



WHO KILLED JACK KENNEDY?
35 Theories and 84 New Leads

WHO'S ARRAID OF THE WARREN REPORT?

*Elementary, my dear Warren.
Everybody.*

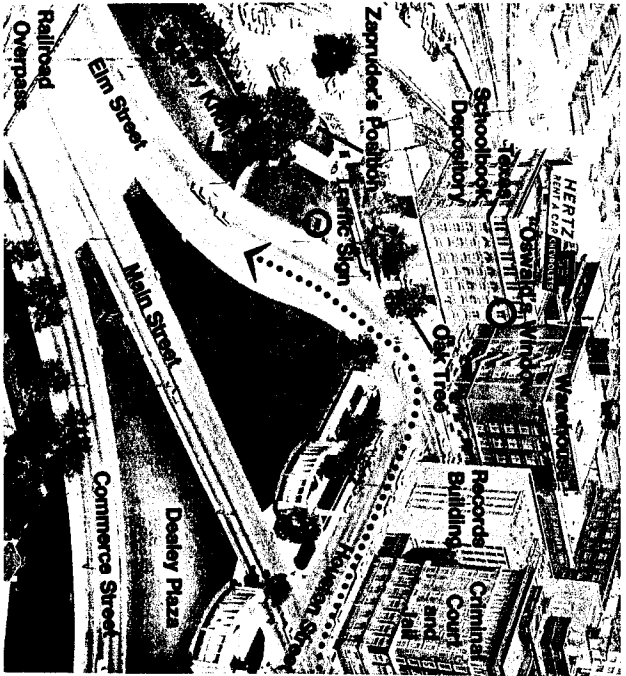
And here's why . . .

by Edward Jay Epstein

The Warren Commission was supposed to end all doubts about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Tragically, it hasn't. The distinguished members of the Commission never intended that their Report should become the basis for an amateur detective game. Yet this is precisely what is happening. A growing number of people are spending their leisure hours scouring the Commission's Report and the twenty-six volumes of testimony and exhibits for possible clues to a conspiracy. Others, using high-powered magnifying glasses and infrared lights, are scrutinizing photographs of the assassination scene, hoping to find snipers concealed in the shrubbery. Still others are combing the National Archives on the hunch that they will locate something relevant in the three hundred cubic feet of documents that the Commission deemed irrelevant. Since the National Archives will provide microfilm copies of any nonclassified document in the assassination file at five cents a page, including F.B.I. and Secret Service investigative reports, a syndicate of private researchers is planning to buy all the available documents. Presumably they will then subdivide the 20,000 or so pages into areas (e.g., Ruby, Oswald, eyewitnesses, etc.), and attempt a more definitive study than the Commission itself conducted. Elizabeth Hardwick, a literary critic of considerable stature, is considering joining the syndicate for another purpose. She believes it might contain the American *comédie humaine*.

Meanwhile, more active private investigators are tracking down leads in Dallas and re-interviewing star witnesses. A few are keeping the death count on those who have been even remotely connected with the case. And there is a burgeoning grapevine through which assassination news is rapidly disseminated. As soon as a new discovery is made, assassination buffs across the country are alerted by a telephonic chain letter.

This phenomenon would not be particularly disturbing if the players were merely kooks. However, most of them are not. Assassination buffs apparently are serious people—professionals, students, housewives, etc.—bent on solving what they consider to be an unsolved mystery. Perhaps this is all part of the American folklore tradition of amateurs stepping in and solving cases that baffle the police. Already amateurs have made some constructive contributions to the case. Mrs. Sylvia Meagher, a U.N. careerist, has completely indexed the twenty-six volumes of testimony, a feat the



Commission never had time to accomplish. Mr. and Mrs. George Nash, sociologists, found three new witnesses to the Tippitt murder by following a tip given to them by a Dallas undertaker. Vincent Salandria, a Philadelphia lawyer, has charted the precise movements of the President's head after the bullet's impact by superimposing on each other the individual frames of the film of the assassination taken by a bystander. And Paul Hoch, a Berkeley graduate student, has unearthed some extremely important documents in the National Archives, including the original F.B.I. report on the autopsy. The man who has undoubtedly done the most to propagate the assassination cult is Mark Lane, thirty-nine-year-old attorney and sometime New York State Assemblyman. Lane began lecturing in coffeehouses, then stumped the college circuit, and is currently promoting both a book and a two-and-a-half-hour documentary film on the assassination. Above all, the Warren Commission itself shares at least part of the responsibility for the game. The Commission was obliged to publish all twenty-six volumes of data, although Commissioner Allen Dulles saw no point in doing this. "Nobody reads," he said. "Don't believe people read in this country. There will be few professors who will read the record." Making the record public, however, is *The American Way*.

