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Dear Sirs:

Richard Popkin, in reviewing Edward Epstein's Inquest, has agreed with Epstein too readily that the first bullet which hit President Kennedy could not possibly have also wounded Governor Connally. This is crucial to understanding how the assassination occurred, for separate shots imply that Oswald was not alone.

Popkin's main argument was that Kennedy was hit in the back, not the neck as the Warren Commission said, and that therefore a bullet fired downward from Oswald's position could not have exited from Kennedy's throat and gone on to strike Connally but must instead have stopped inside Kennedy's body.¹ Kennedy was definitely hit in the back: the autopsy placed the wound in the thorax,² which is below the neck; Commander Humes, who directed the autopsy, said the wound was just above the scapula³ (shoulder blade) and also by his measurements located it in the back;⁴ and FBI agent Frazier testified that the holes in the backs of Kennedy's coat and shirt were 5 3/8 inches and 5 3/4 inches, respectively, below the tops of their collars.⁵ (Popkin followed Epstein in saying that the autopsy placed the wound in the neck,⁶ in ignoring Humes's testimony, in saying that the clothing measurements were based on photographs,⁷ in misstating these measurements,⁸ and in erroneously implying that they are unavailable in the Hearings and Report?) However, Epstein¹⁰ and Popkin¹¹ overlook the fact that the front of the neck extends lower than the rear and therefore a descending, undeflected shot may hit the back and

exit from the throat. In judging this possibility one should note that the throat wound was so low that the shirt hole was $7/8$ inches below the collar button,¹² the angle of declination of the shot was only about 18° ¹³; and Humes thought the clothing measurements made the entrance wound appear somewhat low because of Kennedy's arm position and extremely well-developed shoulder muscles.¹⁴ Without measuring Kennedy's body one cannot be sure, but a single shot does appear capable of having caused Kennedy's back and throat wounds and then continuing on.

Popkin's other major argument was based on Epstein's and Vincent Salandria's assertion that the metal fragments found in Connally weighed more than the loss of weight in the bullet which allegedly hit Kennedy and Connally (or else that the fragments numbered too many).¹⁵ If so, this bullet could at most have wounded only Kennedy, and Connally must have been hit separately. The supporting opinions from Humes¹⁶ and Colonel Finck¹⁸ are not significant, because they were based on a report¹⁹ by Dr. Gregory which did not state the size, weight, or number of the fragments.²⁰ Salandria cited fragments mentioned by different observers which added up to 3.6 grains plus an unknown amount, whereas the bullet in question had a weight loss estimated at 2.5 grains and was only 2.9 grains lighter than any of the three complete bullets weighed by the FBI.²¹ However, Frazier said that allowing for possible variation in weight this particular bullet could have lost 4 grains,²² and his reasoning²³ suggests that a loss of at least 4.5 grains was possible. Furthermore, Salandria's reference from Dr. Gregory²⁴ applied to fragments of bone, not metal;²⁵ and he included a 0.5 grain fragment twice,²⁶ both in Frazier's testimony²⁷ and in Dr. Shaw's opinion that over 3 grains of metal fragments were in Connally's wrist.²⁸ Nor is it sure that Dr. Shaw (Connally's chest surgeon) was correct. He said his examination of Connally's wrist was "very cursory."²⁹

On the other hand, Dr. Gregory (Connally's wrist surgeon) said the three metal fragments in Connally's wrist were so small that their loss would leave the mass of the bullet virtually intact.³⁰ Even accepting Dr. Shaw's opinion, the evidence about weight is fully consistent with the bullet in question having wounded both men.

Some of Epstein's other arguments, not cited by Popkin, are not convincing either. For example, Epstein attributed to Dr. Carrico the belief that the hole in Kennedy's throat was too small to have been made by an intact bullet as large as the bullet in question.³¹ Dr. Carrico, however, said the size was consistent,³² and Dr. Perry, who performed the tracheotomy, agreed.³³

To be sure, part of Epstein's evidence does reduce the credibility of the Warren conclusions. However, the hypothesis of separate shots is itself implausible. If the bullet which hit Kennedy's back did not exit from his throat, so that Connally must have been hit by a separate shot, why was only one bullet found instead of two? And what could have caused Kennedy's throat wound? Popkin suggested a shot from in front,³⁴ but that is inconsistent with Frazier's testimony that the projectile which caused the hole in the front of Kennedy's shirt was exiting.³⁵ Moreover, a bullet from the front would have had no exit except its entrance hole (the back wound was definitely an entrance wound³⁶) and was not found inside Kennedy either visually³⁷ or in the X-rays of his entire body.³⁸ Epstein mentioned that the throat wound might have been caused by a fragment of the bullet which hit Kennedy's head,³⁹ but even if Kennedy had been sitting straight when fatally hit--and Humes said that Kennedy's head was "bent considerably forward"⁴⁰--the fragment would have had to descend at such a steep angle (almost directly downward) that it might have hit Kennedy's legs and would presumably have been found or at least left marks in the rear of the car. No such evidence was found.⁴¹

Despite the appalling defects in the operation of the Warren Commission,
it may well have reached the right conclusion after all.

Yours truly,

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Footnotes

Note: citations to a Roman numeral refer to a volume of
the Warren Commission Hearings

1. Popkin, pp. 12-13, 22; also Epstein, pp. 51-58, 61-62.
2. Warren Commission Report, p. 541.
3. II, p. 351.
4. II, p. 361.
5. V, pp. 59-60.
6. Popkin, p. 12; Epstein, p. 116.
7. Popkin, p. 12; Epstein, p. 55. Compare V, pp. 59-60.
8. Popkin, p. 12; Epstein, pp. 55, 61-62.
9. See Popkin, p. 12; see Epstein, p. 55. Compare Warren Commission Report, p. 92, and V, pp. 59-60.
10. Epstein, chap. 3, especially pp. 51, ⁵⁷58, 61-62.
11. Popkin, pp. 12-13, 22.
12. V, p. 60.
13. V, p. 162.
14. II, p. 366.
15. Popkin, p. 13; Epstein, p. 79; Vincent Salandria, "The Impossible Task of One Assassination Bullet," The Minority of One (March 1966), pp. 15-17.
16. Epstein, p. 79; Salandria, pp. 15-17.
17. II, p. 375.
18. II, p. 382.
19. II, p. 375.
20. XVII, p. 18.
21. Salandria, p. 16; FBI weight measurements/^{also} in III, p. 430.
22. III, p. 430.

23. Ibid.
24. Salandria, p. 16.
25. IV, p. 120.
25. Salandria, p. 16.
27. V, p. 72.
28. IV, p. 113.
29. IV, p. 108; also see IV, p. 104.
30. VI, pp. 98-99.
31. Epstein, p. 60 and reference for footnote 53 to chap. 3.
32. VI, p. 5.
33. VI, pp. 14-15.
34. Popkin, p. 19.
35. V, p. 61.
36. II, p. 364; II, p. 380; V, pp. 59-60.
37. See II, pp. 348-84; Warren Commission Report, pp. 539-45; VI, p. 7.
38. II, pp. 364, 349; II, p. 94; II, p. 127.
39. Epstein, p. 59.
40. II, pp. 353, 370; also see XVI, pp. 984-85.
41. V, pp. 66-71.