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A. Summary of  
The First Shot: A Challenge to the Warren Report

by

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Background Information

Immediately after President John F. Kennedy was struck by bullets while riding in a motorcade in Dallas on November 22, 1963 he was rushed to Parkland Hospital in Dallas. In addition to the fatal head wounds, the doctors attending him there observed a bullet hole in his neck just below the Adam's apple. In their doomed attempts to save his life they performed a tracheotomy—an incision directly into the windpipe—just at the site of the bullet hole to aid his breathing. They never had cause to turn his body over and so did not observe a bullet hole in the shoulder area in back.

The autopsy was performed several hours later at Bethesda Naval Medical Center in Maryland near Washington, D.C. The autopsy doctors saw the bullet hole in back but did not detect the bullet hole in the neck in front because it was obscured by the tracheotomy. From the back the autopsy doctors attempted to run a probe through the body to follow the path of the bullet, but were unable to locate a path. They concluded at the time that the wound was only an inch or so deep.

It was only the next day, after the President's body was no longer available that the autopsy doctors learned through a telephone conversation with a doctor in Dallas that there had been a wound in front. Their statements about the actual bullet path are thus deductions after the fact rather than being their direct observations. In the language of the Warren Report, the doctors "concluded" and the bullet path was "traced."

Governor John Connally, sitting just in front of the President in the limousine, was also wounded. No bullet was found either in Governor Connally or in the President's body. Only a few bullet fragments were found in the car. A practically perfect bullet was later found on a stretcher in another part of Parkland Hospital. While it could have been "planted" there the Warren Commission concluded that it was on the stretcher on which Governor Connally had been placed while first being treated.

The Commission concluded that three shots were fired and that one bullet missed the car and that another (the final one) struck the President fatally in the head. Trying to reconcile the absence of bullets afterwards with the shoulder and neck wounds in the President and the wounds in Governor Connally the Commission propounded the famous "single bullet theory" which maintained that the first shot fired passed through the President's neck and went on to wound Governor Connally, the bullet later being found on the hospital stretcher.

Both supporters and critics of the Warren Report would agree on the above. Many people have doubted the single bullet theory, mainly on the basis that it does not seem likely or possible that a bullet could strike two different people including damaging bones in Governor Connally and yet emerge without itself being deformed.

## A Crucial Flaw in the Single Bullet Theory

I am not interested in attacking the single bullet theory as such, but only in arriving at what I consider to be an accurate evaluation of the evidence available. It is not just a question of whether the wounds were inflicted by one or more bullets, but what the evidence shows us about where the shots came from.

We start with the fact (about which there is no disagreement) that the first bullet striking the President did not hit or break any bones in his body. This means that the bullet went over or between the bones. Concern with bony structure of the body led me to think of possible bullet paths in terms of a human skeleton, using one in our anthropology laboratory for investigation purposes. While there would be variations between individuals in skeletal characteristics, the matters with which we are concerned are basic characteristics of the skeleton and far beyond the range of individual variation.

There are many bones in the neck-shoulder area-- ribs, scapula (shoulder blade), clavicle (collar bone), and the neck and back vertebrae. The paths a bullet may take through this jumble of bones without striking any of them are very limited indeed.

There is no disagreement that the wound in front was just below the Adam's apple in the midline of the body. A bullet could not have passed through this point and proceeded straight ahead to hit Governor Connally because just behind this point are the neck vertebrae. Any bullet exiting through this point and not striking these vertebrae would be traveling at least at a 30 degree angle sideways to the left. A bullet traveling at this angle laterally could not possibly have struck Governor Connally. I can only conclude that the President and the Governor were struck by different bullets.

What if the President's body were turned somewhat sideways? The Zapruder movie made during the assassination shows that the President was seated squarely in the car. His head was turned but not his body. The principle of lateral angle renders the single bullet theory untenable. Lateral or sideways angle was completely ignored by the Warren Commission. The assassination could not have happened the way the Commission says it did.

