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B1

On Kennedy Assassination

County Man's Book Questions Report of Warren Commission

By Penny Zweigenhaft
Sentinel Reporter

President John Fitzgerald Kennedy was assassinated Nov. 22, 1963 in Dallas, Tex. This is history.

The murder -- the most horrifying the United States has ever known -- as well as the string of events which preceded and followed it were the subject of 10 months of investigation by the Warren Commission.

The record is now closed. The official findings of the commission, chaired by Chief Justice Earl Warren and headed by six prominent public figures, have been reported to the American people. That was in September 1964.

At least one American is demanding that the record be re-opened and the facts surrounding the assassination be re-investigated.

He is Harold Weisberg, a former newspaper and magazine writer, Senate investigator and political analyst, who now lives on a small farm in Hyattstown.

He has written and published himself a book he calls "Whitewash" which charges there are more unanswered questions about the assassination now than there were when the commission began its investigation.

Weisberg claims the commission trumped up or glossed over evidence where necessary to prove the theory it adopted from the police: that President Kennedy was shot by Lee Oswald, that Oswald fired three shots from the sixth floor window of the Texas School Book Depository Building, that Oswald killed Officer J.D. Tippit in an attempt to escape, and--most important--that Oswald was working alone.

Taking each part of the report and pointing out inconsistencies, changes in substance in the testimony of various witnesses, and questions which should have been raised by the commission but never were, Weisberg raises grave doubts about the "conclusive findings" of the Warren Commission.

Events took place right here in Montgomery County, for instance, which the commission never explained, according to Weisberg. This, of course, involves the autopsy at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda.

Why, he asks, were the photographs and x-rays taken of the President's body before and during the autopsy never made available to the doctors during their testimony and, indeed, never included in the record at all?

Photos Are SOP

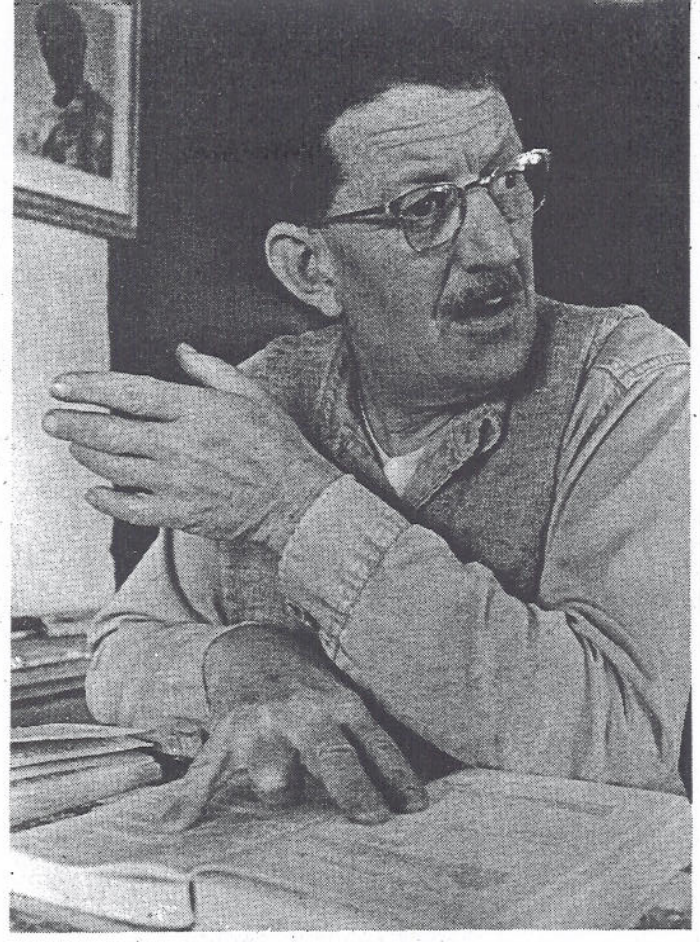
These photographic records are standard operating procedure and are regarded as the best possible evidence for determining all the necessary facts about a wound.

It is understandable that they should not have been made public as a matter of respect and good taste.

But why were they not used to corroborate the testimony of the doctors when there was reasonable doubt as to the location of the non-fatal wound of the President?

Was the wound in the President's back as an autopsy chart sketched by the doctors Nov. 22 indicates, or was it in the neck as the commission purports and an artist's representation of the wound shows?

