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JIM GARRISON
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Josiah Thompson
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Dear Tink:

I have recently been re-studying the autopsy question, and I have come to the conclusion that it is of paramount importance to determine on what date the autopsy was delivered to higher authority. I note that CE397 (17H47) states that "Autopsy notes and the holograph draft of the final report were handed to Commanding Officer, U.S. Naval Medical School, at 1700 (i.e. 5:00 p.m.) 24 November, 1963." This certificate signed by Cdr. Humes and Captain Stover is dated November 24, 1963.

Sylvia Meagher asserts that the certificates "read as if they had been written after a passage of time, as if to account for the disposition of the documents at an earlier date." (A.A.F. p.138). I am not sure what she bases this on, but it appears to be of crucial importance.

I believe that the only really vital question about the autopsy relates to the location of the back wound. Let us assume that the wound really was in the back, and not, as the autopsy claims, the neck. If so, I do not believe that Humes would have been prescient enough to shift the location of the wound by six inches, as early as November 24. One has to reconstruct the general confusion and uncertainty about the case at that time to appreciate this. The Warren Commission, let alone the single bullet theory, did not yet exist. Humes certainly had not seen the Zapruder film, and I doubt if he could have been sufficiently confident of his knowledge of the physical layout of Dealey Plaza to be so bold as to shift the wound to make it conform with an Oswald-lone-assassin thesis. In fact, the evidence seems to indicate quite strongly that if the position of the back wound was changed, it was done so to make it conform with the "single bullet" theory. According to Epstein, "in early March, Arlen Specter discussed the time problem informally with Commander Humes and Boswell," and according to Specter, Humes

Josiah Thompson
July 10, 1968

Page -2-

suggested "it was medically possible that both men had been hit by the same bullet." (Inquest p. 93). Then on March 16, 1964, Humes testified and the undated autopsy was introduced into evidence.

My point is that if the autopsy was tailored to the "single bullet" theory, it can hardly have been so tailored by November 24. On the other hand, if it can be proved that the autopsy was not delivered until much later, then this would amount to proof that the autopsy is a fake.

This question, it seems to me, is separate from the question of whether or not the bullet transited Kennedy's body. In other words, I can accept that Humes, on November 23 when he discovered that the tracheotomy had obliterated a wound he had not known about, altered his conclusion that the bullet had not exited. But I cannot accept that at the same time he concluded it was necessary to relocate the back wound six inches higher. At that time he cannot have had enough information to realize the necessity for this. But I accept your conclusion that the autopsy was changed on November 23 as a result of Humes' phone call to Dr. Perry, ("so that's it!").

Sylvia Meagher refers to many newspaper accounts which give a different version of the autopsy from the subsequently official one. However it seems to me that all of these discrepancies can be accounted for by the fact that the newspapers were receiving information from the FBI, who continued to adhere to their version of the autopsy, and possibly never saw the official autopsy at all. She states that "the on-site tests carried out by the Secret Service in December 1963 were based on findings different from those in the published autopsy, which it is now claimed, were recorded and known to the Secret Service before these on-site tests." (AAF, p. 138). However, do we know for sure that the FBI and/or the Secret Service ever saw the official autopsy report? I am just theorizing that two conflicting sets of reports could have existed side by side, without the FBI/Secret Service knowing of the conflict, if they ^{never} saw the official report. I note that Sylvia writes, "On-site tests were conducted on December 5, 1963, by the Secret Service --presumably (my emphasis) with the autopsy report in hand," (AAF p. 135).

Josiah Thompson
July 10, 1968

Page -3-

In summary, I feel that if it can be proved that Humes relinquished control of the finally published autopsy as early as November 24, then any alterations which had been made by that date can hardly have had any sinister intention. Clearly the decision to conclude that the bullet transited was an inference intended to make the written record conform to the new evidence about the throat wound, which hardly seems sinister. The vital nature of the problem -- brought to light by study of the Zapruder film -- was not appreciated for several months, and so it is unrealistic to criticize Humes on this point. For the same reason, it seems most unlikely that it would even have occurred to Humes to shift the location of the wound up by six inches. (For all he knew, Kennedy may well have been leaning forward when the bullet was hit, thus precluding the necessity to shift the wound).

On the other hand, it seems clear that if the autopsy was not in fact delivered until much later, (specifically, after the on-site tests and study of the film), the autopsy was clearly altered to make it consistent with the "single bullet" theory.

This is hardly intended to provide any solution, but it does, I believe, state the problem. I would be interested to hear your comments.

Best wishes,

Tom

TOM BETHELL

TB:SK

cc. Sylvia Meagher