

16 September 1966

Dear _____,

The Time Essay ("Autopsy on the Warren Commission") in the September 16, 1966 issue contains incorrect statements on questions of fact.

(1) The essay states that "three employees watching from a window directly below heard the shots from overhead." One of the three men in the fifth floor window, James Jarman, Jr., testified that he had thought that the shots came from below, not above, the fifth floor (see Hearings, Volume III, page 209).

(2) The essay states that "the wound in Connally's back was oddly large, suggesting that the bullet had begun to wobble and slow down before it struck--presumably because it had just passed through the President's neck." However, the Warren Report (page 92) describes that wound as being small in size and with clean-cut edges.

The Warren Report (page 109) later refers to the same wound as "large." The contradictory descriptions appear to have originated in contradictory measurements of the wound, stated both as 3 cm. or 1.2 inches (Commission Exhibit No. 392) and as approximately 2 cm. and a half or 3/5th of an inch (Volume IV, page 104).

The contradictions were not noticed by the Warren Commission and both descriptions were incorporated in its Report.

Although the accurate measurement was not established by the Commission, the bullet hole in the back of the Governor's coat (5/8" x 1/4") seems to correspond with the small clean-cut wound described on page 92 of the Report. That, of course, weakens the presumption that the bullet had first passed through the President's neck.

You perhaps will agree that it is most unfortunate that the Warren Commission was so careless as to give two contradictory descriptions of this wound, since the size and nature of the wound have significance in determining the validity of the single-missile theory--which in turn has crucial significance in determining whether there was more than one rifleman.

(3) The essay states that "the doctors found an opening in the right rear of the President's skull, which they diagnosed as an entrance wound." However, there is substantial evidence—~~and~~ in particular, the Zapruder film—which throws doubt on that assertion and suggests that, on the contrary, the shot that struck the President's head came from in front of and to the right of the car. Many critics of the Warren Report have pointed to the fact that the head shot threw the President violently back and to his left. Measurements of his position in the frames immediately after the head shot (frame 313), obtained by superimposing frames upon each other, corroborate the recoil backwards and to the left (see article by Gastano Ponzi in the July 1966 issue of The Greater Philadelphia Magazine).

Moreover, not a single one of the 14 doctors at Parkland Hospital involved in the treatment of the President was able to confirm the existence of a bullet entrance hole in the back of the head (see Volume VI, pp. 6, 16, 25, 35, 42, 48, 51, 56, 60, 62, 67, 72, 74, 81, and 82). Four of the 5 FBI or Secret Service agents present at the autopsy failed to confirm the existence of that wound (see Volume II, pp. 128 and 143, and Commission Document No. 7—National Archives—report of FBI agents Stewart and O'Neil), although one of the agents, Clinton Hill, was called in expressly to view the wounds.

[The one witness who corroborated the existence of an entrance bullet wound in the head, Secret Service agent Roy Kellerman, said that it was located in the hairline to the right of the right ear (see II page 81). That would situate the wound above the right cheek, not in the back of the head.]

Finally, and I regard this as having ^{particular} significance, the diagram of the skull made by the autopsy surgeon during the course of the autopsy (Volume XVII, page 46) does not show any small wound of entry in the back of the head such as the wound shown in the schematic drawings prepared in March 1964 in connection with the testimony of the autopsy surgeons.

Unfortunately, the examination of the witnesses concerned did not elicit any explanation for the omission of the wound of entrance ~~shown~~ from the autopsy diagram; nor did the questioning provide any basis for determining whether those witnesses who failed to see the entrance wound did, or did not, view the area of the head where this wound supposedly was situated.

(4) The essay states that the autopsy surgeons were puzzled when they could find neither a bullet, an extended bullet path, nor an exit wound; but that they "cleared up the mystery, after surgical examination of the body was completed."

That account is not consistent with the description of events presented in the Warren Report (pages 88-89), which states that further exploration during the autopsy disproved the theory that the bullet had penetrated only a short distance and had dropped out of the body through the hole of entrance as a result of heart massage. The Report asserts clearly that the autopsy surgeons determined during the examination of the body that the bullet had passed between two large strap muscles in the neck and that they presumed that it had exited at the site of the tracheotomy incision—a presumption which they then corroborated by telephone ~~consultation~~ consultation with Parkland Hospital the next morning.

In calling attention to the different description given in the Warren Report, I do not in this instance suggest that the essay is incorrect. On the contrary, Time's account (rather than that in the Warren Report) appears to me consistent with the evidence and, in particular, with the fact that all four federal agents who witnessed the autopsy throughout departed with the impression that the bullet had fallen out onto the President's stretcher. That is apparent in the testimony of Secret Service agents Roy Kellerman and William Greer and ~~with~~ the report of FBI agents Sibert and O'Neill.

If that inference is valid, it means that the surgeons came to one set of conclusions during the actual post-mortem examination but revised certain crucial findings subsequently, when the body was no longer accessible. The possibility of fundamental error would of course be serious under such a procedure.

(5) Point (4) above is closely related to the problem of the FBI reports and their conflicting descriptions of the wound in the President's back or the back of his neck. The essay attributes the conflict solely to the fact that the two FBI agents (Sibert and O'Neill) "had overheard and recorded the doctors' puzzled comments about the neck wound during the surgical examination; the clarifying Dallas call was not made until later, thus was not included in the report."

Apparently Time believes ~~it conceivable~~ that the Director of the FBI made a formal Summary Report on December 9, 1963 and a Supplemental Report on January 13, 1964 purely on the basis of the hearsay information given by FBI agents Sibert and O'Neill in their report of November 26, 1963, without making any further investigation into the autopsy findings and without ~~reading~~ the contents of the official autopsy report (transmitted to the FBI, according to Fletcher Knebel's investigations, on December 23, 1963). ~~Personally, I do not find that conceivable.~~ *It hardly seems conceivable,*

Time said in an earlier issue (dated) that the FBI had long since retracted or repudiated its December 9, 1963 and January 13, 1964 reports and in no way disputed the official autopsy findings. In an attempt to obtain confirmation of the alleged retraction, an inquiry was directed to the Director of the FBI. In a letter dated September 12, 1966, J. Edgar Hoover has stated:

"All information furnished to this Bureau relating to the assassination of President Kennedy was accurately reported and furnished to the President's Commission and consequently the need to retract any information furnished to the Commission has never arisen."

I interpret that statement as a reaffirmation of the descriptions in the FBI Summary and Supplemental Reports of a wound below the shoulders inflicted by a Bullet that penetrated at a steep downward angle only a finger's length—a description that appears to destroy completely the single-missile hypothesis and to weaken, if not destroy, the lone ~~assassin~~ assassin theory.

In concluding this letter, I should like to ~~indicate~~ indicate my disagreement with certain judgments, inferences, and interpretations in the essay upon which I have not touched because I wished to limit my remarks, so far as possible, to questions of fact and to issues of evidence.