

8 July 1966

Mr. Jacob Cohen
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Dear Mr. Cohen,

Your article "The Vital Documents" in the current (July 11, 1966) issue of The Nation was most interesting. One must hope that the authorities will heed your appeal and produce the mysterious photographs and x-rays taken during the autopsy. Although I am by no means persuaded by your theory of "innocent" alteration of the autopsy report, I do congratulate you sincerely for your resourcefulness in coming up with an imaginative explanation to counter the serious charges implicit in Edward Jay Epstein's book Inquest. Is it not arresting that, although that book has been in the headlines for some seven weeks now, not one official spokesman for the Warren Commission or the FBI has come forward with facts which might be said to constitute a responsive refutation of the challenge to the Commission's findings in general and to the authenticity of the autopsy report in particular?

You have properly focussed on the withheld photographs and x-rays as essential to a precise scientific determination of the nature and location of the wounds sustained by the President and, therefore, to the number and source of the shots. However, I am at a loss to understand how you can have omitted from your analysis a discussion of the stretcher bullet--which in itself vitiates the single-missile hypothesis, by virtue of the testimony of each and every competent medical witness--and of the bullet holes in the President's garments. I will not argue the position of the hole in the coat, although I find the "explanation" that the coat was raised or bunched at the time of the shot highly implausible and wholly unsupported by photographic or other evidence. But what about the hole in the shirt? Even belatedly-produced photographs purporting to show a wound in the back of the neck, if they are forthcoming, would leave unresolved that most crucial discrepancy--the position of the hole in the shirt some inches below the collar. I do not believe that that problem can be dismissed without an accounting, whether or not the autopsy photographs are made available.

I am delighted to see that you interpret Epstein's line of questioning as tantamount to a charge that the autopsy was falsified and that the evidence of falsification was collusively suppressed. Epstein has been unjustly criticized by some of his fellow-critics on the ground that he was timid in challenging the Commission. I am glad that others are getting the message, which despite the reserve of Epstein's language seems to be crystal-clear.

You say that the eyewitness testimony on the nature of the wounds is "contradictory." But consider the eyewitness testimony on the site of the crucial wound. Secret Service agent Glen Bennett reported that he saw the bullet strike the President in the back about four inches below the neck. Secret Service agent Clinton Hill, who was called into the autopsy chamber expressly to witness the condition of the body, testified that the wound was situated about six inches below the neck. And the other lay witnesses, without exception if my recollection is correct, invariably called this wound a wound in the shoulder or in the back; never did those witnesses refer spontaneously or naturally to a wound in the neck (see, for example, Kelley (5H 175); Kellerman (2H 103); Greer (2H 127); and Hill (2H 143)). Those persons are trained observers by profession and disinterested witnesses, while those who affirm that the wound was in the neck, despite all the contrary evidence, may or may not be disinterested.

Incidentally, two of the citations in your article are incorrect. On page 46, column one, at the end of the penultimate paragraph, you cite Volume I, p. 581. I believe that the correct reference is V, p. 81. In the same column, in the final paragraph, "V, p. 71" should be V, p. 61.

Now we come to a cardinal question: the date on which the FBI first had access to the autopsy report and whether or not that access preceded or followed the FBI Reports of December 9, 1963 and January 13, 1964. I am astonished that Francis Adams not only disclaimed the statements attributed to him by Epstein but insinuated that he had never even been interviewed by him. Does Adams, or anyone else, suggest that Epstein invented the whole thing? Surely not!

In any case, what Adams has withdrawn, Fletcher Knebel has supplied. Knebel, in his recent LOOK article, was good enough to tell us that he had obtained from the Treasury Department a precise date on which the autopsy report was said to have been transmitted to the FBI—December 23, 1963, fully three weeks before the FBI submitted the January 13, 1964 Report with its categorical statement that the bullet had penetrated only a finger's length. The "firmer documentation" which you demanded from Epstein has already been provided, by one of Epstein's most venomous critics.

I notice that you consider the (undated) Dallas Police Report "well organized and admirably detailed." Perhaps; but that admirable report (CE 2003) contains some appalling misrepresentations. It attributes a positive identification of Oswald to one witness (McWatters) who in fact failed to make such an identification; and it omits entirely any mention of Howard Brennan, who also failed to make a positive identification. Let us hope that those two "errors" were also innocent, and unique.

Turning to your ingenious hypothesis of the innocent alteration of the autopsy report, to avoid disclosure of adrenal insufficiency, and your statement that that curious omission had not yet received public comment, you may be

interested to know that the omission was the subject of severe criticism in the publication Current Medicine for Attorneys not too long ago, and was the subject of critical comment in the Journal of the American Medical Association, whose editor tried but failed to obtain clarification from Admiral Burkley, I believe.

I admire the adroitness of your adrenal theory; I am almost affected by your sturdy faith in the Commission's innocence of heart; and I applaud your readiness to concede that something sinister may be afoot and, if so, must be exposed. After intensive study of the medical and autopsy evidence, I concluded more than a year before seeing Inquest and the astonishing FBI descriptions of the wound that the autopsy findings had been influenced--if not fabricated--by the need to accomodate a fixed hypothesis. I will reconsider that conclusion only if we now receive not only the missing photographs and x-rays but also cogent and explicit explanations for the incongruous position of the hole in the shirt and many similar anomalies or conflicts in the medical evidence.

And even if all those wonders come to pass, the Commission will still have to account for an imposing list of misrepresentations and defects in its Report as compared with the corresponding evidence in the Hearings and Exhibits, which I have documented in a 500-page manuscript which I hope will make a contribution to the establishment of the truth about Dallas.

With good wishes,

Yours sincerely,

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