

26 September 1966

Mr. William Johnson
Associate Editor
Time, Inc.
Rockefeller Center
New York, N.Y. 10020

Dear Sir,

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 Jamman, 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 the wound as small in size 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 1.5 cm. or 3/5ths of an inch (Volume IV, page 104).

The contradiction was not noticed by the Warren Commission; 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 its size and characteristics 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--in particular, the Zapruder film--which throws doubt on that assertion and suggests that, on the contrary,

the shot 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 backward and to the left (see diagram illustrating article by Gaetano Fonzi in the August 1, 1966 issue of The Greater Philadelphia Magazine).

Not one of the 14 doctors at Parkland Hospital who were involved in the emergency treatment of the President was able to confirm the existence of a bullet entrance hole in the back of the head (see Volume VI, pages 6, 16, 25, 35, 42, 48, 51, 56, 60, 62, 67, 71, 74, 81 and 82).

Four of the 5 federal agents present at the autopsy failed to confirm the existence of the wound (see Volume II, pages 128 and 143; and Commission Document No. 7, National Archives, report of FBI agents Sibert and O'Neill), although one of the agents, Clinton Hill, was called in expressly to view the wounds. The one witness who did corroborate the existence of an entrance 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 during the course of the autopsy by the surgeon (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 preparatory to the testimony of the autopsy surgeons.

Unfortunately, the examination of the witnesses concerned did not elicit any explanation for the omission of the alleged wound of entrance from the otherwise-careful and detailed autopsy diagram; nor did the questioning provide any basis for determining whether the 18 witnesses who failed to see the entrance wound did, or did not, view the part 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."

Here the essay comes into conflict 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, as a result of heart massage, through the hole of entrance. 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 with Parkland Hospital the next morning.

In calling attention to the conflict, I do not in this instance suggest that the essay is incorrect. Time's account rather than that in the Warren Report appears to me consistent with the evidence as a whole and, in particular, with the fact that the four federal agents who witnessed the autopsy throughout all 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 in 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, which are in diametric conflict with the official autopsy findings with respect to the wound in the President's back or the back of his neck. Time attributes that 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 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 taking account of the contents of the official autopsy report (transmitted to the FBI, according to Fletcher Knebel's inquiries, on December 23, 1963). This hardly seems conceivable, given the importance of the case.

Time said in its July 8, 1966 issue (page E3) that the FBI had long since acknowledged that it was in error in stating in its Summary and Supplemental Reports that the first bullet did not pass through the President's body at all. In an attempt to obtain confirmation of the alleged admission of error (which Time was not able to substantiate), an inquiry was directed to the Director of the FBI. J. Edgar Hoover replied in a letter dated September 12, 1966, that:

"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."

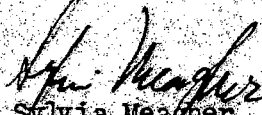
I interpret that statement as a reaffirmation of the description in the FBI Summary and Supplemental Reports of a wound below the shoulders inflicted

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 immensely, if not demolish, the lone-assassin theory.

There are a number of judgments, inferences, and interpretations in the Time essay with which I am in strong disagreement. I have not touched on those questions in this letter since I wished to limit my remarks generally to questions of fact and issues of evidence.

I am sending copies of this letter to Messrs. Henry Luce, Hedley Donovan, and Otto Fuerbringer.

Yours sincerely,


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