

The CBS "News Inquiry" on the
Warren Report

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If the critics did not have enough to do in their attempts to correct the record and expose the misrepresentation in the Warren Report, they must now deal also with the various offspring-"reports" by the mass media seeking to reverse popular disaffection with the official account of the assassination. In the space of a single week in June 1967, major apologies for the Warren Report were presented, by the Associated Press in a syndicated newspaper article, and by CBS-Television News in a four-part "news inquiry" presented in one-hour installments on four successive nights. NBC-Television did not attempt to cover the whole canvas but ^{was} content to beat CBS to the punch ^{by a few days} by airing a one-hour assault on the notorious Garrison investigation. Since the New Orleans District Attorney, Jim Garrison, was already moribund, ^{thanks to} ~~by~~ his own grotesqueries, the savage attack by NBC probably endowed him with ^{undue} martyrdom in some ^{eyes} quarters. Instead of destroying Garrison's credibility, NBC probably managed to prolong it.

The CBS investigation was the most elaborate and expensive of the rehabilitation projects and may have made some new ~~or reconciled~~ supporters for the Warren Report, since it had many of the trappings of scientific measurement, expertise, and impartiality. The facade was impressive but nevertheless the CBS conclusions happened to coincide with those of the Warren Commission in all essential ~~respects~~. CBS was more critical of the Secret Service and the FBI than was the Commission; it was even slightly critical of the Commission itself for having permitted the FBI to absolve itself of allegations that Oswald was on its payroll.

But when CBS dealt with the evidence, whether its own inquiries and experiments or the Commission's, there were many omissions, errors, and fallacious arguments. The omissions were inevitable, even given four hours of broadcast time. The evidence is so vast and complicated that a full exposition was out of the question. The errors perhaps were also inevitable, in any nine-month investigation which required the researchers to master the 27 volumes published by the Warren Commission, unpublished material in the National Archives, and criticism published in books and

Draft

magazines, and then to reinterview witnesses, reinvestigate evidence, and conduct new photographic, marksmanship, and ballistics tests. Certainly errors of at least a marginal nature crept into the script, quite innocently no doubt.

What I take issue with is not minor inaccuracy but major deception which, under the guise of objective investigative journalism, attempted to propagandize an audience estimated to consist of perhaps 22 million viewers. The major deception emerges unmistakably in CBS's attempt to reinstate the single-missile theory--the theory that one bullet made all of Governor Connally's wounds after first having traversed President Kennedy's neck. The single-missile theory has been repudiated by all the critics of the Warren Report and recently by many of its friends. The critics reject this hypothesis because (1) they consider that the evidence proves that a bullet struck the President several inches below the neck, not in the higher location required if it exited at the Adam's apple and proceeded to strike the Governor; (2) even if the point of entrance was in the higher position (shown in schematic drawings and described in the autopsy report), the critics absolutely reject the notion that the bullet found on a stretcher in Parkland Hospital could have inflicted the damage attributed to it. Although that bullet supposedly fractured Connally's rib and wrist bone in the course of traversing two men and their clothing, it is virtually intact and undeformed.

To counter these arguments, CBS set itself the task of demonstrating that one bullet could have done all this damage to two men. It arranged for a series of tests to determine whether a bullet fired from a Mannlicher-Carcano rifle into gelatin blocks simulating a human neck, torso, wrist, and thigh had sufficient energy to make a path through each of the substances and lodge in the last block of gelatin. Tests of this type had been performed for the Warren Commission, but they had utilized shots into the separate parts and not into the whole series.

In the CBS tests, a plywood board was inserted into the gelatin block simulating the wrist, to approximate the bone; but in the gelatin block simulating the chest, no plywood approximating the rib was utilized. The CBS tests thus had a built-in advantage for the single-missile theory, although in other respects it was a great improvement over the wound penetration ballistics experiments utilized by the Warren Commission.