

JFK CONSPIRACY: FINALLY, IT'S OFFICIAL

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Two cheers for the House Assassinations Committee! At last an official body of the U.S. Government has had the courage to admit what the critics of the Warren Report have been saying for some fourteen years--that there was a conspiracy behind the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Chairman Louis Stokes has even acknowledged publicly that the Committee's findings vindicate "what 80% of the American people suspected all along", a gracious recognition of the acumen of the populace even if it begrudges credit to the long-maligned critics whose tireless and lonely battle against the Establishment and its lackey news media contributed so greatly to the official reversal of the Warren Commission's meretricious conclusions.

The Committee has found a "probable" conspiracy. Here it must be emphasized that "probable" represents a 95 to 98 per cent of certainty, or certainty "beyond a reasonable doubt". Moreover, the finding of conspiracy is not based solely on the analysis of an accoustical tape which established that a shot was fired from the grassy knoll. The accoustical findings are corroborative of a considerable body of eyewitness testimony and circumstantial evidence of conspiracy, sufficient in itself to destroy the now-discredited lone-assassin sophistry.

But, having praised the Committee for its finding of conspiracy, it must be said that the remainder of its preliminary report is underwhelming and often infuriating. The first finding, for example, is that "Lee Harvey Oswald fired three shots at President John F. Kennedy. The second and third shots he fired struck the President. The third shot he fired killed the President." Two unnamed members of the Committee refused to vote for this pronouncement, to their credit. It is unjustified and indefensible, on numerous grounds.

In the first place, this finding ignores what must be called Oswald's alibi --the fact that he was encountered in a windowless room on the second floor of the Depository building within seconds more than one minute after the shots. He was seen on the first floor of the building at noon by two witnesses and at 12:15 by a third witness (who has recently told the Dallas Morning News that in fact she encountered Oswald at 12:25 in the second floor lunchroom). No one with credibility has placed Oswald on the 6th floor at any time immediately preceeding the shots, and the testimony of one witness who placed him on that floor at about 11:50 has long since been totally discredited.

In the second place, in asserting that "Oswald fired three shots" the Committee ignores the fact that the first two shots, according to its own accoustics experts, were separated by only 1.95 seconds or less than the minimum time of 2.25 seconds required to fire the Mannlicher-Carcano rifle, without taking aim, given the poor and defective condition of the weapon at the time of the assassination. One cannot take seriously the attempt of G. Robert Blakey, the chief counsel of the House Committee, to reduce the minimum time to 1.65 seconds on the basis of test firing a "similar" rifle in 1978, since his tests fail completely to achieve verisimilitude. Blakey's claim would allow 3.30 seconds to fire three shots, but the testing done for the Warren Commission by three master riflemen and for CBS by eleven ace shooters came nowhere near such timing. In the CBS tests, the average time out of 20 recorded attempts was 5.6 seconds. Therefore, the separation of the first two shots by 1.95 seconds on the accoustical tape in itself requires more than one rifleman firing from behind the presidential car and establishes, even without the shot from the knoll, a conspiracy. Dovetailing with this is the evidence of the Bronson film, discovered and made public by the critics, which appears to show at least two persons at or next to the "sniper's window" on the sixth floor. Chairman Stokes has said publicly that "the Bronson film is of real importance".

In the third place, there is the reaction of the President to the fatal head shot at Zapruder frame 313. That shot threw him violently back and to the left. The critics have insisted for more than a decade that this shot must have come from the right and the front, according to the laws of physics. To that, spokesmen for the Warren Report replied that there was no evidence of any shot from the grassy knoll, which was to the right and front of the car. Now, however, scientific tests have established that there was a shot from the grassy knoll. Clearly that shot provides the explanation for the way the President was slammed back and to the left. Yet the Committee, in finding that the third shot Oswald fired killed the President, seems to ask us to believe that the shot from the grassy knoll, which would have sent the President back and to the left, missed; and that a shot from the Depository striking the President in the back of the head, which should have thrown him forward and to the right, hit. This plays havoc with logic and reality and suggests an urgent need for reexamination of all the autopsy and medical findings, with a view to achieving a reconciliation between that body of questionable data, the Zapruder film, and the accoustical tape analysis.