This is a crucial question. The commission concluded three bullets were fired by Oswald. One missed the car and its inhabitants completely.



Weisberg Refutes Commission

Harold Weisberg, author of "Whitewash," explains a point in his book, which takes issue with the conclusions reached in the Warren Commission report. Sentinel Photo by Joyce Dopkeen.

U. S. NAVAL MEDICAL SCHOOL
NATIONAL NAVAL MEDICAL CENTER
BETHESDA, MARYLAND 20014

In reply refer to

24 November 1963

C-E-R-T-I-F-I-C-A-T-E

I, James J. Humes, certify that I have destroyed by burning certain preliminary draft notes relating to Naval Medical School Autopsy Report A63-272 and have officially transmitted all other papers related to this report to higher authority.

J. J. HUMES
CDR, MC, USN

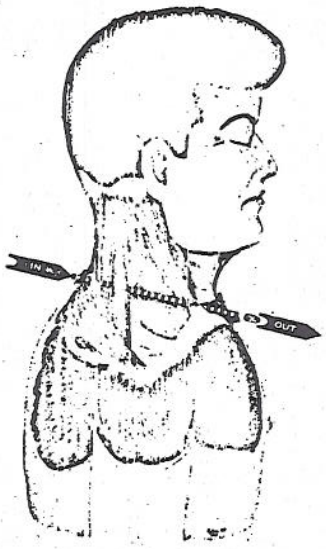
COMMISSION EXHIBIT 397—Continued

Certification of Burning

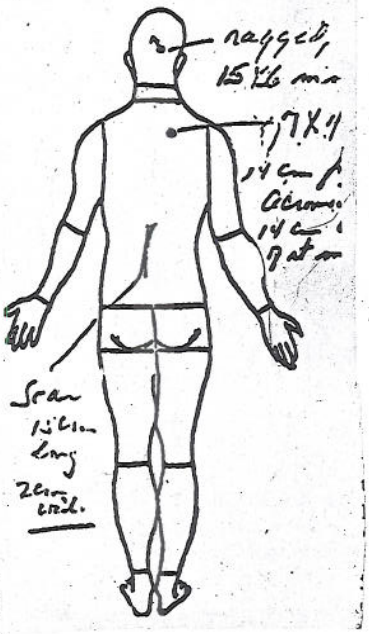
This is the certification which is part of the testimony presented to the Commission. There is no indication of why the draft notes were burned.

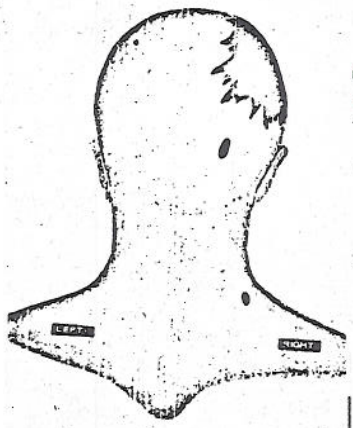
Neck or Back?

At left are an artist's representations of the President's non-fatal wound, done just prior to the time the doctors testified before the commission, showing the wound in the neck. Compare this with the autopsy chart done immediately following the autopsy, below, indicating the wound in the back, not the neck.



COMMISSION EXHIBIT 385





COMMISSION EXHIBIT 386

Another caused the fatal wound to the President's brain. A third is supposed to have gone through the President's body from back to front and then struck Governor Connally, splintering his rib and shattering his wrist, and finally lodging in his thigh.

If the bullet entered Kennedy's back rather than his neck, the entire theory of three bullets is destroyed. This same bullet could not have wounded Connally as it did because of the angle of the bullet and the governor's position in the car in relation to Kennedy's.

Why, then, depend on sketches when photographic evidence is available? Weisberg asks.

Schematic Drawings

Throughout the testimony of the autopsy doctors, references to the desirability of using the pictures keep cropping up. Yet the doctors had the schematic drawings made because they suspected they would never see the pictures, according to their statements.

Even without the pictures, though, other information which would place the non-fatal wound in the back rather than the neck seems to have been tossed aside by the commission, Weisberg believes.

Secret Service Agent Roy H. Kellerman was present at the autopsy and refers to the wound as "a shoulder wound." Agent Clint Hill, also present during the autopsy, testified the wound was "six inches down from the neckline on the back just to the right of the spinal column."