Indeed, the number of people who have bothered to read the record has been small (less than a thousand sets of the twenty-six volumes have been sold to date). But they have been an inquisitive group, often ingenious. With their help, the public record has spawned a school of theories that has been swimming in the eddies of the public press, lately with increasing dizziness. Many of the theories, it is true, depend on fragments of evidence which, although clear enough, are palpably irrelevant (i.e., the death of several peripheral witnesses since the assassination). But they are no more irrelevant than many of the Report's own meticulous entries (i.e., in July of 1962 Oswald spent \$3.87 for a subscription to *Time*). Assassination buffs have seized, perhaps too eagerly, on discrepancies in the testimony of witnesses who were understandably shaken and confused. But in this they are no more at fault than the Commission, which appeared *(Continued)*

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WHO'S AFRAID OF THE WARREN REPORT?

(Continued from page 204) to accept testimony, even though it may have been ambiguous, so long as it aided its predisposition to prove Oswald the lone assassin.

While the Commission was obviously intent on proving there was no conspiracy, selecting testimony and evidence for their Report that particularly suited them, the assassination buffs have responded by being suspicious of everything in which the Commission put credence. Throughout the case, where an omission or a contradiction seems best explained as simple human error, the private theorists loudly claim intentional deceit on the part of the Dallas police, the F.B.I., the witnesses, and the Commission itself.

Most of these accusations would be difficult to prove without further evidence, and thus for the time being they are rendered moot. But from the mass of such charges there has emerged one flagrant contradiction in the Report which can be proved or disproved very easily. More important, it is a crucial contradiction upon which all of the other leading theories depend.

This contradiction involves the one and only autopsy conducted on the President at the Bethesda (Maryland) Naval Medical Center on the night of the assassination. The report of the autopsy findings, published by the Commission, virtually precluded the possibility of a second assassin. First, it shows that both bullets that hit the President came from behind and the general direction of the Texas School Book Depository (where Oswald was at the

time). This finding of course would cut the ground out from under early theories that the shots came from a point in front of the motorcade. Mark Lane's theory that the throat wound was an entrance wound, Thomas Buchanan's theory that the shots came from the triple overpass, and the many theories based on eyewitness testimony that the shots came from the grassy knoll would all be rendered invalid by the autopsy findings.

Second, the autopsy report states that the first bullet hit the President in the back of the neck and then exited through his throat. This led the Commission to believe that the same bullet that exited from Kennedy's neck proceeded to wound Connally, who was seated directly in front of the President. This finding would explain the split-second time lapse between the first two shots. An amateur film of the assassination shows that both Kennedy and Connally were hit no more than 1.8 seconds apart. Yet, the bolt of the murder rifle cannot be operated in less than 2.3 seconds. In other words, both men were shot in less time than the rifle could be fired twice. And this fact has given rise to a number of two-assassin theories. But if both men were hit by the same bullet, as the autopsy report suggests, the time problem is resolved, and there is only one assassin.

Finally, if in fact Connally and Kennedy were hit by the same bullet, it can be deduced that all the bullet fragments found in the President's car came from the rifle of Lee Harvey Oswald. Since the autopsy findings indicate that only two bullets hit Kennedy, and one bullet was found virtually intact (raising some

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other problems), all the fragments must have come from the other bullet. Since some of these fragments matched Oswald's rifle, the other fragments which were too deformed to be ballistically identified also must have come from Oswald's rifle. The autopsy report thus leaves little ground for two-assassin theories.

