

Critics Reject Facts That Don't Fit Theories

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 Seventh in a Series

Much ado has been made by Warren Commission critics about which stretcher bore President John F. Kennedy and which one was used to transport Texas Gov. John B. Connally.

It all centers on a bullet — one that was found on one of the stretchers. The critics claim a happenstance shell game with the stretchers confused the issue of just how the president was killed and the governor wounded.

Once again the critics picked facts which supported their theory and ignored those which displeased them.

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AT FIRST, it was thought Bullet 399 — the center of the controversy — came from the president's stretcher. And that fit in with the speculation that a bullet had hit the president in the back and exited during external heart massage. But the autopsy was to show that this didn't happen.

The commission determined that the bullet came from Connally's stretcher.

Edward Jay Epstein here goes back to autopsy surgeon Col. Pierre Finck, saying his testimony "cannot be dismissed merely because it collided with the hypothesis that Bullet 399 was found on Connally's stretcher. Since Finck's categorical statement that this bullet could not have caused Connally's wrist wound was never challenged, disputed or corrected, it can only be concluded from the evidence that Bullet 399 did not come from Connally's stretcher."

EPSTEIN should turn to Vol. V, page 90, where he will find the testimony of Dr. Alfred G. Olivier, an expert on bullet wounds. This exchange took place:

"Q: Do you have an opinion as to whether, in fact, Bullet 399 did cause the wound on the governor's wrist, assuming if you will that it was the missile found on the governor's stretcher at Parkland Hospital?"

"Dr. Olivier: I believe it was. That is my feeling."

There also was testimony from Drs. Robert Shaw, George T. Shires and Charles F. Gregory that they thought one bullet caused all of Connally's wounds. Shires testified that Drs. Robert McClelland, Charles Baxter and Ralph Don Patman concurred.

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THE CRITICS each say that because of the movement of the stretchers it could not be determined to a certainty that the bullet came from Connally's stretcher or didn't come from the president's stretcher. Darrel Tomlinson, the Parkland Hospital engineer who found the bullet, could not identify the stretcher positively. There were two stretchers in the corridor where the bullet was found.

Epstein says, "Since all stretchers were eventually returned to this area to be remade, the key question was: Was Kennedy's stretcher returned before or after the bullet was found? This question was never answered."

Not so. * * * * *

TOMLINSON had testified he had come to the elevator area at around 1 p.m. and found a stretcher which had some sheets on

it. He pushed this stretcher from the elevator into the corridor. Then he took the elevator to the second floor, brought down a man who picked up two pints of blood, and returned with him to the second floor where Connally was in surgery. He then made several trips between the ground floor and second floor before discovering the bullet.

Nurse Diana Hamilton Bowron testified she was in Trauma Room 1 with the president until his body was taken off the stretcher and placed in a casket. The stretcher, she said, was stripped of its sheets and then wheeled into Trauma Room 2, which was empty.

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NURSE Margaret M. Henchcliffe gave similar testimony and was asked:

"Is it possible that the stretcher that Mr. Kennedy was on was rolled with the sheets on it down into the area near the elevator?"

"No sir."

"Are you sure of that?"

"I am positive of that."

Nurse Doris Mae Nelson testified she was standing near the entrance to Trauma Room 2 when the president's stretcher, clear of sheets, was moved into it.

EXHIBIT 392, containing Parkland Hospital records, has a statement saying that the president was taken out of the hospital in a casket about 2 p.m. Testimony from the doctors and hospital personnel says the president remained on the stretcher until his body was says he has since determined into this question, named from nurse Doris Nelson that the time was closer to 2:10 p.m. Either way, it would be long after the bullet had been discovered.

Could it have been planted, as critic Harold Weisberg suggests?

To buy that, it is necessary to conjure a being of superior intelligence, craftiness and prophesy who could have designed a bullet which would not be too heavy or light to conform to fragments found in the governor's wounds; that would have had the proper condition had it gone through the president's neck alone, and perhaps smashed into the limousine. And what if another bullet had also been found?

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IF THERE was one way to explode the single-bullet theory, it remained in the results of the autopsy report, which will be examined in detail. If Mark Lane, Epstein or Weisberg can demonstrate that this report is at fault and that the

president never suffered a back-to-front neck wound, out goes the theory — and along with it the case against Lee Harvey Oswald as the lone assassin.

So the autopsy doctors did their work. They examined. They drew diagrams. They photographed. They drew a dot. And now there are those that claim the dot and the photographs show the doctors didn't do their work at all. Or the commission didn't.

Next: The Warren Commission's big mistake.
