

*Draft of Meagher article that appeared  
in The Texas Observer*

THE JFK AUTOPSY PHOTOGRAPHS AND X-RAYS

There is no reason to doubt that Dr. John K. Lattimer is an extremely competent urologist but there is every reason to doubt that he is qualified to evaluate the JFK autopsy photographs and X-rays. Urology is as far removed from forensic pathology in the examination of gunshot fatalities as pediatrics or gynecology or even psychiatry. The fact that Dr. Lattimer examined gunshot wounds while in military service during World War II means that he was trying to save lives, without concern about whether the man was shot from a treetop 500 yards away or a trench 200 yards away or shot from the right rather than the left.

Urology is the branch of medicine that deals with disease processes of the genito-urinary tract, primarily the kidneys, the urethers, the bladder, and in a male, the prostate gland, the testes, and the scrotal sac. A urologist never moves above the umbilicus and never in a hundred years can he provide expertise in the field of forensic pathology, as Dr. Lattimer has readily acknowledged. Forensic pathology is a highly specialized branch of forensic or legal medicine and requires five years of special training, followed by continuing work on official medical-legal investigations. A cardinal rule in malpractice, which is frequently encountered in the practice of legal medicine, is that physicians do not involve themselves in a specialty other than those in which they qualify, whether by diagnosis, treatment, or testimony in a court of law. That rule is traditional; it is steeped in wisdom, founded on logic, and understood by all physicians.

For these reasons, it is rather amazing that Dr. Lattimer, who is accredited only as a urologist, should have ventured to examine autopsy

photographs and X-Rays which he is not at all competent to evaluate, and moreover to pronounce his findings in categorical and conclusive terms that even highly qualified forensic pathologists like Dr. Russell Fisher and Dr. Alan Meritz did not venture to indulge in when they earlier reviewed the same evidence.

In contrast to the equivocal and qualified language of the three autopsy surgeons and the Russell Fisher panel, Dr. Lattimer in positive assertions verging on the omniscient tells us that a bullet entered the President even higher on the neck than was suggested earlier, but he does not explain how that same bullet produced holes in the coat and the shirt some 5.5 inches below the top of the collar. One wonders if he confused this bullet wound (originally located in the infra-scapular region or the lower part of the big wing bone on the back, then subsequently moved up several inches to a point immediately over the top of the shoulder) with the bullet hole in the back of the skull near the right occipital protuberance (as it was described by the autopsy surgeons, although later that wound too was moved upwards by four inches by the Fisher panel). Dr. Lattimer describes a halo-like bruise around the wound which he cites as proof that it was a wound of entry but such a bruising effect or ecchymosis is also found at wounds of exit, which a urologist would have no reason to know.

Dr. Lattimer's second argument for a back-to-front bullet transit through the neck rests on the steep downward trajectory which he describes, claiming that for a front-to-back transit along such a path the bullet would have had to come from the floor of the car. If the path of flight is fixed and only the point of origin is in doubt, Dr. Lattimer must explain why the bullet entering the back at that angle of flight did not strike the car floor from which he asserts it would have had to originate to achieve that trajectory, but instead rose in mid-flight to strike Governor Connally at the armpit.

Without reconciling these gross conflicts in the evidence, Dr. Lattimer has not only formed absolute conclusions on the nature of the wounds and the direction of the shots but has actually identified the perpetrator as Lee Harvey Oswald! Not forensic pathology, much less urology, but an occult "science" would have to be invoked to determine that from the autopsy photographs and X-Rays. Going still further, Dr. Lattimer insists that Oswald was a "perfectly competent marksman", on the evidence of his "rifle scorebook" in the Marine Corps. In this, Lattimer tries to be holier than the Pope, for on the testimony of a Marine colonel who evaluated the scorebook for the Warren Commission Oswald left the service "a rather poor shot".

I have been asked why Dr. Lattimer was selected to view the autopsy photographs while forensic pathologists who applied as early as 1966 and again in mid-1971 have yet to receive the same opportunity. When one considers that some of the pathologists have questioned the validity of the autopsy findings while the urologist, Dr. Lattimer, has ardently defended the Warren Report in articles and speeches since 1966, the question answers itself.