But the Commission's account of the autopsy is not the only one. Two F.B.I. Summary Reports that were not published by the Commission give an alarmingly different version of the autopsy findings. After the F.B.I. Reports were published in my book *Inquest*, Norman Redlich, a former Commission lawyer, told *The New York Times* that these Summary Reports had been deemed erroneous and instead the Commission relied on the original F.B.I. report of the autopsy (known as the Sibert-O'Neill report), prepared by the two F.B.I. agents who were present at the autopsy. This heretofore unpublished F.B.I. report was only recently made available to me. It gives a detailed description of the autopsy:

"Upon completion of X-rays and photographs, the first incision was made at 8:15 p.m." The F.B.I. report then states that Commander J. J. Humes, the chief autopsy surgeon, made a detailed examination of the head wound to determine the exact path of the bullet. Only later, in "the latter stages of autopsy," did Commander Humes discover the wound in the President's back. It was, according to the F.B.I. report, "below the shoulders." In probing the wound, Humes found that the bullet had barely penetrated the skin "inasmuch as the end of the opening could be felt with the finger." The autopsy surgeons were puzzled. The

bullet hole was only a few inches deep, yet there was no bullet to account for it.

The doctors then learned that a bullet had been found on a stretcher in the Dallas hospital where President Kennedy was first treated, and Commander Humes concluded: "The pattern was clear that one bullet entered the President's back and worked its way out of the body during external cardiac massage." The autopsy examination ended about eleven p.m.

Ten months later, The Warren Report described autopsy findings entirely different from those reported by the F.B.I. Now, in the Report, there was no wound "below the shoulders." Instead, there was a wound in the back of the neck. Rather than barely penetrating the skin, the bullet had gone clean through the neck and exited through the throat. The Warren Report states these conclusions were reached during the autopsy, the same autopsy that the F.B.I. report described. How can two such accounts, diametrically opposed to one another, be reconciled?

Former Commission lawyers have recently explained that at the time of the autopsy the doctors were not aware of the wound in the President's throat. The outlines of this wound had been obliterated by a tracheotomy performed earlier in the day in Dallas. Learning of the throat wound the next day, the autopsy doctors changed their opinion and deduced that the bullet exited through the throat. This would seem to explain why a bullet that was first thought to have penetrated the back only a distance of a few inches was later thought to have passed entirely through the body.

But it begs the question of how a wound below the shoulder became a wound in the back of the neck. Obviously, no amount of additional information about the throat wound could alter the *location* of the back wound. And this is the crucial contradiction.

Of course, the contradiction might be dismissed (as *Time* magazine dismisses it) simply as an F.B.I. error. But the fact is that other evidence seems to corroborate the F.B.I. version. A diagram of the President's body, prepared by Commander Humes *during* the autopsy, very clearly shows the wound to be below the shoulder. The other autopsy surgeon, Lieutenant Colonel Pierre Finck, was quoted by a Secret Service agent as saying: "There are no lanes for an outlet of this entry in this man's shoulder." Another Secret Service agent, who was called in after the autopsy for the express purpose of viewing the President's body, later testified that he observed the back wound to be "about six inches below the neckline." F.B.I. photographs taken of the President's shirt and jacket (which were never published by the Commission) show the bullet hole to be about six inches below the top of the collar of both shirt and jacket, a position which corresponds with the F.B.I.'s assertion of a wound "below the shoulders."

Perhaps all this evidence of a wound below the shoulder is only a strange series of random coincidences. But so long as these other discrepancies stand, the contradiction cannot be discounted merely as

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Nor can it be dismissed as irrelevant. It is true, as former Commission lawyers *now* point out, that an investigation of a subject as complex as the Kennedy assassination is bound to have a few "loose ends." But the contradiction between the F.B.I. and Commission account of the autopsy findings is more than just a "loose end." It is crucial to the question of whether or not Oswald acted alone. For if the bullet did hit the President below the shoulders, it could not have exited through the throat and continued on to wound Governor Connally. This is because the bullet was traveling downward and was undeflected. If the F.B.I. report is accurate, President Kennedy and Governor Connally were hit by two different bullets which, in turn, gives grounds for theories of a second assassin.

Perhaps this is why the publication of the F.B.I. Summary Reports and photographs in my book precipitated a good deal of debate and wrangling over the contradiction in the autopsy findings. In *Look* magazine, Fletcher Knebel attempted to prove that the F.B.I. did not receive a copy of the official autopsy findings until after its Summary Reports were published. He stated that Treasury Department records show that the Secret Service sent the autopsy report to the F.B.I. on December 23, 1963. However, Professor Richard Popkin countered in *The New York Review of Books* that Knebel inadvertently had proved that the F.B.I. *did* have the autopsy report in hand when its final summary report was prepared on January 13, 1964 (a fact Knebel apparently

