

December 6, .974

Dear Dr Lattimer,

It was good of you to send me a copy of the paper written by you and your sons, The Kennedy-Connally One Bullet Theory, for the November 1974 issue of Medical Times. I would like to requite your courtesy with a copy of something I had published but the few essays I made to contribute to the controversy over the murder of the 35th president of the United States were rebuffed by publications extending from the center to the left of the political spectrum, and I have no means of responding to your thoughtfulness except with correspondence embodying observations on your experiments and writing. I hope that this exchange will initiate a discussion between yourself and your sons, if they should care to participate, and myself.

Your paper describes a reduction of the controversy over the Warren Commission findings to a single "principal remaining major issue upon which some critics continue to criticize the Warren Commission." This is so, apparently, because "Everyone who has viewed and reported on the autopsy and x-ray evidence from President Kennedy's body now agrees that the President was hit by two bullets only, that these were both fired from above and from the rear, and that there is no evidence that he was shot from the side or from the front...that these two shots both came from the Texas Book Depository Building..." The remaining issue in your view is "the question of whether one bullet... could have passed through both President Kennedy's neck and then through Governor Connally."

"Reference" notes "5,6," which follow identify Cyril H Wecht and Robert P Smith, authors of The Medical Evidence in the Assassination of President John F Kennedy (Forensic Science Gazette, Sept, 1973), and R B Cutler, author of Two Flightpaths (Mirror Press, Danvers, Mass. 1971), as two of the critics "who are still skeptical" about the one-bullet theory. I had not heard of Cutler and Two Flightpaths until I read your "Reference" notes; and would appreciate receiving a copy of this writing. Or advice on how to get it.

I have read the Wecht/Smith article and readily concede it gives you reason to claim its authors are in agreement with you on various points. Ironically, however, it is on precisely these points that Wecht and Smith and yourself are demonstrably in error. Most significant are the dogmatic assertions "there is no evidence that he (Kennedy) was shot from the side or from the front" (Lattimer: The Kennedy-Connally One Bullet Theory, first paragraph); and "No support can be found for theories which postulate gunmen to the front or right-front of the Presidential car" (Wecht/Smith: The Medical Evidence In The Assassination of President John F Kennedy, penultimate paragraph).

These contentions which echo the Warren Commission are palpably false. There is hard irrefutable evidence Kennedy was shot fatally from a point in front and to the right of the limousine in which he was riding. That evidence is the Zapruder motion-picture film of the assassination, available to the government since November 22, 1963 and to the public since the summer of 1965 in the National Archives where you reviewed the autopsy photographs and x-ray

films. There is no gainsaying the evidence of the film: when Kennedy is struck fatally he is thrust back instantaneously and with great violence against the rear seat of the car, bounces forward, and spins off to the left into the arms of his horrified wife. All other evidence purporting to controvert the single-assassin theory of the Warren Commission can be only corroboratory of the Zapruder film. So decisive and so forceful is the conviction communicated by the film - Kennedy was struck fatally from the front and to the right - neither sophisticated interpretation nor pseudo-scientific experimentation can diminish its impact or controvert its evidence of an ambush which brought down the president. All the other "hard" evidence - rifle, bullets, prints, cars, clothing, autopsy - as well as eye- and ear-witness testimony, is shrouded in ambiguity, made doubtful by contradictory evidence, and in some instances is invalidated by perjury or forgery. Only the Zapruder film is clear and definitive.

The Zapruder film is evidence of a conspiracy. It should have served as the point of departure for the search for and interpretation of evidence. It was used by the FBI only for such lesser purposes as calculation of the locations of the presidential limousine when the president and Connally were wounded. But, remarkably, when the film was exhibited on June 4, 1964 for Warren Commissioners McCloy, Dulles, and Ford, their colleagues being absent, by FBI expert in optical, mechanical, chemical, police, and forensic aspects of photography, Lyndal L. Shaneyfelt, no questions were put to him by Commissioners or counsel about the import of the film. The transcript of that hearing is barren of any comment on that theme. No "off the record" hiatuses suggest the studied omission is not genuine, as it is in their Report. Oddly, by and large, critics of the Commission have failed to realize and emphasize the crucial importance of the film. Too many, like defenders of the Commission, have been exclusively and narrowly preoccupied with problems of ballistic and medical evidence.

