

29 November 1966

Mr. Osborn Elliott, Editor
Newsweek Magazine
444 Madison Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10022

Dear Sir,

Charles Roberts says in "Eyewitness in Dallas" (December 5, 1966) that the autopsy report on President Kennedy was written by "the best-qualified team of forensic medicine experts the U.S. Navy could muster." He is incorrect. Commanders Boswell and Humes of the Navy are not forensic pathologists; Colonel Finck of the Army is a qualified forensic pathologist, but he arrived when the autopsy examination was already in progress and at an unspecified stage. Outstanding forensic experts for Alleghany and Cook Countys respectively have stated, in public or in personal conversation, that the autopsy examination and report were grossly inadequate and incomplete. For example, the autopsy surgeons should have obtained from the Parkland Hospital doctors before—not after—the autopsy a full account of the medical procedures performed in the emergency room; the photographs of the body taken before the post-mortem examination was initiated could not have been methodical or complete, since the bullet wound in the back was not discovered until "the latter stages of the autopsy;" and the autopsy surgeons failed to take samples of the tissues for microscopic examination and determination of whether or not bruises were associated with the path of a bullet. (I will not go into the suppression of findings on the adrenal glands, discussed in various medical journals.)

Mr. Roberts makes certain assumptions on the basis of Governor Connally's lack of awareness of the wrist and thigh wounds until the next day. After dipping into Volume IV, as he did, he might also have read further—for example, in Volume VI, where he would have found the testimony of Dr. Robert Shaw (pages 92-94). It seems clear from Dr. Shaw's testimony that Governor Connally, when he was shot, immediately experienced breathing difficulty and thought he had sustained a mortal wound in the chest. The other, lesser wounds did not penetrate his awareness because of the acute nature of the chest injury. As Dr. Shaw said, "I think if he had been struck first in the wrist and not struck in the chest, he would have known that. He only remembers the hard blow to the back of his chest and doesn't remember being struck in the wrist at all." The immediate breathing difficulty, moreover, appears to obviate Mr. Roberts' theory (and the Warren Commission's theory, for which not one iota of support was obtained from the medical witnesses) that "he was struck by the first bullet that hit the President and didn't realize it."

Mr. Roberts declares that no new evidence of importance has turned up since the Warren Report was written. What does he make of the three FBI reports? I hope that he does not suggest that those documents are not "new" or that they lack "importance." Finally, on his reference to a "key eyewitness" mentioned in Epstein's book who lied repeatedly—presumably he means Arnold Rowland—I fail to understand how he can mention Rowland without acknowledging the fact that the Commission's own lawyers accused three of the most important witnesses of being liars or perjurers—Marina Oswald, Howard Brennan, and Helen Markham—only to be denied the right to cross-examine and to be overruled on the issue of their credibility. It is the Warren Report that is on trial, not Inquest or any other critical work. And thus far, the case for the defense of the Report is pitifully feeble, and often inaccurate as to basic facts.

Yours sincerely,

Sylvia Meagher

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