

How JFK Died

N-12/30
A month after the assassination of John F. Kennedy, various sources still insist that the President might have been shot from two directions—the implication being that more than one assassin was involved. The argument, offered in the current New Republic, fixes upon the reported bullet hole in the throat as evidence of a shot fired, not from the rear as the President's motorcade passed the Texas School Book Depository, but from the front. Results of an autopsy, performed by Navy doctors in Bethesda, Md., on the night of the assassination and reported in an exclusive story by Washington Post medical writer Nate Haseltine last week, resolved such questions.

The first shot to strike the President did not, as was believed at the time, kill him. According to the report, the bullet struck the President in the back 5 to 7 inches below his shirt collar line and penetrated 2 or 3 inches into the shoulder muscle, causing considerable bleeding within the muscle and neck, but no critical damage.

Bullet Found: This bullet, the Navy doctors believe, probably dropped out of the President's body and was the one reported found on his stretcher at Parkland Hospital in Dallas. The doctors who treated Mr. Kennedy never learned of the first wound because the President remained on his back while they worked to save his life.

The third bullet that was fired by the assassin (and the second that struck the President), the Navy pathologists concluded, struck the occipito-parietal region on the right side of the head—an area in the back of the skull. The bullet split the skull, plowed through the vital portions of the brain which regulate breathing and circulation, and emerged on the left side. Such a wound, according to the pathologists, was completely incompatible with life. There was no possibility of saving the President.

As for the wound in Mr. Kennedy's throat, just below the Adam's apple, the autopsy produced evidence that a fragment from the second bullet was probably deflected downward, passing out through the throat.