing editor of *The American Rifleman*, and has his shop in Orange City, Iowa. (Note: Mr. de Haas is now deceased; however, his son has taken over the family business.)

Richard Hobbs, considered by many, including Carcano historian Alexander Eichener, as a world authority on the Carcano rifle, who, after examination of CE-139/C2766 concluded it was, in fact, a Moschettieridel Duce Carcano of Mussolini's Guardia del Duce, and not a cheap surplus field rifle that would be sold in a Chicago sporting goods store. (Note: I believe there is an address and phone number for Richard posted on Alexander Eichener's Carcano web-site.)

Wolfgang Droege, founder of the Shiloh Rifle Manufacturing Co, Big Timber, Montana and creator of the Buffalo Rifle for Tom Selleck's movie, *Quigley Down Under*, who also presented a custom 45-70 gold inlayed Creedmoor Rifle to former President Ronald Reagan. (Note: Even though Wolfgang is not a Carcano expert *per se* he does make some of the world's most powerful rifles, and anyone who doubts the concept of knockdown power should see one of these rifles in action.)

Richard Casull, founder of Freedom Arms, Freedom, Wyoming and creator of the world's most powerful revolver, the .454 Casull Magnum, and, like Wolfgang Droege, has forgotten more ballistics than most people will ever know. (Note: Dick openly scoffs at the idea firearms lack knockdown power and is more than happy to give critics a taste of the power of his remarkable pistol which performs on par with many rifles.)

Wayne Leek, ballistcian for the Remington Arms Company and creator of the Fireball XP-100. (Note: even though Wayne is closed-mouthed about the disposition of many of his prototype XP-100's, he is more than happy to expound upon the performance capabilities of one of the world's most powerful and accurate varmint *handguns*, which, by the way, can be fired quite easily from a two-handed combat stance.

Bert Waldron, sniper (US Army), 113 confirmed kills with a verified cartridge expenditure of 1.3 cartridges per kill, as compared to the world infantry expenditure of 10,000 to 50,000 cartridges per kill. (Note: Bert can be contacted through the editor of *Guns Magazine*. Also, he is a quiet and unassuming person, and if asked about jet-effect and retro-recoil he will just shake his head and smile, but his eyes speak volumes.)

Craig Roberts, sniper (USMC), 26-year police veteran, specialist in sniper and counter-sniper tactics, author of the book *Kill Zone*, which is a professional sniper's perspective of the JFK assassination, which blows the lone nutter the-

ory right out of the water. (Note: I consider Craig a personal friend and collaborator on the JFK case, and I strongly recommend careful study of his book. Craig can be reached via email at craig@ionet.net, if memory serves.

Carlos “Gunny” Hathcock, sniper (USMC), the Marine Corps’ premier sniper with 93 confirmed kills including history’s longest single kill-shot of 2,500 meters, nominated for the Congressional Medal of Honor for action in Vietnam, former chief instructor of the USMC Sniper’s School, at Quantico, Virginia. (Note: Gunny Hathcock proved the impossibility of the lone-nutter scenario during tests he personally conducted at Quantico, and although he is now suffering from MS he is still more than happy to poke holes in the lone-nutter scenario. He can be reached through Craig Roberts.) (NOTE: Since the writing of this article, Gunny has gone on his final patrol. God keep you Gunny!)

Dr. Joel Ham, professor of physics, who wishes to keep his school out of the public debate, but has proven by demonstrable scientific method the irrelevancy of the jet-effect with respect to firearms ballistics.

Dr. George E. Miller, professor of physics and supervisor of the nuclear reactor facilities at UC Irvine who is assisting me with my neutron activation analysis evaluation of the ballistics evidence.

These are some of the people who I consider to be more or less in my corner, who roughly share my views on the subject of firearms ballistics, and I urge the readers of this forum to carefully compare these qualified professionals with the collection of political scientists, piss doctors, jet mechanics, computer nerds, wannabes and nobodies that comprise the lone-nutter contingent, and then ask yourself, “Who, then, is best qualified to address the ballistic issues of the JFK case?” “Who, then, represents the more credible authority?” “Whose opinions possess the greater validity and are more deserving of serious consideration?”

Finally, I want to add that all of the derision, the snide innuendo, the ad *hominem* labels, the feeble attempts at denigration, the smart-ass remarks and week-kneed mockery heaped upon myself and the other serious researchers on this newsgroup by the lone-nutter collection of misfits will not detract me one iota from my agenda and goal of seeing justice done in the JFK case.

Finally, with respect to my own qualifications:

I come from an unbroken line of firearms and ballisticians going back to 1680 when my direct ancestor, Barnett Richardson, established the Richardson foundry near Jamestown Virginia.

I was literally raised working at my father’s forge and machine shop. I have actually studied Newton, Julian Hatcher, John Thompson, Helson & Barnes, John Browning, Dave Emory of Hornady, Vernon Speer, Robert D. Hayden, Ted C. Almgren, Martin J. Hull, and Bill McDonald. As to my forensic qualifications, I encourage all readers to read my petition to reopen the JFK case as a murder investigation. Such should give the readers some idea as to my legal knowledge.

As an avid independent, I quite simply refuse to join any trade organizations, all of whom operate from one kind of agenda or another, and I refuse to be locked into any such agenda, especially when it involves people like Fackler, Lattimer, Alvarez, Oliver and the like.

With Regard:

John Ritchson (SSGT. 499th TC USATC HG US Army Class of 69)
(GunSmith/Ballistican, Black Eagle Gun Works)
(Survivor, SE Asian Games, 11BRAVO7, Tet 1970)