Another element that suggests that the shot from the grassy knoll is the shot that hit JFK in the head and killed him is a bullet fragment found in the car. On the final day of the House Committee's open hearings, Congressman Christopher Dodd asked Blakey for information about a "bullet fragment found in the car not easily identified by neutron activation analysis". Blakey said that he was not prepared to reply, as he did not wish to rely on memory, and that he would discuss this fragment privately with Dodd. Information from a reliable source (a member of the Committee's staff) indicates that one bullet fragment found in the car fails to match the other fragments found there, which if true would in turn suggest the impact within the car and its occupants of a bullet from a weapon other than the so-called Oswald rifle.

Finally, there is the tantalizing FBI document dated 4-15-64 reporting on a conference held on the preceding day by Dr. J.J. Humes, autopsy surgeon, and other medical and ballistics experts who assisted the Warren Commission. Here is a startling excerpt from that document:

Dr. Humes, U. S. Navy Commander, who performed the autopsy on the President, appeared to lead the discussion throughout the 4-hour session...The most revealing information brought out by the doctors is as follows:

1. That Shot 1 struck the President high in the right shoulder area, penetrating the torso near the base of the neck damaging the flesh of the throat but not tearing the throat wall. This bullet, according to the doctors, continued and entered Governor Connally's right shoulder, emerging below the right nipple. The velocity of the missile, according to the doctors, apparently was snagged (sic) in the coat and shirt, eventually falling out on Connally's stretcher.
2. That Shot 2 struck the wrist of the Governor, continuing on into his thigh.
3. That Shot 3 struck the right side of the President's head, carrying much bone and brain tissue away, leaving a large cavity. (Emphasis added.)

This further indication that a bullet struck the right side of the President's head, juxtaposed with other evidence already cited, adds up to a powerful presumption that the fatal shot came from the grassy knoll and that at least three gunmen shot at the President, two from behind the car and one from the right front. We must therefore reject the Committee's findings with respect to Oswald as the man who fired three of the four shots and the shot that proved fatal.

The findings published by the House Committee include the statement that "The Committee believes, on the basis of the evidence available to it, that President John F. Kennedy was probably assassinated as a result of a conspiracy. The Committee is unable to identify the other gunman or the extent of the conspiracy." That being so, it is difficult to understand why the Committee --unable to identify the other gunman or the extent of the conspiracy--has flatly exonerated the Secret Service, the FBI and the CIA from any involvement in the assassination of President Kennedy, without even the qualification of "on the basis of the evidence available" or the caveat that "the available evidence does not preclude the possibility that individual members (of the Secret Service, the FBI or the CIA) may have been involved". Wisdom suggests that that door should remain open, until such time as it becomes possible to identify the gunmen and the extent of the conspiracy.

The further investigation of the conspiracy in the assassination of the President has been left by the House Committee to a reluctant and indeed unwilling Department of Justice. I would suggest, and I believe that most of my fellow-critics would agree, that a Special Prosecutor (but not Leon Jaworski) be designated and given complete independence and the means to pursue this investigation to wherever and whomever it may ultimately lead. Because we were not listened to in 1966 and 1967, when the main body of criticism was published, the finding of conspiracy has been delayed for more than a decade and the trail has certainly become colder. But we are not at the end of the road. Further aggressive investigation may still lead to the identification of the gunmen and their principals, and to the exoneration of Oswald, who appears to have been only a scapegoat and a patsy in this crime of the century. Surely the time has come to stop ridiculing and disregarding the serious critics and scholars in this case, and to forge ahead utilizing their expertise and advice. Wanted: a new Archibald Cox who will do the job that remains to be done.

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