

SECRET SERVICE GETS REVISION ON KENNEDY WOUND

After Visit by Agents Doctors Say Shot Was From Rear

By a Washington Correspondent
of the Post-Dispatch

WASHINGTON, Dec. 18—Two Secret Service agents called last week on Dallas surgeons who attended President John F. Kennedy and obtained a reversal of their original view that the bullet in his neck entered from the front.

The investigators did so by showing the surgeons a document described as an autopsy report from the United States Naval Hospital at Bethesda. The surgeons changed their original view to conform with the report they were shown.

There was no coercion at all, Dr. Robert N. McClelland told the Post-Dispatch. "They didn't say anything like, 'This is what you think, isn't it?'"

The Associated Press reported that a source familiar with the autopsy findings said Mr. Kennedy might have survived the first bullet to strike him. He said it was the second bullet which struck his head, that proved fatal.

This source said last night the first bullet struck the President in the back and did not damage any vital organs. He said it was not likely to have caused death.

The surgeons' earlier description of a wound in the front of the President's throat as an entry wound had cast doubt on the official belief that Lee Harvey Oswald was the only assassin. It had suggested the possibility that a second sniper had fired simultaneously from somewhere in front of the President's automobile.

The surgeons now support the official view that both bullets that struck the President were fired from behind, from the direction of the sixth story warehouse window where Oswald was believed to have been hiding.

They now believe that the bullet in the neck entered from the back, where the right shoulder meets the neck, and passed out through the hole in front, about

two inches below the Adam's apple.

Dr. McClelland told the Post-Dispatch last night by telephone of the visit by the federal agents and the manner in which the doctors changed their opinion.

He said the investigators called on the doctors about a week ago at the Southwestern Medical School of the University of Texas, adjoining Parkland Memorial Hospital, where the President died a half hour after he was shot.

The visit was after the Federal Bureau of Investigation had completed its report of the assassination and the Justice Department had given it to the special investigating commission, headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren.

"I was wandering down a hall when they snagged me," Dr. McClelland said. He was one of three physicians who worked on the President's throat and performed a tracheotomy, cutting a hole in the throat, in an effort to restore satisfactory breathing.

He said the Secret Service agents met with Dr. Malcolm Perry, the first doctor to reach the emergency room after the President had been carried in, and Dr. Tom Shires, who was out of the city at the time but arrived an hour later.

Ask To See Reports

Dr. McClelland said the investigators asked to see reports the doctors had written the day of the President's death about what they had seen and done in the emergency room. He said he recalled saying in his report that the throat wound might have been an entry wound.

Dr. Perry had told reporters the day of the assassination that the wound had the appearance of an entry wound. A few days later, Dr. McClelland had told the Post-Dispatch that he judged it to be an entry wound on the basis of considerable familiarity with gunshot wounds. He had said doctors at the hospital saw one a day and sometimes several a day, continuing that a bullet normally enters through a small hole and tears its way out through a large hole.

In the course of the conversation last week, Dr. McClelland said, the Secret Service men showed them the long autopsy report and pointed out the place where it described the course of the bullet in the President's neck.

Wound in Back of Neck

He said it told of an entry wound, which the Dallas doctors had not seen, in the back of the neck, low on the right side. The bullet passed to the right of the

spinal column, not injuring it, but damaging the windpipe, the report stated, he said. The report indicated that the whole bullet or a large fragment of it passed out the front of the throat just above the breastbone.

Dr. McClelland said he did not know whether the autopsy report told of recovering a bullet from the President's body, as told in some accounts.

"I didn't read the entire report," he said. "I was mainly interested in finding out what the wound in the neck was."

Recalling his thinking the day of the assassination, Dr. McClelland pointed out that the Dallas doctors were with the President's body only about 22 minutes and were working to save his life, not to determine the course of the bullets.

Lying on Back

"He was lying on his back on the stretcher," the surgeon said. "It was not necessary or possible to examine him in the back. My first impression was the purest kind of supposition."

He said when he saw a small wound in the front of the neck and a large wound in the back of the head he thought it possible one bullet had caused both, entering at the throat, passing up along the vertebrae and going out the back of the head.

That conclusion was on the basis of "no complete history and no complete examination," he said. By history, he said, he meant the circumstances of where the bullets had come from.

A few days later, he said, the Dallas doctors received a third or fourth-hand report from the Naval Hospital that another wound had been found in the back of the neck and that the throat wound was thought to be an exit wound. That report, along with news of the supposed position of Oswald in the warehouse window, caused them to start reconstructing the shooting in their minds, so that both bullets came from behind.

"This was confirmed by the autopsy report," he said.

Accepting Report

Dr. McClelland said he and Dr. Perry fully accept the Naval Hospital's explanation of the course of the bullets.

"I am fully satisfied that the two bullets that hit him were from behind," he said. "As far as I am concerned, there is no reason to suspect that any shots came from the front."

The Associated Press gave this new account of the wounds, as reported by a source fully acquainted with results of the post mortem examination conducted at the Naval Hospital:

The first shot struck Mr. Kennedy in the back, made what

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was described as a small, neat hole and penetrated two or three inches without damaging vital organs.

The bullet may even have entered Mr. Kennedy's back after first glancing off some part of the presidential limousine, because its penetration was not deep when compared with the damage done by the other shot. The first bullet was said to have been the one that was re-

covered from the stretcher on which Mr. Kennedy was carried into the hospital.

The Fatal Wound

The second bullet to strike Mr. Kennedy, the third bullet fired, left a large hole in the back of the President's head, destroyed considerable brain tissue and severely damaged the forehead. Unquestionably, this wound was fatal, the source told the AP. In effect, it caused instant death, although a faint spark of life may have remained a few minutes in the heart and lungs. This bullet, the source said, was recovered from the limousine.

The second shot fired by the assassin hit Gov. John B. Connally of Texas in the chest as he turned toward Mr. Kennedy after the first bullet hit the President. The source said Connally's wound was at approximately the same elevation as the one in Mr. Kennedy's back. He was seated in front of Mr. Kennedy on a jump seat.

Because there was an interval of five or six seconds between Mr. Kennedy's first and second wounds, the new account leaves the implication that Mr. Kennedy might have survived, perhaps escaped serious injury, had he quickly thrown himself to the floor of his limousine after the first bullet struck, the AP said.

It seems apparent, however, that Mr. Kennedy was unable to react immediately except to throw his hands in front of him, the AP said. Mr. Kennedy's life might have been saved had someone shielded him or knocked him to the floor of the car before he was struck in the head, the AP reported.

Secret Service agents are trained to react in such a fashion, but none was close enough to the President to intervene. Mr. Kennedy did not want agents at his elbow except when driving in heavy crowds. The crowd was a thin one at the point where the President was assassinated.