The Zapruder film came into being before the autopsy. As evidence it is the antithesis of the autopsy report. It negates the autopsy report. It constitutes the decisive objective proof the autopsy report is fraudulent. It eliminates the necessity for and diminishes the importance of the single-bullet theory which in intent and substance is one with the autopsy report and stands or falls with it.

The Zapruder film does more. Not only can and should it serve as a touchstone for the evaluation of evidence but also, and in the first instance, as an imperatively irresistible incentive to search for the executioners who brought the president down, their sponsors; and a prod to determine the motivations for the assassination, efforts which the Commission contended it made but in which it confessed failure. So used the Zapruder film can be a doorway to discovery of historic evidence and comprehension of the assassination as an incident in the context of the struggle of vast interests to set and control the evolution of government policy. Is not this the lesson of the investigation of the Lincoln assassination?

To reject the Zapruder film by ignoring it or to fail to recognize and acknowledge its evidence of a conspiratorial ambush is to be

condemned to toil like Sisyphus, struggling endlessly and futilely to rationalize the intractable and indeterminate evidence, to collaborate with the establishment in reducing the assassination from an historic event to a motiveless case of triple murder.

The failure of Dr Wecht to enter the maze through the doorway of the Zapruder film and reach for politicohistorical evidence and truth because of self limitation to professionalism in his field of expertise, forensic science, accounts for the digressions in which he finds himself in culs-de-sac with defenders of the Commission. But while he concurs with you in error there are nevertheless a number of significant differences between you. In their paper, The Medical Evidence etc., Wecht and Smith reject, as you noted without specific reference to individuals, "The theory that one bullet caused both the President's back/neck wound and the Governor's chest wound..." It is "untenable," they wrote, and "incompatible with experience." In their paper's Summary and Conclusions, they argued "the Commission's conclusion that there was only one assassin cannot be reconciled with available evidence. Medical and photographic data...strongly suggest that there were two rifles used." This you did not note in your article. How strongly Dr Wecht feels about this "issue" can be seen in a later article by him in the October 28, 1974 issue of Modern Medicine in which he wrote that his "examination of the available records and the autopsy photographs and x-rays at the National Archives had led me to conclude that more than one person had been involved in the shooting;" and that "the Warren Commission did not solve the case." You who had reviewed the same autopsy materials before Dr Wecht had concluded the Commission was vindicated. Dr Wecht concluded his article with the assertion, "I am going to continue to insist that there was more than one assassin, based on the presently available evidence." It is a view which I, among many others, including, we learned years later, Lyndon Johnson and Senator Richard Russell. That view, too, was in all likelihood, a significant element in the attitude, if the opinion polls were valid, of a majority of the people of the United States in the nineteen sixties and probably also now in the seventies. Dr Wecht's intention to continue insisting on the truth is commendable. He should be encouraged and abetted.

In any event, it is clear his position is diametrically opposed to the principal finding of the Warren Commission of an autonomous solo assassin. Patently, Dr Wecht believes there was an assassination conspiracy although he shies away from use of the word, possibly from reluctance to confront the ineluctable inferences which must be drawn from that evidence and which would extend beyond the parameters of his area of expertise. You, on the other had, doggedly and loyally support the defunct Commission and reject the autopsy of its findings. Your formulation of a single remaining major issue between critics and defenders of the Commission, therefore, it is crystally clear, is arbitrary, incorrect, and misleading.

