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Assassination of President John F. Kennedy

Kennedy Conspiracy Discounted

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There were always those who believed there was a conspiracy to assassinate President Kennedy, and many of these persons brushed aside the report of the Warren Commission, which found no evidence to support the conspiracy theory and concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone.

Recently, talk of plots to assassinate foreign leaders, and investigations into what role, if any, the American CIA may have had in such plots, has revived speculation over the Kennedy assassination.

The conspiracy theory persists partly because some persons find it difficult to believe that such a momentous act could be done so capriciously, and by such an insignificant, hapless man as Lee Harvey Oswald.

Few persons not familiar with the Warren Report realize the large number of chance occurrences underlying the assassination. It is very unlikely that Oswald would ever have killed Kennedy had the President not gone to Dallas when he did and passed the building in which Oswald was working. At the time Oswald took his job, there was no way of knowing that the presidential parade route would go right by the building in which he worked, or that there would be a presidential parade at all in the foreseeable future in Dallas.

The night before the assassination, Oswald hitched a ride with a friend out to a suburb to see his wife, Marina, from whom he was then separated. He begged her to come back and live with him. He offered to rent an

apartment in Dallas for the two of them the next day. She refused. The next morning Oswald left his wedding ring and almost all his money on the dresser, and departed with the same friend for work, with the rifle dismantled and concealed in a package. Kennedy might be alive today had Marina relented.

Allegations concerning CIA activities in the late 1950s and the 1960s have created added doubts, because the CIA-assisted the commission in its investigation. However, the CIA was only one such outside source of assistance, and it was not the most important one. (The most important was the FBI.) Moreover, the commission double-checked and cross-checked all significant information among a variety of sources—governmental and private.

The principal reason for the criticisms and conspiracy theories, however, is the breadth of the Warren Report. The published materials comprise 27 volumes. The National Archives contain additional material, which has for the most part been made public. Critics of the report, by selective and inaccurate citations, have turned this vast amount of material against the commission.

The commission took testimony from over 500 people. Thousands more were interviewed or gave affidavits. The FBI alone conducted approximately 25,000 interviews. As is true with even the simplest accident case, some people's reactions, memories, observations and actions were imperfect.

For example, critics have claimed that one of the doctors who worked to save the President's life said the wound on the President's throat was an entry wound, which if true would prove that there was a second gunman since Oswald was behind the President.

What these critics fail to disclose is that the doctor, at a raucous news conference right after the President died, said that it was possible that a bullet had entered the throat. He later testified that at the time he made the remark, he had not seen the wounds on the back of the President. Although the throat wound could not thereafter be definitely analyzed, because of a tracheotomy which this doctor, among others, had performed, other doctors later said the wound probably was an exit wound.

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 Washington Star-News _____
 Daily News (New York) _____
 The New York Times _____
 The Wall Street Journal _____
 The National Observer _____
 The Los Angeles Times *ET-11*

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The commission, on the basis of this and other expert testimony, fiber analysis of the clothes, the location of bullets and other evidence concluded that the hole in the throat was an exit wound, which would demonstrate that the bullet came from the rear where Oswald was located.

Quite apart from eyewitnesses, the evidence supporting Oswald's guilt is overwhelming. Ballistics evidence demonstrated that Oswald's rifle was the murder weapon; Oswald's prints were on the rifle; handwriting analysis of order forms and pictures of Oswald with the rifle demonstrated that the rifle was his; the rifle was found in the building where Oswald worked and where Oswald was seen shortly before the shooting; his prints were located in the part of the room where the rifle and spent cartridges were found and from which witnesses saw the rifle protruding at the time of the assassination; X rays, photographs and the autopsy show that the bullet came from the area where Oswald was located; after the shooting, Oswald promptly left the premises and resisted apprehension by killing a policeman. Finally, he lied about a number of facts during his interrogation.

Thus, the claims that the rifle was inaccurate, that the shot was difficult, that Oswald was a poor shot and that stress analysis tests of Oswald's voice allegedly show him to have been telling the truth when he denied his guilt are all unpersuasive in light of so much uncontroverted evidence. These claims, even in isolation, are misleading: Oswald was a former Marine and hunter. He practiced with the rifle when he was a civilian. Tests showed that his rifle was sufficiently accurate. The shot was not particularly difficult. It was from a stable, prepared position at a target moving 11 m.p.h. almost straight away at a range of 177 to 266 feet. The rifle had a telescopic sight. The voice stress analysis has not achieved general acceptance as a reliable lie detector test.

Most critical commentaries focus on suggestions that there had to be at least two gunmen.

One of the oldest claims is that Oswald could not have fired three shots in the time he had and have two of them hit the President. The commission utilized the film of the event by Abraham Zapruder to determine that

the interval between the two hits was between 4.8 and 5.6 seconds (the exact time is not determinable since the first shot hit the President while a road sign was between him and Zapruder's camera).

Some have said that 4.8 to 5.6 seconds is too short a time for three shots to be fired and two of them to hit. But the time interval is between two shots—the two that hit—not three. The commission found the evidence inconclusive as to whether, of the three shots fired, it was the first, second or third that missed. Since the time interval is that between the two shots which hit, Oswald had all the time he needed to fire the first shot. A period of 4.8 to 5.6 seconds is ample time for aiming and firing one shot—the second one that hit.

