

February 18, 1974

Dear Dr Wecht

A swelling tide of criticism charges the U.S. Postal Service with inefficiency and delay in delivering mail. A postal inspector is investigating the slow progress of the subpoena, issued by a state judge in California, commanding President Nixon to appear in his court, which reached Washington in seven days. Wasn't that good time for the pony express? But even though the same postal service has thus far failed to deliver any reply from Dr Lattimer to my letter to him of February 7, I have no complaint. Your inquiries about ~~that~~ his responses to that letter, dated February 13 in Pittsburgh, reached me in New York City after only three days.

Lattimer

It is true, Dr ~~Burkley~~ has not responded to my letter. And when I spoke to him after he concluded his talk at Lenox Hill Hospital on the 11th, he said he had not known about the death certificate made out by Dr Burkley until I called it to his attention. He declined to look at my copy of it. And he dismissed it as of little or no importance. About the location of the back wound given by Dr Burkley in that death certificate Dr Lattimer said only, "He was wrong," and didn't elaborate. Earlier in our very brief, hurried, and interrupted conversation Dr Lattimer considered my question whether his inspection of the autopsy X-rays and photographs had enabled him to add anything of significance to the review of the 1968 panel, indicated several details in which he differed with that panel's findings, and concluded by saying, "Significant? No!" He expressed interest in my opinion he had misinterpreted the Zapruder film in his talk and wanted to hear more about it. He said his son was working on the film but didn't say more. Others cut in and I promised to communicate with him about the film. That's about all that passed between us. Since then I haven't heard from him. Maybe he's out of town.

Now may I put to you the questions Dr Lattimer has not answered? What do you make of the two death certificates? Is there significance in two certificates? Why should Dr Burkley make out a second one? Is it a matter of of formal procedure only? Or of personal prestige? Or is there some deeper, hidden, more meaningful reason? What purpose or interest was served by consigning Dr Burkley's certificate to oblivion? Am I sniffing at empty gopher holes? What of the location Dr Burkley gave of the back wound? It is lower, is it not, than the autopsy X-rays and photographs show? Was the Burkely death certificate ignored because it contained this patent error? Do you see significance in the failure to take testimony from Dr Burkley? Have you formed an opinion of his role in the events in Dallas and Washington?

Dr Lattimer's talk, which consisted of comment on slides relevant in greater and lesser degree to the Lincoln and JFK assassinations, was essentially a simplistic popularization of the Warren Commission's findings as proved by the researches of Dr Lattimer. No problems remained. The implication - there is nothing more to say. But he offered no reason for continuing to say so, as he evidently plans to do, to other audiences in other places. I cannot say whether the doctor is aware of the irony. His style of delivery was conversational, seem-

ingly matter of fact, unadorned with adjectival or oratorical embellishment. He has a shy sense of humor. He took no note of contradictory evidence. He presented personal experience as corroboration of ballistic and medical evidence. Twice, I remember, he appealed directly to the audience of some fifty persons, all white, to believe him.

Two points in his talk invite comment. In the account of his review of the autopsy X-rays and photographs he made no mention of still missing evidence. He noted the differences in the location of the back and head wounds of entry between the original autopsy and the reality as he found it. But by not including in his talk the coincidence of his findings with those of the 1968 panel, Dr. Lattimer, either wittingly or unwittingly, suggested to his audience the corrections of the autopsy locations of these wounds resulted from his inspection and review. He made no comment about the significance of the original mislocations, about their bearing on the Commission's calculations and findings. He may have included one reference to the degree of descent of one bullet, but there was no reference at all to angular degrees of the lateral trajectories of the bullets which wounded Connally and killed Kennedy. Thus, by implication at least, both the erroneous and the correct locations proved the Warren Commission was correct! Of this irony, I am sure, the doctor and his audience were unaware.

More significant, I believe, was Dr Lattimer's explanation of how he came to review the autopsy X-rays and photographs. He applied, he said, for permission and was waiting unexpectedly when, after a delay of years, he received a carbon copy of a letter from Burke Marshall, executor of the Kennedy estate, to the National Archivist, permitting Dr Lattimer to review the hitherto restricted autopsy materials; but the carbon copy had no letterhead and Dr Lattimer thought it would be useless as a ticket of admission if he presented it in Washington. Then the NY Times called and asked Dr Lattimer whether he was going to review the materials. He explained his difficulty. The Times - Dr Lattimer did not say who on the Times - said it would check and call back. The Times did and assured Dr Lattimer the letter was valid. So, said Dr Lattimer, he went.

This account suggests very strongly Dr Lattimer was selected to make the first non-official review of the autopsy X-rays and photographs. By the Kennedy establishment. Why? Two reasons suggest themselves: 1) Dr Lattimer was a known uncritical supporter of the Warren Commission findings; 2) he was not a forensic pathologist and therefore less likely than such a specialist to interpret the autopsy materials adversely to the Warren Commission Report, but eminent enough to command media attention without offending settled attitude of the government toward the assassination. The question arises: why was Dr Lattimer launched like an assassin's bullet to strike down the already murdered truth? Does Lattimer's minicampaign look to the past, to allay restless ghosts? Or does it look to the future as reassurance to the power structure of the country Senator Edward Kennedy intends no threat to the stability of the state by demanding truth about the murders of his brothers?