A like confusion attends the account of your ballistic experiments in The Kennedy-Connally One Bullet Theory. What was the aim of these experiments? To test whether one bullet could have caused both President Kennedy's neck wound and the wounds of Governor Connally, according to the title page of your paper, its "actual feasibility," as stated in the seventh paragraph of the first page

of your monograph. Why such a test? "On May 24, 1964," reads paragraph two of page 97 of the Warren Commission Report, "agents of the FBI and Secret Service conducted a series of tests to determine as precisely as possible what happened on Nov. 22, 1963." Twelve pages later: "Based upon the medical evidence on the wounds of the Governor and the President and the wound ballistic tests performed at Edgewood Arsenal (in April 1964) Drs. Olivier and Arthur J. Dziemian, chief of the Army Wound Ballistics Branch, who had spent 17 years in that area of specialization, concluded that it was probable that the same bullet passed through the President's neck and then inflicted all the wounds on the Governor." And "Dr. Frederick W. Light, Jr., the third of the wound ballistic experts who has been engaged in that specialty at Edgewood Arsenal since 1951, testified that the anatomical findings were insufficient for him to formulate a firm opinion as to whether the same bullet did or did not pass through the President's neck before inflicting all the wounds on Governor Connally. Based on the other circumstances such as the relative positions of the President and the Governor in the automobile, Dr. Light concluded that it was probable that the same bullet traversed the President's neck and inflicted all the wounds on Governor Connally." Again: "Additional experiments by the Army Wound Ballistics Branch further suggested that the same bullet probably passed through both President Kennedy and Governor Connally." Yet again: "From the initial findings that (a) one shot passed through the President's neck and then most probably passed through the Governor's body..." (Report, page 111).

There is more. Testifying in June 1964 about the reconstruction of the assassination made in Dallas in May, under the supervision of Commission Counsel Arlen Specter, author of the single-bullet theory, FBI ballistics expert, Robert Frazier, conceded it was "entirely possible" Kennedy and Connally were hit by the same bullet. But he also said "There are a lot of probables in that..." and "I don't have any technical evidence which would permit me to say one way or the other...as an expert...I don't say that it probably occurred because I don't have the evidence on which to base a statement like that." Nevertheless the Commission's Report asserted, "Frazier testified that it (the bullet which 'first' hit Kennedy - T.S.) probably struck Connally" (Report, page 105).

And in its first chapter, under the heading of "Conclusions," the Report found "there is very persuasive evidence from the experts to indicate that the same bullet which pierced the President's throat also caused Governor Connally's wounds." Yet the Commission held, "...Governor Connally's testimony and certain other factors have given rise to some differences of opinion as to this probability..."

So the Commission accorded the single-bullet theory only the value of probability. Moreover, it declared "...it is not necessary to any essential findings of the Commission to determine just which shot hit Governor Connally..." (Report, page 19). I do not understand, therefore, why, after a lapse of ten years, you undertook an experiment to vindicate the single-bullet theory. Did you hope to improve on the 1964 ballistic tests and reconstruction? Why did you use rubber and horsehair in "mock ups" of Kennedy's neck? In what way were they superior to the gelatin blocks and the anesthetized goat used in the tests conducted for the Commission? Your paper did not say. Why not? Indeed, why is your paper barren of any reference to the Commission's tests?



What is the scientific, evidentiary, and logical validity of all such tests? If their maximum achievement is no more than possibility, is it not essential to adduce fact in order to bridge the chasm between possibility and actuality? And if the divide be impassable, as in the assassination of President Kennedy, is it not fallacy, even villainy, to substitute possibility for reality in the guise of probability and call it proof? And does it not signify the hopelessness of attempts to solve the assassination mystery within the limits and by means of only the so-called hard physical evidence?

By reviewing medical, ballistic, and other related evidence, and by performing ballistic experiments you convinced yourself the bullet which wounded Governor Connally "tumbled" when it entered his back, pierced his chest, his right wrist, and his left thigh. Why was this necessary? Ten years before the Commission found, "Thus, the Governor's wrist wound suggested that the bullet passed through the President's neck, began to yaw in the air between the President and the Governor..." (Report, page 109). Note again the Commission did not venture beyond possibility.