## A Determination of What Did Happen During the Assassination

My only concern here is with the first (and non-fatal shot). Skeletal characteristics indicate that it could have been traveling within a range of 30 to 45 degrees laterally. What was its downward angle? The angle downward from the sixth floor east window of the Depository was 18 degrees. Was this the actual angle of the first shot? We have seen that lateral angle rules out the bullet having struck Governor Connally. A bullet traveling laterally from 30 to 45 degrees and downward at an 18 degree angle and exiting the President's neck would have to have struck either Mrs. Connally or landed in the car. That the bullet did neither is evidence that it was traveling in a near-horizontal direction and escaped the car out the left side.

The Commission used faulty reasoning. It should have examined the evidence to determine the number and location of people shooting. Instead, it started with assuming only one assassin at a certain location and distorted the evidence to fit this assumption. This can be seen in its approach to the autopsy data concerning the location of the wound in back.

Given the location of the front wound we can establish the downward angle by determining the location of the wound in back. If the latter was higher on the body than the front wound then the bullet would have been traveling in a downward direction. If it was about the same level on the body as the front wound then a near-horizontal path would be indicated.

There is an apparent conflict in the evidence about the wound in back. Two sources locate the wound high on the back at the base of the neck. The first is the verbal description in the autopsy report. This says that the bullet entered "above the scapular." Such an entrance point would result in a lateral angle of about 45 degrees and a downward angle of about 30 degrees. It would be impossible for a bullet following this path either to strike Governor Connally or to escape the car.

The credibility of the autopsy verbal description is reduced by two facts. First, the path of the bullet was deduced after the autopsy and not observed during it, and second, autopsy doctor James Humes destroyed by burning his original autopsy notes (for reasons which have yet to be explained).

The other source locating the wound up high is Commission Exhibit 386. This is a drawing made months after the autopsy by a Navy medical corpsman who had never seen the body but who was working under the supervision of Dr. Humes who presumably was following the autopsy verbal description.

There are much better sources than these. The best is the measurements made on the body during the autopsy. Simple numerical measurements are much less susceptible to distortion than words. The back wound was measured as being 14 cm. (5 1/2 inches) below the mastoid process -- a bony knob just inside the skull approximately in line with the ear lobe. This would place the wound lower on the back than the verbal description.

Furthermore, there is another factor of crucial importance which has so far not been noted in the assassination literature. When a person's body is in the prone position as during autopsy the shoulder fall forward and downward, closer to the head (and mastoid process) than when the person is erect. Changed shoulder position also explains the failure to be able to run a probe through the body. The bullet path was no longer a straight line so the wound appeared to be a shallow one. A point on the skin 5 1/2 inches from the mastoid process in the prone position will be about 7 1/2 inches when the person is erect. This means that the bullet actually entered at a point more than seven inches down from the mastoid process, which would place it between the second and third ribs and at a level with the wound in front.

The other evidence supports this location. Bullet holes in the shirt and jacket measure  $5 \frac{3}{4}$  and  $5 \frac{3}{8}$  down respectively from the top of the collar. This would place them in line with the location of the wound on the body as determined by autopsy measurements with allowance for the shoulder position. This location also agrees with the statements of FBI and Secret Service agents who saw the wound either in Dallas or at Bethesda and agreed in placing it four to six inches down on the back below the neck.

A bullet entering at this location and exiting where it did in front would be traveling in a horizontal direction. It could not have come from the sixth floor window of the Depository. The Governor's wounds are consistent with a shooter located at the sixth floor east window of the Depository.

Thus we conclude that the President and the Governor were struck by different bullets fired from two different locations. The person who fired the first shot at the President would have been located on or near the street level in or near the western end of the Depository.

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### Legends for Pictures

#### Figure 1

The shoulder area is a veritable jumble of bones. Obviously, the places a bullet can go through this area without striking any bones are quite limited. Note how little space there is between the front of the neck vertebrae and the breastbone.

#### Figure 2

View of shoulder area from top with skull removed. Sideways angle of 42 degrees is minimum possible as rod touches the neck vertebrae. Somewhat smaller sideways angle is possible if path is between the ribs rather than over top of ribcage. In this picture rod represents same path as in Figure 4.

