

JFK autopsy photos said to be fakes

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New York—A photo technician hired by the House Select Committee on Assassinations to analyze film related to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy has concluded that four of the Kennedy autopsy photos are forgeries.

Robert F. Groden, a photo-optics technician who served as consultant to the committee, said he has evidence "that raises grave doubts about the authenticity" of materials relied upon by the House committee and three earlier investigations into the Kennedy assassination.

The Sun was shown a copy of his written conclusions, which will be included in the final version of the committee's report to be released later this month.

"For the record," Mr. Groden wrote in his analysis, "my visual inspection of the autopsy photos and X-rays reveals evidence of forgery in four of the photos," two color pictures showing the back of the President's head and the same shots in black and white.

Mr. Groden's analysis suggesting the possibility of an exit wound in the back of the President's head is supported by the sworn statements of 10 doctors and nurses who treated or handled President Kennedy upon his arrival at Parkland Hospital in Dallas immediately after he was shot November 22, 1963.

The Warren Commission based its September (1964) conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone assassin in part on autopsy evidence that indicated all the shots came from the rear. The House committee's reported conclusion also is that the only shots which hit the President came from the rear.

Mr. Groden concludes that the alleged

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forgery of autopsy photos was accomplished by the "matte insertion process," a technique well known in motion pictures and widely used in such films as "Superman: The Movie."

The process works this way: A small area is cut out of the larger backdrop film into which a new image is to be inserted. For instance, the skyline of the fictional city of Metropolis was the backdrop against which a horizontally outstretched Superman was imposed, giving the impression of flight.

The density of images around the edges, where one negative fits into the other, is reduced so they blend smoothly. One negative is placed on top of the other and a positive image is created from this insertion process.

Mr. Groden contends that the autopsy photos were forged in the same manner.

A photo showing part of the back of a cadaver's head, containing a small entry bullet wound, Mr. Groden said, was inserted over that of a massive exit wound in the back of President Kennedy's head in an apparent attempt to conceal the wound caused by a shot from the front.

Mr. Groden's analysis of the autopsy photos was completed early last summer, before his September 7 testimony during the committee's public hearings. Mr. Groden said he was specifically forbidden to discuss the autopsy photos when he testified.

Committee sources said Mr. Groden's instructions were that he was not allowed to discuss any aspect of the case which had not been covered previously in the public sessions. As Mr. Groden was the second witness to be called—following former Texas Gov. John B. Connally—the autopsy photos were off limits in accordance with the committee's ground rules.

In mid-July, a staff member of the House assassinations committee discovered that one of the Kennedy files—containing the autopsy photos that were being kept in a combination safe—had been handled by "an unauthorized person," who apparently gained access to them surreptitiously.

Fingerprints were found not only on the plastic sleeves containing the photos, but also on the pictures themselves. Among them were the four photos which Mr. Groden contends are forgeries.

District of Columbia police traced the fingerprints to Regis T. Blahut, a Central Intelligence Agency officer assigned to assist the committee with CIA files needed for the assassinations investigation.

Police said Mr. Blahut's fingerprints also were found on X-rays of the President and on the so-called "magic bullet," which had been crucial in linking Oswald to the assassination.

A CIA spokesman said the agency fired Mr. Blahut immediately after the fingerprints were identified. The spokesman, Herbert Hetu, said the agency was satisfied that the tampering with Kennedy assassination evidence was "just a matter of personal curiosity."

Mr. Groden said he submitted his report on the alleged autopsy-photo forgeries to the committee during the last week of June—about two weeks before it was discovered that Mr. Blahut of the CIA had tampered with the same photographic evidence Mr. Groden had been examining.

"It seems like too much of a coincidence to me," Mr. Groden said over the weekend.

At the close of its hearings last year, the House committee released its preliminary finding that President Kennedy's death was "probably" the result of a conspiracy—that there were at least two gunmen.

This conclusion was based on acoustic evidence—a recording from a motorcycle policeman's radio—that at least four shots were fired at the presidential limousine, one of which came from the area of Dealey Plaza known as the grassy knoll.

