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Assassin or Assassins?

Warren Commission Left Room for Doubt

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Mark Lane, a New York attorney, has based his recent career on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Hardly had the sound of shooting died away, it seemed, before Lane, probably the most flamboyant of the Warren Commission debunkers, was on the scene in Washington. Mother Oswald in tow, to raise hot issue with the "verdict" in Dallas. He made a nuisance of himself during commission hearings and held press conferences any time he could get an audience. He has lectured on the subject in this country and abroad. All in all, he seemed either obsessed or, as some of us believed, cynically in search of the buck. He wasn't too believable, in other words, and when the Warren



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Commission report finally was published, there was some hope he would go back under the rock from which he had come.

I cite this background to demonstrate the perspective for this. Lane's book called "Rush to Judgment," published Monday, has created serious doubts about the Warren Report and the investigation. As difficult as it might have been, he should have been listened to previously. He has worked up a presentation for the defense of Lee Harvey Oswald that may not be entirely convincing but which creates reasonable doubts on several points. Which is what a defense attorney is supposed to do.

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LANE'S approach, through the tedious presentation of evidence and the testimony of his witnesses, is admittedly one-sided and selective. But in taking this line, he emphasizes the one-sided and selective line of investigation adopted by the Warren Commission. The commission, organized under the Chief Jus-

tice, began its investigation, Lane charges, with the preconceived notion of Oswald's guilt. It, of course, brought in the verdict that Oswald, working alone, assassinated President Kennedy with a rifle fired from the sixth floor of the Dallas School Book Depository.

The line of Lane's presentation is that more than one assassin was involved, that the wounds in Kennedy's throat and head could not have been inflicted from the rear, that neither Oswald nor his rifle were capable of such accuracy and speed of firing in the first place, and that Oswald, possibly, was the fall guy for the real assassins.

It would be impossible here to go into detail on Lane's accumulation of evidence.

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BUT TWO serious flaws in the commission report can be noted. First, although I was assigned to deal with a

portion of the report when in Washington, at the time, for this newspaper, and found it

comfortably convincing. I was never able to resolve the doubt in my mind created by the instant fingering of Oswald as the slayer. Or how it happened that Patrolman Tippit encountered him so soon after the assassination and met his own death.

But it is the physical evidence — the evidence of the wounds, along with the testimony about the number of shots and the direction from which they came — that should trouble most of us. Would a high-powered bullet, fired from the rear, have left a neat hole in the President's throat? Would such a shot, fired from behind, explode the front or rear of the President's skull? In which direction does a man lurch when hit by such a slug? In which direction would the debris of death fly if, indeed, the shot was from the rear? Can we believe the statement of the priest, administering last rites, who commented on a wound over the President's left eye? Why was other testimony on a wound on the President's left temple ignored? Why were neither photographs nor x-rays of the wounds viewed by the commission?

The answer to these questions, according to Lane, is that the main purpose of the commission was to re-assure the American public, and any pieces of the puzzle that didn't fit were thrown away.

"The Commission, he writes, "did not acquit itself of its mandate; it failed to conduct a thorough investigation; it failed to ask the relevant questions if their likely answers promised discomfort. Its failure shall in time, I believe, be complete, for half answers do not for long dispel rumors and contain doubts. I believe the final failure of the Commission to be that it has prepared a fertile ground for the cultivation of rumor and speculation."

Lane has done some planting in that ground, himself.