#### Figure 3

Shoulder area viewed from rear. There are only three possible places through which a bullet could pass: 1) over top of ribcage; 2) between first and second ribs; 3) between second and third rib. A bullet entering below position number 3 would be traveling in an upward direction. All three positions would result in a lateral angle within a 30-45 degree range.

#### Figures 4, 5, and 6

Wooden rod shows the path of bullet travel for each of the three possible areas of bullet entrance. It can be seen that each of the three possible paths is at a definite angle sideways. The approximate downward angles of the three paths are respectively 30 degrees, 20 degrees, and zero degrees. Bullets following either of the first two paths could not escape either the car or another person in the car but would not strike Governor Connally.

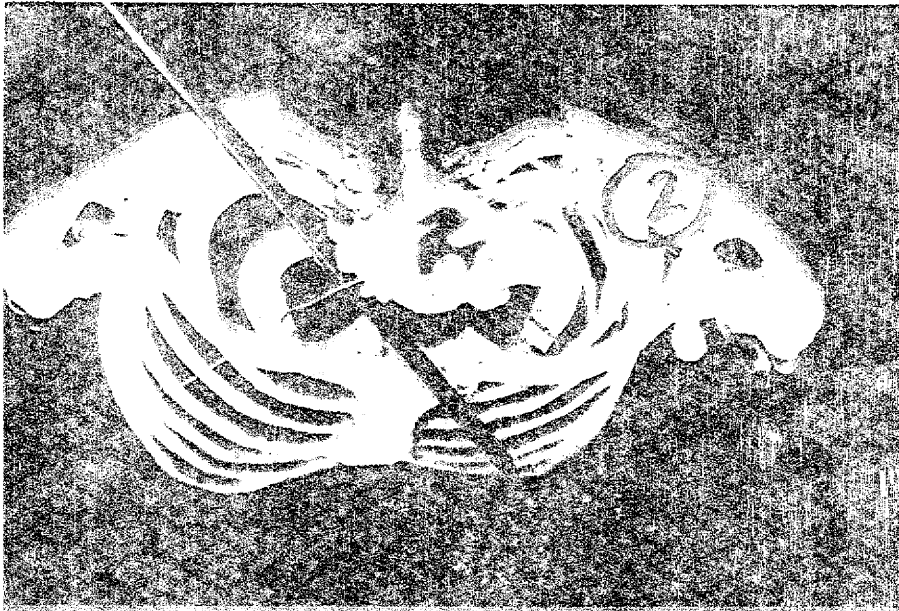
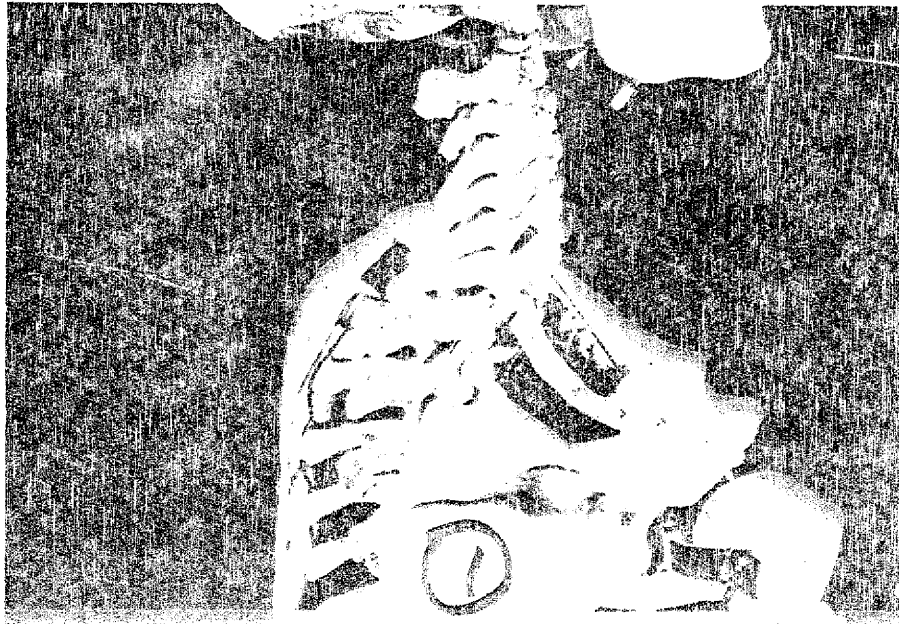
#### Figures 7 and 8