A stockade fence behind a line of thin-trunked trees at the top of the knoll is located to the right and in front of the spot where President Kennedy was shot. The distance is about 100 feet.

The House committee, sources told The Sun, will conclude in its final report that the shot fired from the grassy knoll missed the President and the limousine altogether, and that the alleged conspiracy involved organized crime rather than domestic or foreign intelligence agents.

"Even though that would have been the easiest shot of all," Mr. Groden said in an interview, "the [House] committee was forced to conclude that it missed everything because otherwise, they would have to explain why all the autopsy material failed to show that the President was hit at least once from the front."

"The mob is the new patsy," said a former committee staff member who disagreed with the upcoming findings.

In his report, Mr. Groden writes, "The basic conclusions from all except the acoustics panel [of the House assassinations committee] is that two shots struck the President from behind.

"On the surface it would seem that the autopsy materials bear out this conclusion. That, however, may not be the case.

"There is evidence that raises grave questions about the authenticity of the items being relied upon by the select committee and its panels. Moreover, there is medical data in the photos and X-rays that apparently is being ignored. . . ."

With respect to the photos Mr. Groden says are forgeries, he writes, "Within the circumference of the President's head, there is an irregular line. [Outside] this line it is auburn and completely dry. [Inside the line the hair appears to be wet and has less of a reddish tinge.] In later generations [copies] of these photos, a large degree of contrast buildup becomes apparent at the line's edge and the line becomes clearly defined. This phenomenon is characteristic of crop lines in matte insertion processes used for retouching and repositioning of photos."

Kennedy autopsy photos faked, technician says

Mr. Groden's allegation of autopsy forgery is supported by the best known visual record of the Kennedy assassination—home movies of the presidential motorcade filmed by Abraham Zapruder from his vantage point on the grassy knoll.

Former Representative Thomas N. Downing (D., Va.) said he showed the Zapruder film to members of Congress in 1975 and 1976 to persuade them to vote for authorization of the House Select Committee on Assassinations. Mr. Downing, now retired, was the committee's first chairman. "It convinced me there was more than one assassin," he said.

The color 8-millimeter film, viewed more than 50 times by this reporter, clearly shows an explosion of blood and tissue at the upper right portion of the President's forehead, near the hairline. Immediately upon impact, the President's head is thrust backward at a rate measured at just over 100 feet per second. Further, a frame-by-frame inspection reveals (in frames 335 to 337) what appears to be a puffing out of the back of the head, as if tissue were exploding from the rear of the skull.

Jacqueline Kennedy can be seen scrambling out on the trunk of the limousine to retrieve a piece of the President's brain an instant after the shooting. Later, a witness, Billy Harper, found a piece of bone on the Elm street pavement to the left and behind the limousine. It was identified by a pathologist as occipital bone, which is located in the back of the skull.

Any such evidence of a frontal wound to the President tends to cast doubt on the accuracy of the Kennedy autopsy records, which indicated only rear-entry wounds.

The autopsy on President Kennedy was performed by military personnel at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md.

The autopsy drawings were done by an artist who was not permitted to see the President's body. No investigation of the Kennedy assassination—including the Warren Commission's—was permitted to examine the President's brain.

However, these are the statements of two of the doctors who examined the President at Parkland Hospital in Dallas.

Dr. Gene Atkins: "The back of the right occipital parietal portion of his head was shattered, with brain substance protruding."

Dr. Kemp Clark: "There was a large wound in the right occipital parietal region. Both cerebral and cerebellar tissue were extruding."

(The occipital region is the rear part of the skull. The parietals are the two membrane bones at the top of the skull. The cerebral part of the brain consists of its hemispheres at the top of the head, protected by the parietals; the cerebellar part of the brain is in the back of the skull, above the medulla, in the occipital region.)

In addition, Diana Hamilton Brown, a nurse who ran to the limousine to assist Jacqueline Kennedy in lifting her husband's shoulders so he could be placed on a stretcher, described "one large hole" in the back of the President's head.

