

Conclusions of the Panel

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 16—The following is a discussion and summary of the conclusions of a panel of four physicians who examined 69 photographs and X-rays taken during the autopsy of President Kennedy at Bethesda Naval Hospital on Nov. 22, 1963.

Discussion

The information disclosed by the joint examination of the foregoing exhibits by the members of the panel supports the following conclusions:

The decedent was wounded by two bullets both of which entered the body from behind.

One bullet struck the back of the decedent's head well above the external occipital protuberance. Based upon the observation that he was leaning forward with his head turned obliquely to the left when this bullet struck, the photographs and X-rays indicate that it came from a site above and slightly to his right. This bullet fragmented after entering the cranium, one major piece of it passing forward and laterally to produce an explosive fracture of the right side of the skull as it emerged from the head.

The absence of metallic fragments in the left cerebral hemisphere or below the level of the frontal fossa on the right side together with the absence of any holes in the skull to the left of the midline or in its base and the absence of any penetrating injury of the left hemisphere eliminate with reasonable certainty the possibility of a projectile having passed through the head in any direction other than from back to front as described in preceding sections of this report.

The other bullet struck the decedent's back at the right side of the base of the neck between the shoulder and spine and emerged from the front of his neck near the midline. The possibility that this bullet might have followed a pathway other than one passing through the site of the tracheotomy wound was considered.

No evidence for this was found. There is a track between the two cutaneous wounds as indicated by subcutaneous emphysema and

small metallic fragments on the X-rays and the contusion of the apex of the right lung and laceration of the trachea described in the autopsy report.

In addition, any path other than one between the two cutaneous wounds almost surely have been intercepted by bone and the X-ray films show no bony damage in the thorax or neck.

The possibility that the path of the bullet through the neck might have been more satisfactorily explored by the insertion of a finger or probe was considered. Obviously the cutaneous wound in the back was too small to permit the insertion of a finger. The insertion of a metal probe would have carried the risk of creating a false passage, in part because of the changed relationship of muscles at the time of autopsy and in part because of the existence of post-mortem rigidity.

Although the precise path of the bullet could undoubtedly have been demonstrated by complete dissection of the soft tissue between the two cutaneous wounds, there is no reason to believe that the information disclosed thereby would alter significantly the conclusions expressed in this report.

Summary

Examination of the clothing and of the photographs and X-rays taken at autopsy reveal that President Kennedy was struck by two bullets fired from above and behind him, one of which traversed the base of the neck on the right side without striking bone and the other of which entered the skull from behind and exploded its right side.

The photographs and X-rays discussed herein support the above-quoted portions of the original autopsy report and the above-quoted medical conclusions of the Warren Commission report.