Anthropology instructor William Gerritsen serves as a model to demonstrate differences in shoulder relationships to head according to body position. Spot behind ear marks the tip of the mastoid process. Mark is made on shoulder 5 1/2 inches (14 cm.) from mastoid process while Gerritsen is in prone position. When he is in the erect position, the mark is 7 3/8 inches from the mastoid process. A bullet entering at this point would appear to have entered almost two inches higher when measured in the prone autopsy position.

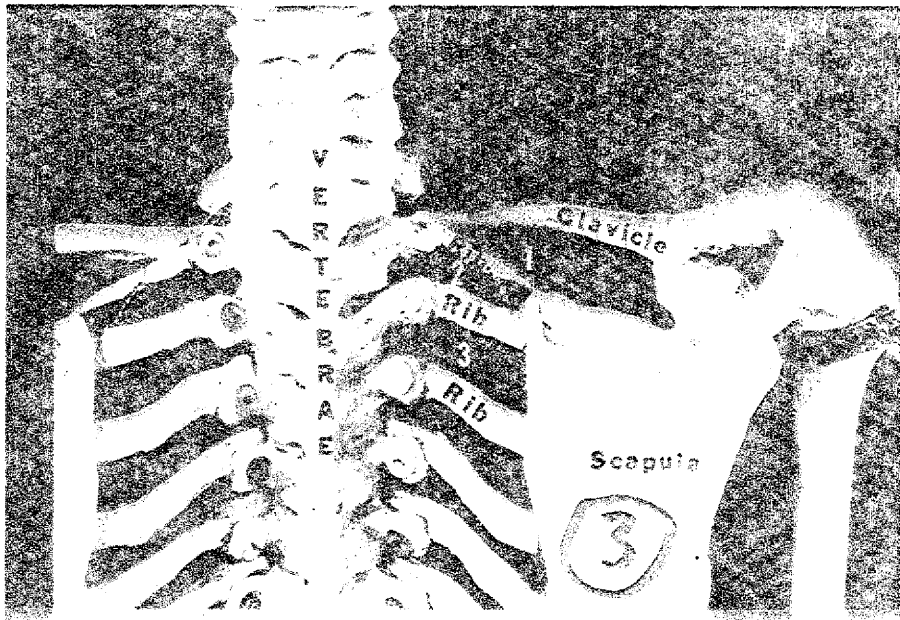
#### Figure 9

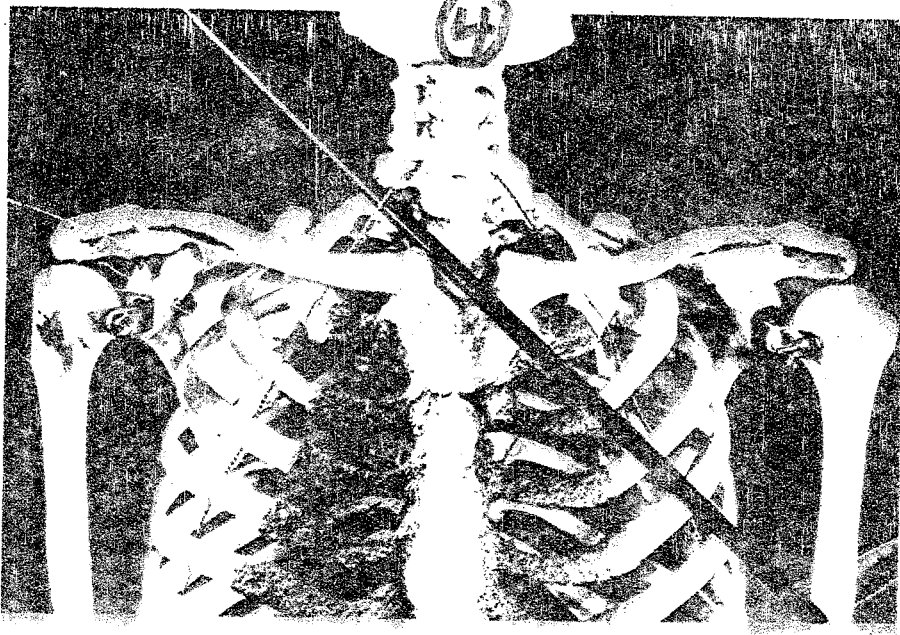
Mr. Gerritsen sits in front of skeleton and slightly to the left in same position as that occupied by Governor Connally. Bullet path is indicated by wooden rod. Bullet path would have been to the left of Governor Connally. Bullet could not possibly have struck the Governor in the right shoulder. If bullet struck anyone else, it would have been either Mrs. Connally or the driver of the limousine.



