

The Autopsy TIME 12-27-63

The autopsy report on President Kennedy was on its way to the special investigating commission headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren, and had not yet been made public. But "unofficial" word of its contents was given to Washington newsmen last week.

The autopsy was performed at the Naval Medical Center at Bethesda, Md., and its findings differed in significant respects from earlier reports by doctors at Dallas' Parkland Memorial Hospital. The Parkland doctors' only interest had been in trying to save the President's life, totally forlorn though that hope was, and they took little time for closer examination of his wounds.

Thus Parkland doctors thought that one bullet struck Kennedy in the throat, just below the necktie knot, another in the back of the head, and either would have been fatal. But the autopsy indicated that the first bullet had struck Kennedy in the back, some six inches below the collar line, and that the throat wound had been made by a fragment of the last bullet, which literally exploded in Kennedy's head. Parkland doctors, who worked over Kennedy as he lay on his back, apparently missed the first wound. And it might not have been fatal. The bullet had penetrated but two or three inches, perhaps after ricocheting from part of the limousine, and it struck no vital organs.

The implication was that if President Kennedy had been shielded or thrown to safety on the floor of the car in the 5-sec. interval between the two shots, he might have survived. A Secret Serviceman, trained to react quickly in such emergencies, might have done just that had he been stationed close enough to Kennedy. One agent rode in the front seat of Kennedy's car in Dallas, but there was no way for him to scramble back to the President's aid in time. Kennedy himself had always objected to agents flanking him closely (particularly when campaigning), and by his own order there was no agent at his elbow in Dallas.

Meantime, the seven-member Warren commission moved ponderously ahead with its work. Warren ordered the FBI to add more details to its five-volume report, told the State Department that it too must flesh out its findings about the background of Assassin Lee Harvey Oswald. "They are summary reports in more or less skeleton form," said Warren, "and in order to evaluate them, we have to see the materials on which they are based." (18:2)

AUTOPSY PHOTOS, X-RAYS?
The First Baker Witness

The inside story, at last