And one of the doctors located the bullet holes in the President's jacket and shirt as "six inches below the top of the collar, and two inches to the right of the middle seam."

How could this have been a neck wound?

And of another event which took place in Bethesda, the burning of the original notes jotted down in the autopsy room, Weisberg has other questions.

Why did Cmdr. James J. Humes, an expert in forensic medicine (the legal aspects of medicine) burn "certain preliminary draft notes" relating to Kennedy's autopsy?

These were historical, government documents, Weisberg claims, which Humes had no right either to take to his home or destroy. And why, he goes on, did the commission not question this?

Why, too, did the autopsy report on the President take two days to prepare? And why were there so many versions?

Content Changed

One of the most striking things Weisberg points out is the change from the second version of the autopsy prepared by Humes to the final version. Editorial changes were not for clarification, Weisberg charges, but were changes of content which once again affect the three-bullet theory.

One alteration, for instance, "allowed placing the source of the shots at a more 'upper' floor than the original" and backs up the commission's theory, Weisberg states.

He goes on to show how the word "puncture"--which by definition suggests a point of entry where something is pierced--is eliminated al-

together from the final version of the autopsy.

Doctors at Parkland Hospital in Dallas originally concluded that the wound in the front of Kennedy's neck was a point of entrance for the bullet. Once they had performed the tracheotomy in an effort to save the President's life, this no longer could be determined.

If a bullet did enter Kennedy's neck from the front, it could not have been fired from the Texas School Book Depository Building.

It could, however, have been fired from another direction where Weisberg claims people reported seeing "puffs of smoke" and the chief of police initially sent his men to investigate.

Dr. Humes acknowledged he received his information about the front neck wound from Dr. Malcolm Perry of Parkland Hospital.

"Doctor Perry's description of the anterior neck wound," states Weisberg, "that very critical question of exit or entrance, was described as a 'puncture wound' in the handwritten draft. The final copy reads 'much smaller wound.' This is a change of fact. . .

'Puncture' Stricken

"The posterior wound, which the commission said was of entrance, was described with the word 'puncture,' meaning the same thing, in the handwritten draft, from which the word 'puncture' was then stricken.

"Is it possible," asks Weisberg, "the autopsy surgeons had doubts?"

One thing is certain, he points out. During the evening of Nov. 22 at Bethesda Naval Hospital, the three surgeons who performed the historic autopsy never "traced" the course of the non-fatal bullet from the back or neck to the front of the neck, as the report claims.

"The path of this bullet was not followed," Weisberg states. "It was projected. Humes testified, 'Attempts to probe in the vicinity of this wound were unsuccessful without fear of making a false passage'."

And Secret Service Agent Kellerman testified one of the doctors, Lt. Col. Pierre A. Finck told him while he was "probing inside the shoulder" that there was no lane of outlet for the bullet.

Weisberg discovered a once-secret report of the Federal Bureau of Investigation after he had concluded his book. It is added as a postscript.

("The FBI report, in fact, is a tissue so thin and a polemic so undisguised that it would demean the labors of a hick police force investigating the purloining of a desiccated flounder," comments Weisberg.

"It is a neat, clean, colorful and optically attractive rendition of such tenuous content that a self-respecting undergraduate lawyer would hesitate to take it to an uncorrupted court.")

Three Shots

Stating three shots rang out, the report continues: "Two bullets struck President Kennedy, and one wounded Governor Connally."

"It does not say that, of the three shots, one that struck the President also struck the governor, nor does it intend to," Weisberg declares. And what about the missed shot?

"It is only too obvious that there is here no acknowledgment of the missed shot," Weisberg explains, "which means a minimum of a fourth (shot) and the total elimination of Oswald as a lone and unassisted assassin."

The FBI report goes on: "Medical examination of the President's body revealed that one of the bullets had entered just below his shoulder to the right of the spinal column at an angle of 45 to 60 degrees downward, that there was no point of exit, and that the bullet was not in the body."

Weisberg has an explanation for this, too, involving a bullet found at Parkland Hospital under a mat of one of the stretchers, according to testimony. An undeformed missile, the commission concluded it was the one which caused Kennedy's non-fatal injuries and Connally's three wounds. It worked its way out of Connally's thigh by itself, the report found.

"There is but a single possible meaning: This bullet hit the President and penetrated his body so slightly that it fell out and was found at the hospital," Weisberg analyzes.

