

The Bullet Wounds
and the Autopsy Report

The controversy about the bullet wound in the President's neck has not been put to an end by the ingenious explanation which the Warren Commission has produced. The team of doctors at Parkland Memorial Hospital did not consider it a wound of entrance, as was universally reported at the time of the assassination; they thought it was either an entrance or an exit wound (no one suggested the work of a ~~man~~ vampire, which is about the only other possibility that comes to mind). But if any of the doctors did judge it to be an entrance wound, they were understandably mistaken. (If any of them still persist in their original diagnosis of an entrance wound, as has been suggested in various press reports, they are guilty of a heresy which they are wise to keep silent.) The pathologists who performed the post mortem have said that there was an entrance wound in the back, or the back of the neck, of which bullet the wound in the front of the neck was the exit wound.

Nevertheless, the FBI continued for weeks after the autopsy was performed to attempt by re-enactments to determine how a bullet fired from behind could strike the President from the front. This did not prove possible. By the spring of 1964, the mystery appeared to be solved--the neck wound had been caused by a fragment of the bullet that struck the President's head. It was an exit wound.

The third revision appeared a month or two later. The exit wound in the neck had been caused by a bullet which struck the President in the back, or the back of the neck. It is still not clear which, since the wound in the body and the corresponding ~~wound~~ ^{hole} in the coat are separated by about five inches.

Why should such great indecision and such frequent revision have occurred if the post-mortem, which was completed on the day of the assassination, proved that the neck wound was the result of the bullet's exit and not its entrance? Let us turn to the autopsy report itself, as given in Appendix IX of the report of the Warren Commission.

It is immediately striking to find that the autopsy report is undated. It indicates that the post-mortem examination was completed on 22 November. Internal evidence shows that the report was not written before 23 November 1963 or after September 1964, when the report of the Warren Commission went to press. It could have been written, or re-written, any time between those dates.

Next, it is instructive to read the first two paragraphs of the report, which appear under the strange heading "clinical summary." Those paragraphs say that there were three shots, and that as the shots were heard a rifle barrel was seen to disappear into a window on an upper floor of the

Texas School Book Depository Building. An autopsy surgeon would have to be very eccentric indeed, after that hint about the number and direction of the shots, to report any findings inconsistent with the story. In fact, there was actual difficulty in classifying the neck wound, which had been altered in the course of a tracheostomy performed by Dr. Perry at Parkland Memorial Hospital. The doctors traced the course of the bullet through the body and, "as information was received from Parkland Hospital," they "presumed" or "concluded" that the wound was a wound of entrance. But when did they so conclude?

A wound was reported and for weeks after the assassination regarded by the FBI as an entrance wound became, on an undetermined date, an exit wound. Between the two events, the doctors at Parkland were visited (but only after a month had passed) and confronted with the choice of challenging their colleagues (rather high-ranking Naval officers) who had performed the autopsy and who had concluded in a report (which was not shown to the Parkland doctors although the special agents of the Secret Service were clutching a copy during the interview) that the neck wound was an exit wound, or agreeing to that alleged finding. Perhaps the autopsy surgeons learned "as information was received from Parkland Hospital" that the doctors agreed that it was an exit wound but did not learn that the middlemen, the Secret Service agents, had secured that information without disclosing to the Parkland doctors the actual contents of the autopsy report. There is every appearance that each set of doctors reached this conclusion only after indications from the investigative agencies that it had to be an exit wound and that the other set of doctors said it was.

If there is no ground for such a suspicion, why is the autopsy report undated, why is there no indication elsewhere in the report of the date on which these several doctors and sets of doctors arrived at an agreed conclusion, and above all why was the FBI trying to account for an entrance wound weeks after the autopsy findings had indicated that there was no such wound?

These questions are crucial, for if there is any possibility that the wound was an entrance wound as it was regarded without a whisper of doubt for a whole month after the autopsy was performed there were two or more assassins, and all, or all but one of them, are ~~as of this date still abroad in the land.~~ still abroad in the land.