The evidence concerning the wounds conclusively dispels the idea of shots from the front, another part of the conspiracy theory. The wounds both slanted downward from Kennedy's back. This is clear beyond doubt from the autopsy and from the photographs and X rays of the body. The photographs and X rays are still not open to public view, because of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis' wishes, but to doubt the evidence of the wounds is to label as liars the doctors who examined the body, the pictures and the X rays for the commission. The inward pointing of the threads of the back of Kennedy's clothing and the outward pointing of the threads in the front of his clothing demonstrate that the bullet which first hit



The assassination

him entered from the rear and exited from the front. Since the car was in a low underpass, a bullet from any direction would have to have been going downward, and would have hit the car after leaving Kennedy. All

the bullet damage to the car was in front of Kennedy, which is consistent with a bullet entering from the rear.

A great deal of publicity has been given recently to the claim that Kennedy must have been hit from the front because the Zapruder film shows his head jerking back.

In fact, the head jerks back not when the bullet hits it but slightly later. Actually, at the time of the hit, the President's head appears to move slightly forward and the sprayed flesh also moves forward. The jerk, therefore, cannot have been a momentum reaction. It must have been a neural or muscular reaction caused by either bullet or by a reaction to some other stimulus.

Many critics have pointed to a rough sketch of the location of the neck wound and to the location of the bullet hole in the President's shirt and suit jacket as proving that the rear wound was lower on the President's body than the wound in front. From this it follows, supposedly, that some other gunman must have been firing in a downward direction from the front.

But the best evidence of the wound's location are the autopsy records and the photos and X-rays of the body itself. These unambiguously show the rear wounds higher than the wound at the front. The rough sketch was just that: rough. The holes in the shirt and jacket seem to indicate a low wound on the body only because the clothing, when photographed, was laid flat and because, presumably, when the President was sitting in the car his clothing was slightly bunched up his back.

Critics have criticized the "single-bullet theory," which is the commission's conclusion that the first bullet passed through the President and also hit, and eventually came to a stop in, Gov. Connally. Why anyone should think it unlikely that a rifle bullet should go through one man and hit another, when the men were sitting close together, escapes us.

Of course, it was difficult for the commission to reconstruct exactly what the path through both men was, but a reconstruction proved possible, and the conclusion that it was a single bullet which hit both men makes, by far, the most sense in the context of all the other evidence. No bullet was left inside the President;

the nature of the President's wound shows that the bullet that made it was hardly slowed down and so must have been stopped by something else, but there was no appreciable damage to the car in front of the President; the films show Connally to have been hit at or near the same time as the

President; the nature of Connally's wounds show that he, too, was hit from the rear.

The fact that the recovered bullet that apparently went through both Kennedy and Connally was not greatly distorted itself actually supports the single-bullet theory. In order that a bullet be recovered without being greatly distorted, it must be brought to a slow and gentle stop. By going through two men, and by tumbling end over end through flesh and muscle and by glancing off, rather than penetrating, large bones, the bullet was brought to a slow and gentle stop and so was able to emerge in a relatively unscathed condition.

The photographs supposedly showing shadows outlines of guns in the bushes or trees actually show this only to someone with a wild imagination. What they really show are only shadows such as can be seen on almost any photograph taken from a distance of trees or shrubbery.

There has been speculation recently that various people masqueraded before the assassination as Oswald and, thus, there must have been a conspiracy.

Just as thousands of people claim to have seen Patty Hearst in various places at the same time, many people reported seeing Oswald. The Oswald "identifications" were even more doubtful because many of them allegedly took place months and years before the assassination. If there was a conspiracy, what possible purpose would have been served by sending fake "Oswalds" around the country?

The recent surge in speculation about purported CIA or FBI connections with, or coverup of, the assassination is not a result of any newly discovered link between those agencies and the assassination. It is a result of the revelations of alleged unsavory practices in other matters by these agencies.

In October, 1963, the CIA's Mexican department sent a message and a

photograph to the FBI saying in effect, ~~that~~ the man in the photograph was thought to be Lee Harvey Oswald. The photograph was not of Oswald, but it was not until shortly after the assassination that this fact was established. These events have led to the speculation that either the man in the photograph was a CIA agent masquerading as Oswald or that Oswald was a CIA agent.

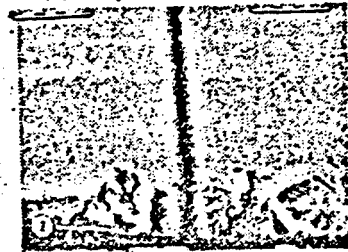
This happened because the CIA had several secret sources of information operating in Mexico and, as is frequently the case in this kind of work, the central headquarters had difficulty in putting the bits of information from the different sources together properly. One source reported that a man calling himself Oswald had visited the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City. Another source obtained a photograph of a man who probably visited the same embassy about the same time. No source was able to get a photograph of Oswald in Mexico City, and no source was able to obtain the name of the man in the photograph who visited the Embassy. Someone in the CIA who was responsible for putting bits of information together guessed, mistakenly it turned out, that the two men were the same.

With all of this confusion, the time has come for everything on the assassination in the National Archives to be made available to the public, unless its disclosure can be shown to be definitely detrimental to the national security.

We do not believe that a reopening of the inquiry, in the sense of establishing a new commission to carry on its own investigation or to hear argument from private investigators, would serve any useful purpose.

The legitimate interest of the American people in knowing as surely as possible that they have found out the whole truth can be served, we think, by the creation of special limited new investigations if and when a need for one of them arises. Currently, for example, the news media has reported that the White House commission on the CIA is investigating the allegation that the CIA may not have fully disclosed all relevant information to the Warren Commission in an effort to cover up its own involvement with an assas-

sination attempt on Castro. Such an issue should be investigated and reported on.



... of President Kennedy ...



... Dallas, Nov. 22, 1963.