All this testimony, and that of seven other medical witnesses at Parkland who corroborated this description of a large wound in the back of the head, was included in the Warren Commission report. However, in its finding, the Warren Commission relied on the drawings, X-rays and photos that came out of the autopsy performed in Bethesda.

Forensic pathologists for the military are trained at the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology on the grounds of Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington where, according to several sources, Marjory's chief medical examiner, Russell S. Fisher, has extensive, long-term contacts. Dr. Fisher served on the Ramsey Clark panel, which in 1968 concluded that the original autopsy performed on President Kennedy was valid.

One of the most controversial aspects of that autopsy, which has been upheld by the Warren Commission, the Ramsey Clark panel, the 1975 Rockefeller Commission and the majority of the House committee's pathology panel, is the one involving the so-called "magic bullet."

The bullet, otherwise known as Warren Commission exhibit No. 399, is alleged to have caused seven wounds in President Kennedy and then-Governor Connally, who was seated in front of the President in

the limousine.

Without this single-bullet theory, it would not have been possible for the Warren Commission to have concluded that Oswald was the lone gunman. Nor would it be possible today for the House committee to conclude that all the wounds in President Kennedy and Mr. Connally came from one rifle fired from the sixth-floor window of the Texas School Book Depository, where Oswald worked.

The bullet, according to the majority finding of the House assassinations committee, entered the President near the top vertebra (about 2 inches below where the Warren Commission placed it, and about 2½ inches above where the doctors at Parkland Hospital placed it, including President Kennedy's personal physician.)

It then exited at the President's throat, near the trachea, entered Mr. Connally's back, exited just below his right nipple, breaking a rib on the way through, entered Mr. Connally's right wrist, shattering the wrist bone, and exited on the other side of his wrist, before burrowing into his thigh, according to the Warren Commission.

The bullet was recovered in the emergency area at Parkland Hospital. The FBI places the time when the bullet was found at 1.30 P.M.

The bullet was and still is in "near pristine" condition, to use a description of a critic of the single-bullet theory, Dr. Cyril Wecht, of Pittsburgh, the medical examiner of Allegheny county, Pa. The bullet's most obvious deformity is a small niche taken from the tip by the FBI for spectrographic tests. A bullet that struck matter as solid as a human wrist bone normally would be seriously deformed, ballistics experts say.

Moreover, doctors who treated Mr. Connally testified that they recovered more weight in bullet fragments than was missing from the recovered bullet. And Mr. Connally and his wife, Nelly, both contend he was hit by a separate bullet than

that which struck the President.

"I do not believe, nor will I ever believe, that I was hit with the first bullet," Mr. Connally told the House committee in public session last September 6. "I know it was the second shot that hit the Governor." Mrs. Connally testified.

The first bullet is the only one that could possibly have traversed both bodies, pathologists for the House panel have found; a later bullet is the one said to have shattered the President's skull, and the other two are accounted for as misses.

In addition, Dr. Robert A. Shaw, the physician who attended Mr. Connally, said in answer to a question at a November 22, 1963, press conference concerning the Governor's condition, "The bullet is in the leg. It hasn't been removed. This is a very insignificant factor."

A videotape of the press conference shows a clock on the wall indicating the time was 3.30 P.M.—roughly two hours after the FBI's estimate of when the so-called "magic bullet" was found. Dr. Shaw now says there never was a bullet in Mr. Connally's leg, only a fragment.

Dr. Wecht, the Allegheny county (Pa.) medical examiner, testified in public session before the House assassinations committee about the so-called "magic bullet" and the wounds it is said to have caused.

"There is just no way in the world that this bullet could have done that. . . . This is the kind of examination that would not be tolerated in a routine murder case by a good crew of homicide detectives in most major cities of America on anybody—just a plain, ordinary citizen, let alone a President."

But as to forgeries, Dr. Wecht said in an interview, "I have no way of knowing that's not my area of expertise. But I do know that any medical examiner, in a private case, if there was any question [in a head-wound case], he would insist on having the brain to examine and be would raise hell if he couldn't get it."