~~could not prove). The fact is that other evidence seems to corroborate the F.B.I. version. A diagram of the President's body, prepared by Commander Humes during the autopsy, very clearly shows the wound to be below the shoulder. The other autopsy surgeon, Lieutenant Colonel Pierre Finck, was quoted by a Secret Service agent as saying: "There are no lanes for an outlet of this entry in this man's shoulder." Another Secret Service agent, who was called in after the autopsy for the express purpose of viewing the President's body, later testified that he observed the back wound to be "about six inches below the neckline." F.B.I. photographs taken of the President's shirt and jacket (which were never published by the Commission) show the bullet hole to be about six inches below the top of the collar of both shirt and jacket, a position which corresponds with the F.B.I.'s assertion of a wound "below the shoulders." Perhaps all this evidence of a wound below the shoulder is only a strange series of random coincidences. But so long as these other discrepancies stand, the contradiction cannot be discounted merely as~~

missed). *Newsweek* suggested that Kennedy "might have been bent forward enough" to place the back wound higher than the throat wound. But *Life's* film of the assassination indicated that the President was seated erect at the time of the shot. And Philadelphia District Attorney Arlen Specter, a former Commission lawyer, attempted to demonstrate to the *Greater Philadelphia Magazine* that a shirt could rise high enough on the neck so that a bullet hole about six inches below the top of the collar would be consistent with a neck wound. The interviewer was not, however, fully convinced since it appeared that this feat would require doubling over a portion of the shirt—and there was only one bullet hole in the back of the President's shirt.

Throughout the debate, the F.B.I. has remained coyly ambiguous. It told *The Washington Post* that its December 9 Summary Report was "based on the medical evidence at that time." But it told the *Los Angeles Times* that the F.B.I. report was wrong when it said that there was "no point of exit" for the bullet, explaining "F.B.I. agents were not doctors, but merely quoting doctors." To *The New York Times* and other papers, the F.B.I. declined comment.

The great irony of the controversy is that it can be settled decisively by available evidence that neither the Commission nor its critics have seen. Color photographs, taken during the autopsy, would show exactly where the bullet entered the President's back, whether it was below the shoulders, as F.B.I. reports claim, or in the back of the neck, as the Commission's autopsy report claims. After the autopsy, these photographs were turned over undeveloped to the Protective Research Section of the Secret Service. What happened to the photographs after this is not definitely known. Some Commission lawyers believe that they were given to

the Kennedy family; others believe that they remained with the Secret Service or White House. In any case, the Commission never received either the autopsy photographs or X-rays. Neither the Commission lawyers did not try to obtain them. Arlen Specter

reportedly was on the verge of tears when he found out that they were not to be requested by the chairman.

The whereabouts of these photographs and X-rays has remained a mystery. *Newsweek* recently reported that a two-month inquiry by its staff "failed to turn up a single government official who can, or will, give a simple answer to the question: 'Where are the Kennedy autopsy pictures?'"

Moreover, it is not known whether the autopsy photographs were ever developed. Undeveloped color film tends to lose detail and decompose in about five years. Three years have already elapsed. If the photographs fade or are somehow accidentally destroyed, the opportunity to resolve the contradiction will be lost forever. What is ascertainable today may become a moot point in the near future. What is to be done? The Commission's investigation of the assassination of President Kennedy cannot be considered complete so long as the contradiction in the autopsy findings remains unresolved. By viewing the photographs, the contradiction can be resolved once and for all time. If they show the wound to be in the back of the neck, then there can be no further doubt as to the accuracy and authenticity of the autopsy report. Theories of a second assassin, evolving out of the contradiction, would be quashed. And virtually all

of the speculation would be reduced, at least among thinking people, to groundless banter.

There is another possibility. The photographs might show the bullet wound to be below the shoulders. If this were the case, the Commission (or another fact-finding body) would have very serious unfinished business to attend to.

Already, the conspiracy theories are proliferating at an alarming rate. As the following *Primer* shows, doubts about the authenticity of the autopsy report are at the root of all the two-assassin theories. The assumption, either explicit or implicit, that the autopsy report was changed makes tenable the theories that hold that a shot came from in front of the President's car. This in turn leads to theories of suppressed and planted evidence, which in turn implicates the authorities and other important figures in the conspiracy. Finally, there come theories speculating on the forces behind the conspiracy to kill Kennedy, some of which go so far as to accuse those with power to suppress evidence. ##