Asks Question

"Is there any other way in which it neither went through his body nor remained in it?" he asks. "And is there any other explanation of the inability of the autopsy surgeons to probe this wound? How could they explore a passage that did not exist?"

If this, indeed, is the case, it destroys the entire Warren Commission report, since one or more other bullets would have had to have inflicted Kennedy's front neck wound and Connally's three wounds.

But Weisberg claims the Commission, in "lemming-like" fashion, destroys its own report. It proves that certain acts which it states without equivocation did happen could not have happened according to the Commission's own reconstructions.

The reconstruction of Oswald's walk, for instance, from the rooming-house to the place where Tippit was killed would have had him arriving five minutes after Tippit lay dead! Or so Weisberg says.

And the reconstruction of the firing of the three shots was not an authentic reproduction of the situation, Weisberg maintains. Even so, most experts were not able to duplicate the firing of the shots so fast and with such accuracy.

Yet the Commission concludes that Oswald had the capability to do this, despite the fact there was no proof he had practiced extensively and despite the fact that the Marine Corps report showed he was no better than a "fairly good shot" even when he had been practicing consistently.

Weisberg raises a serious question about a possible connection between Oswald and Tippit when he brings up testimony by Oswald's landlady that between the time Oswald arrived home and left again, a police car stopped in front of the house and honked the horn several times before pulling off.

Log Is Checked

"Examination of the police radio logs clearly reveal one police car was assigned to that area--No. 10, Tippit's," Weisberg states. The commission report reveals no evidence was found to show a police car in the area.

According to Weisberg, Tippit failed to respond to a request for his location from the dispatcher, issued at about 1 p.m.

"Why he should have failed to answer the call from the dispatcher, which just happened to be about the time the only police car in the area, his, was reported outside the rooming-house, is, of course, a mystery," concludes Weisberg.

The author makes it abundantly clear throughout the book that he is not trying to defend Oswald. He does not, in fact, deny Oswald's connections with the assassination.

What he does claim is that

Oswald's guilt has not been proved "beyond a reasonable question of a doubt." And that, of course, is the American system of justice: a man is innocent until proven guilty beyond that reasonable question of a doubt.

All the Warren Commission investigation did, Weisberg accuses, is validate the findings of other police agencies.

There was no attempt to go beyond other previous reports, he says, and in fact, when information did not jibe with the commission's adopted theory, it was ignored, altered or suppressed, he argues.

'Serious Conflict'

He blames part of the problem on the fact that the actual investigations were carried out by FBI and Secret Service agents. Since these same agencies had been involved in efforts to protect the President and had carried out their own investigations, there was a serious conflict, Weisberg points out. Their bread and butter came from these agencies, not from the commission.

Besides this handicap, there was the necessity of the staff doing the lion's share of the work. "Only a very small percentage of the hearings was attended by any members," Weisberg contends. "Most hearings had no members present."

Yet the report was issued in the names of the noted men on the commission and the American people digested its conclusions, keeping in mind their stamp of approval and probably believing these seven men had conducted the investigations.

