

25 February 1972

The Editor
The Press Journal
15 N. Dean Street
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Sir,

Your lead story in the February 24th issue ("Noted Surgeon Backs Charges on Assassination") correctly reports that Dr. John K. Lattimer is the only civilian physician who has been permitted to view the autopsy photographs and X-rays of President John F. Kennedy. These photographs and X-rays were not taken at Parkland Hospital in Dallas, as is asserted in your story, but at the Bethesda Naval Hospital, where the autopsy was performed by three surgeons from the armed services, only one of whom can be said to have been properly qualified in forensic pathology.

The autopsy photographs and X-rays were reviewed by the three autopsy surgeons in January 1967. They were again reviewed in February 1968 by a panel of four medical experts selected by the U.S. Department of Justice, which did not release the panel's report until the following year. Now a further review has been conducted by Dr. Lattimer, a urologist who has acknowledged that he was in no way qualified to interpret the materials in question but who has been writing and lecturing on behalf of the Warren Report since 1966.

One is struck by the fact that the observations reported by Dr. Lattimer differ materially, with respect to the location and description of the wounds and other salient features of the evidence, from the observations of the 1968 panel of four, which in turn differed materially and significantly from the 1967 review by the three autopsy surgeons, which in turn differed significantly and materially from the original autopsy report and testimony. In the course of these several examinations and reviews, one wound has been moved from the base of the skull to the top of the head—a shift of some four inches—while a second wound was moved progressively from the back to the base of the neck to high in the neck. Since bullet wounds do not themselves shift from one location to another, one must conclude that three of the four sets of findings are inaccurate, or that the photographs and X-rays examined at different times by different individuals are the source of the baffling variations.

Another striking fact is that applications to examine the autopsy photographs and X-rays were made as early as 1966 on behalf of two of the most eminent and prestigious forensic pathologists in this country—namely, Dr. Milton Helpert, the medical examiner of New York City, and Dr. Cyril H. Wecht, coroner of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania and President of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences. Dr. Wecht,

who again made a formal request to inspect the photographs and X-rays in mid-1971, has not even received the courtesy of a response, despite his undisputed and preeminent expertise. The same is generally true for Dr. John Nichols, a pathologist at the University of Kansas. Surely it is strange and anomalous that a urologist, who is not eligible under the terms of the agreement under which the autopsy photographs and X-rays were deposited in the National Archives, has been allowed to examine them, while highly qualified pathologists continue to be denied the same access. Strange, unless there is some link to the fact that Drs. Helpern, Wecht and Nichols have publicly voiced doubts and criticisms of the autopsy findings and the related conclusions of the Warren Report, while Dr. Lattimer has made repeated efforts to sanctify the official case.

In so doing, Dr. Lattimer ironically has come into conflict with the assertions in the Warren Report and with the testimony of witnesses. For example, he is quoted in your story as stating that "In the front seat of the car investigators found the empty jacket of the bullet". That is absolutely untrue, and no one has ever claimed otherwise. The "empty jackets" or cartridge cases of three missiles were found on the sixth floor of the Book Depository; none were found in the car.

Dr. Lattimer has also made unfounded claims about Oswald's capability as a marksman. An officer of the Marine Corps who gave testimony on that subject to the Warren Commission, after reviewing Oswald's scorebook, had to concede that Oswald left the Marines a rather poor marksman.

What is intriguing and paradoxical in Dr. Lattimer's pronouncements just after his examination of the photographs and X-rays is that he places the bullet wound much higher in the neck than any of the preceding experts and, coincidentally, at a point which corresponds with a diagram he used in lectures long before he even saw the photographs and X-rays. (See enclosed illustration.) Relating that wound high in the back of the neck with a second bullet wound at the Adam's apple, Dr. Lattimer arrives at a bullet path or trajectory which indicates either a steep ascent or a sharp descent. He argues that the bullet must have entered at the back, since to enter at the front and exit high in the back of the neck the bullet would have had to be fired from the floor of the car. But since the bullet path is constant, Dr. Lattimer's hypothesis would require the bullet to proceed to the floor of the car and not, as he implicitly suggests, to veer upward in mid-flight so as to strike Governor Connally at his armpit.

This subject is extremely complicated and arcane, and the average reader can easily be misled by pronouncements which appear to be authoritative but in fact are internally inconsistent and contradictory of the objective facts.

Yours sincerely,



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(Author of the Subject Index to the Warren Report and the Hearings and Exhibits, Scarecrow Press, New York, 1966, and Accessories After the Fact: The Warren Commission, the Authorities, and the Report, Bobbs-Merrill, New York, 1967)