

# Pathologist Kaps Kennedy

## Autopsy

By Phil Casey

In a book just published a world-famous pathologist who is also a leading authority on bullet wounds criticizes the autopsy performed on President Kennedy's body and says the Warren Commission erred in not calling afterwards for pathologists who have extensive experience with such wounds.

In essence, Dr. Milton Helpern, New York City's chief medical examiner, says this:

• No pathologist who specializes in forensic medicine and has extensive experience with bullet wounds took part in the autopsy. (Forensic medicine is that branch of medicine dealing with medical evidence in court trials or any step in the administration of justice).

• No such specialist was called by the Warren Commission to investigate the problem of the number of bullets and their paths through the bodies of the President and Gov. John B. Connally of Texas.

• If the Warren Commission been consulted, they might have clarified once and for all the question of the wounds of "ent. r.e. rrd exit" and the number of bullets that struck the two men.

• If the Warren Commission had called on such men, Helpern believes it might have been able to avoid "the aura of doubt and suspicion that has enveloped" its work and conclusions.

### Career Account

The book is "Where Death Delights," an account of the career of the 65-year-old Helpern, regarded as a world leader in forensic medicine and the investigation of bullet wounds.

He was a key prosecution witness in the trial of Dr. Carl Coppolino, convicted, earlier this year of poisoning his first wife. Coppolino was defended by famed attorney 1967 Lee Bancy.

Helpern, who has performed or directly supervised 60,000 autopsies, 10,000 of them involving bullet wounds, has been described in The New York Times as "Sherlock Holmes with a microscope," "one of the best medical detectives in the world," and the man who "knows more about violent death than anyone else in the country."

Author of the book is former FBI agent Marshall W. Houts, 48, lawyer and author of 10 books on medical-legal court evidence. He was associated years ago with mystery writer Erle Stanley Gardner in Gardner's famed Court of Last Resort, a private agency set up to help innocent men convicted of murder.

### Periodical Publisher

Houts is publisher of "Trauma," a hard-cover, bimonthly legal periodical dealing with medical-legal evidence and claims for it the largest circulation—7000 lawyers, investigators and others—any legal periodical. It sells for \$40 a year.

Author Houts, attending a recent convention of former FBI agents, said in the Slapsham Hotel site he shared with his wife and four of his seven children and talked about Helpern's criticisms of the medical aftermath of President Kennedy's assassination.

Helpern doesn't question the criminal investigation or its conclusions and he doesn't say the Warren Commission's medical conclusions are wrong, but he has his doubts.

He doubts strongly the Commission's conclusion that one of the two bullets that struck the President passed through his body and into Governor Connally's body.

Thus, he agrees with Governor Connally, who has insisted that he was struck by the second of three bullets fired and was not wounded by a bullet which struck the President first.

- Moynihan
- Casper
- Callahan
- Conrad
- Felt
- Gale
- Rosen
- Sullivan
- Tavel
- Trotter
- Tele. Room
- Holmes
- Gandy

**A Missing Bullet**  
 Only two of the three bullets were found and it is Helpern's theory that the missing bullet is one that struck the Governor, went through his body, and got lost. The way of a bullet can be bizarre and to lose one that has wounded someone is not rare, Helpern said.  
 Of the Commission's conclusion that Connally was wounded by a bullet that passed through President Kennedy's body, Helpern has this to say:

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*Trill...*  
*Lead...*  
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  - The New York Times
  - The Sun (Baltimore)
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  - The New Leader
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  - The National Observer
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"This single bullet theory requires us to believe that this bullet went through seven layers of skin—tough, elastic, resistant skin. It passed through the back of the President's neck, then out through his throat; it entered the Governor's back and out through his chest; it next entered the skin on the back of his wrist; it came out through the layer of skin on the inside of his wrist; and it apparently penetrated the layer of skin on his left thigh. In addition to these seven layers of tough human skin, this bullet passed through other layers of soft tissue; and then these shattered bones!

"I just can't believe that this bullet had the force to do what Mr. Specter (Assistant Counsel Arlen Specter) and the Commission have demanded of it..."

#### Skin Resistance

And Helpern also says: "... Mr. Specter and the Commission have asked too much from this bullet. You must remember that next to bone, the skin offers the greatest resistance to a bullet in its course through the body than any other kind of tissue. The energy of the bullet is sometimes so spent that it can't quite get out through the final layer of skin and it comes to rest just beneath the outside layer of skin. If it does get through the skin, it may not have enough energy to penetrate even an undershirt or a light cotton blouse. It has exhausted itself and just more or less plops to a stop."

Helpern pointed out also that the bullet alleged to have done all this wasn't distorted in any way and lost only a fraction of its original weight. "I cannot believe," he said, "that this bullet is going to emerge miraculously unscathed, without any deformity and with its lands and grooves intact."

Though it may be too late to

do anything, Helpern said, he suggested that X-rays and photos of the President's body, which are now closeted in the National Archives, be examined by specialists in forensic medicine who have had much experience with gunshot wounds. He suggested also that Dr. Russell Fisher, Maryland medical examiner, be one of these.

#### Experts Not Used

At one point in the chapter dealing with this subject, Helpern says:

"The tragic thing is that a greatly loved President was not given the same type of expert medical attention and medical respect in death that he received in life. When he was having his back problems, he properly consulted the leading experts in the field of orthopedic surgery; but, you see, in death, the task of evaluating his bullet wounds was not given to experienced experts in this field. It was still the old saw that an autopsy is an autopsy, is an autopsy and anyone can do it, particularly so long as he is a general or 'hospital' pathologist."