European View

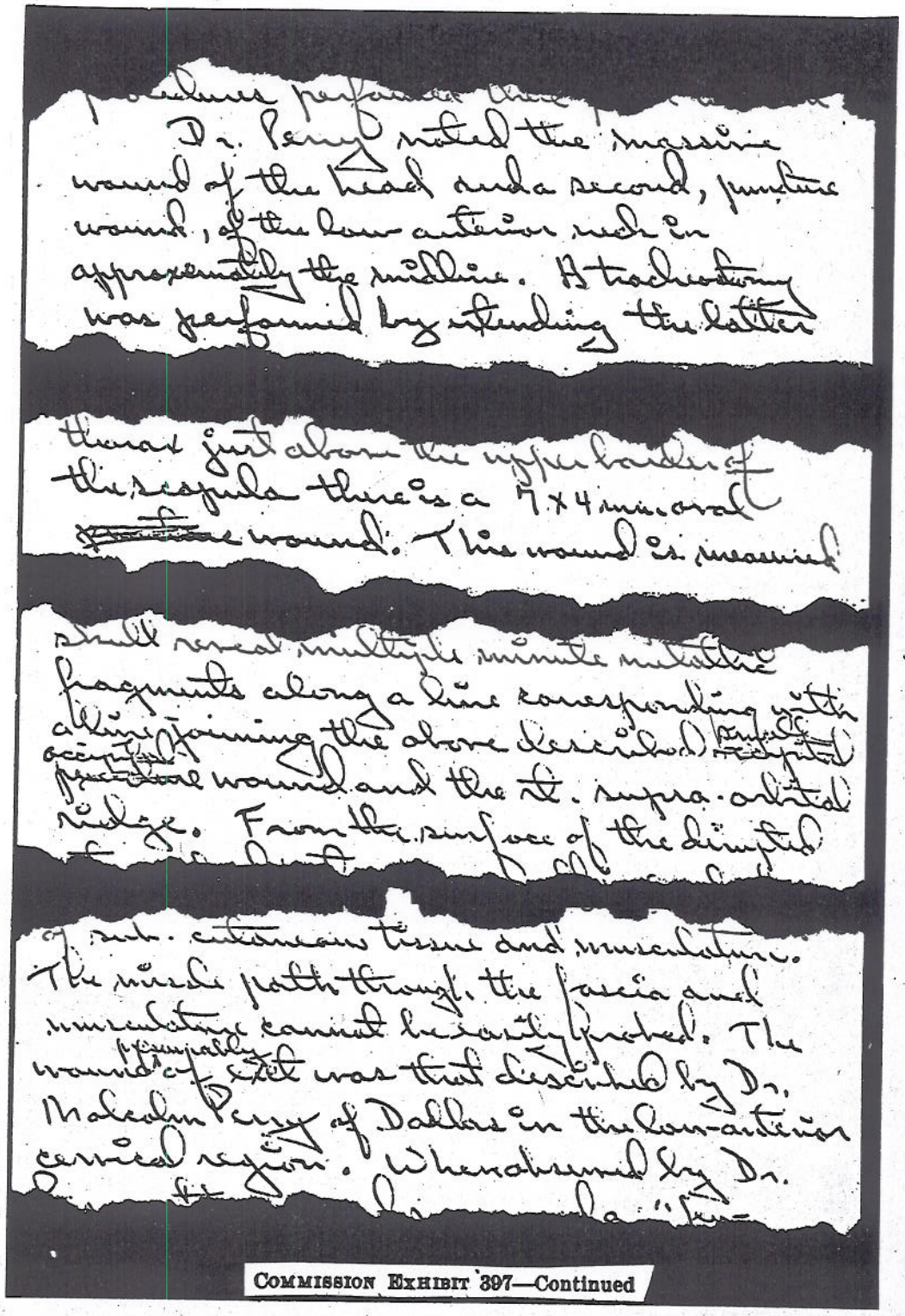
Weisberg is not the first to question the eminent commission.

The European press has never bought the commission's conclusions that Oswald--a crazed killer with Marxist leanings trying to carve a niche for himself in the annals of history--killed Kennedy on his own, without help from others.

Perhaps because Europeans have witnessed more assassinations than Americans, they have consistently mocked the naivete of citizens here for jumping on the bandwagon and accepting without skepticism the lone killer proposition.

Others, too, have questioned the findings of the commission, including Thomas G. Buchanan in his "Who Killed Kennedy?" and "Inquest" by Edward Jay Epstein, another new book just available on the stands.

All these men cast serious and legitimate doubts on the workings and conclusions of the commission. The record may indeed be closed but it may be reopened some day--perhaps sooner than some think.



procedures performed there [illegible]

Dr. Perry noted the massive wound of the head and a second, puncture wound, of the low anterior neck in approximately the midline. A tracheostomy was performed by extending the latter

thorax just above the upper border of the scapula there is a 7 x 4 mm. oval ~~puncture~~ wound. This wound is measured

skull reveal multiple minute metallic fragments along a line corresponding with a line joining the above described small ~~occipital~~ ~~puncture~~ occipital wound and the rt. supra-orbital ridge. From the surface of the dirupted [illegible]

of sub-cutaneous tissue and musculature. The missile path through the fascia and musculature cannot be easily probed. The wound presumably of exit was that described by Dr. Malcolm Perry of Dallas in the low-anterior cervical region. When observed by Dr. [illegible]

COMMISSION EXHIBIT 397—Continued

Editing of Autopsy Report

This is the preliminary version of the autopsy report prepared by Dr. J. J. Humes of the National Naval Medical Center. Changes included the elimination of the word "puncture" from the final version.