What did your experiments add to the Commission's suggestion? I note with respectful pleasure you addressed yourself to the inescapably obvious problem: what made the bullet tumble?, which the Commission, with baffled wisdom, ignored. The answer, you concluded, was Kennedy's neck. To be sure, it is only a postulate, "deduced" according to your title page, from your tests and "integrated model of the flight path of Bullet 399 through President Kennedy and Governor Connally." And to your credit you admitted "we cannot prove that it was President Kennedy's neck that caused Bullet 399 to be tumbling by the time it had struck Governor Connally..." But then you made a desperate leap into the void with your claim, "...we can definitely say that the tumbling was compatible with the situation revealed by our experiment's 'mock-ups' of President Kennedy's neck." So, in the end, you were unable to advance the Commission's cause in this respect or rescue its reputation. Wisely and tactfully you made no reference to the lacunae in the Commission's case.

The title page of your paper lists three authors, Lattimers all, but surely - it is only a postulate - your thought and pen were guided by a fourth collaborator whose delicious sense of irony suffuses the assassination and the assassination controversy, my old friend and antagonist, imp of the perverse. For in pushing your investigation in support and defense of the Commission you dealt it a serious blow. Under the subheading, "Reconstruction of What Happened," you wrote that "two tiny fragments... had been noted" in President Kennedy's neck by the prestigious panel of pathologists who reviewed the autopsy x-rays in the National Archives in 1968. These fragments, called chips on your title page, were not reported by the armed-forces autopsy pathologists who failed to notice them or were instructed to omit reference to them in their report and subsequent testimony by their superiors in attendance at the autopsy. This "discovery" by the 1968 panel, in effect, buttressed Dr Wecht's earlier attacks on the incompetence of the service pathologists and the dishonesty of their report, all of which you omitted in your article.

The panel interpreted the fragments as metallic, which you noted, but made no deductions about their source and significance, which you failed to remark. Thereby the panel discreetly avoided challenge to the accomplishments of magic bullet 399 of striking bone in Kennedy as, so it is said, after tumbling, it did in Connally without damage to its copper jacket. Apparently, however, their caution did not serve you as a model. Boldly and originally, you interpreted the particles or chips "studied by one of us" in a "post-mortem x-ray film" of Kennedy, and as a result of "x-ray studies of various materials," as "more likely fragments of bone rather than metal." Like the 1968 panel you report no problem with respect to the intact copper jacket of the bullet which created these bone fragments.

On the other hand, unlike the panel, you postulate a possible source of these particles. Your studies, you wrote, suggest "that Bullet 399 hit the bony tip of the transverse process of either the sixth or seventh cervical vertebra of the President with stunning effect." Why "either?" Didn't the x-rays show the exact locus? If you couldn't pin it down how did you arrive at the hypothesis of any specific bony structure?

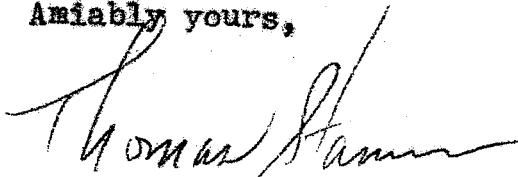
On second thought, it may be inadvisable to suspect your finding, qualified and ambiguous though it is. For if you are correct the Commission is dead wrong. Ah, forgive the unintended triple pun; it is only the second one of which I am guilty; the last lapse was around 1949.

Your suggestion, you wrote, "is a new (your emphasis) interpretation, which is different from all previous assumptions that Bullet 399 hit no bone in President Kennedy." One "previous assumption," of course, was made by the autopsy surgeons in their report; "The missile produced contusions of the right apical parietal pleura and of the apical portion of the right upper lobe of the lung...contused the strap muscles of the right side of the neck, damaged the trachea and...As far as can be ascertained this missile struck no bony structure in its path through the body" of the president (Report, page 543). Et tu Brute!

There is dialectical irony in the situation. Dr Wecht challenges the autopsy head on and makes compromising concessions to his foe. You enter the lists in Quixotic support of the Commission and wound it badly, if not fatally, by a superfluous tumbling experiment and a dubious two-bit deduction. Ay, the muse of history is a sardonic lady.

Forgive my abominable typing and be sure to send me copies of any further experimental results you achieve in coming days.

Amiably yours,



Thomas Stamm