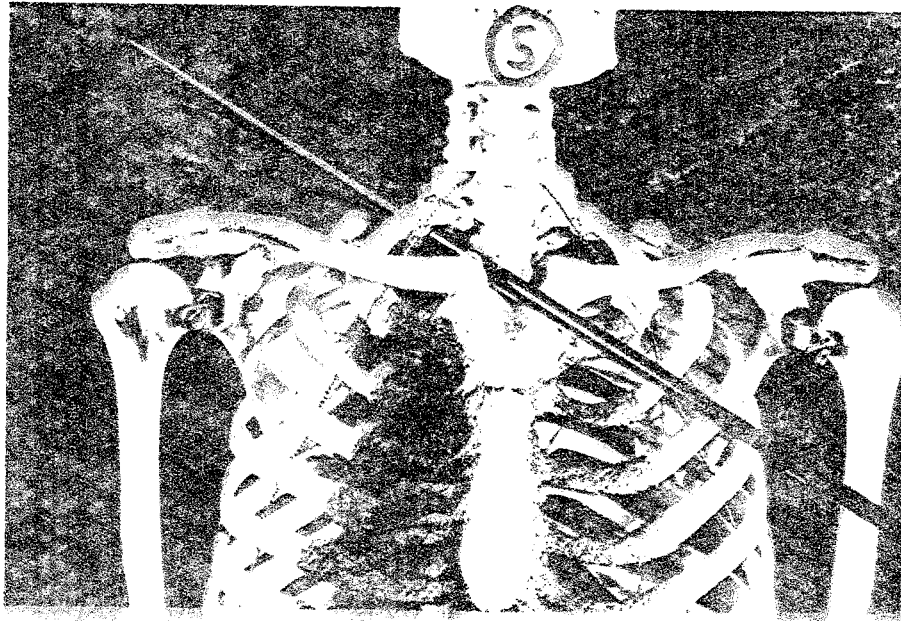


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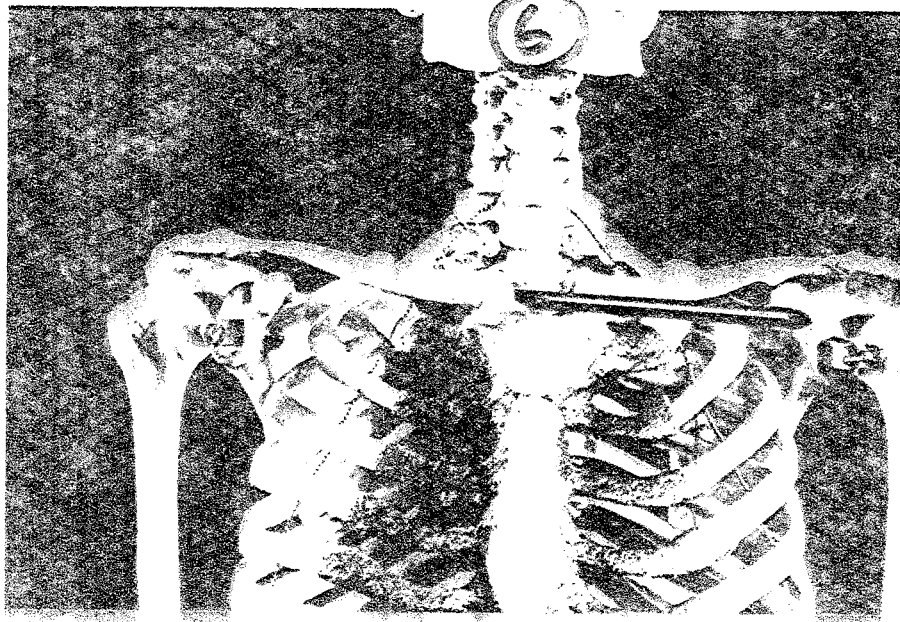


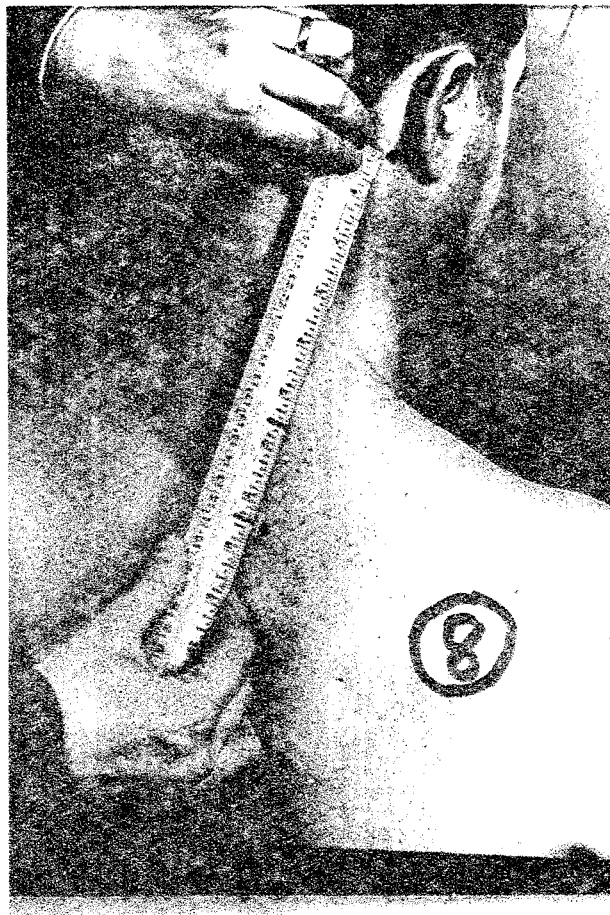
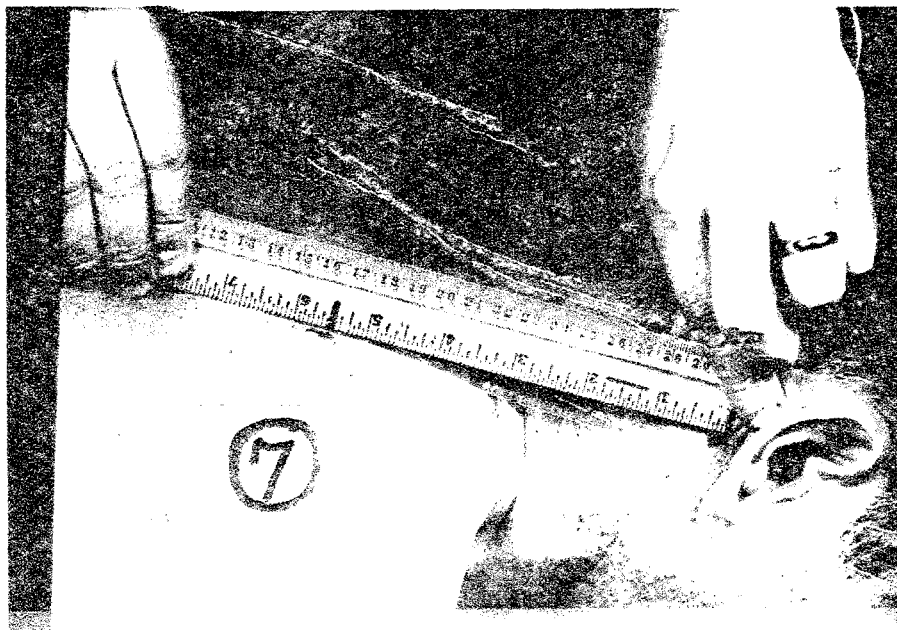


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