TRUTH ABOUT THE ASSASSINATION

Confusion Spread Rapidly

(Third in a series of six articles excerpted from "The Truth About the Assassination," newly-published study by an eyewitness reporter of the controversial questions surrounding the murder of President Kennedy.)

By CHARLES ROBERTS

IN THE FIRST hours following President Kennedy's murder confusion was endemic. It spread from Dallas to Washington and on to Europe—from Parkland Hospital and the Dallas police station, to newspapers, radio and television—like an airborne plague.

No one was prepared for that awful convulsion of history. In it, some men made mistakes which added to the confusion. These, in turn, prepared the ground for an assault three years later on the findings of the Warren Commission, which wasn't appointed until a week after Kennedy died.

Apparently on the theory that any sign of confusion or bungling by anyone in Dallas on November 22, 1963, undermines the Commission Report, critics of the Commission have blasted away at almost everything the police, doctors and newsmen said or did in Dallas on that day. Like the hunter who wants to be sure of hitting something, most of them have fired with shotguns. They have brought down random targets which in no way disprove any of the Commission's conclusions. A few examples:

CHARGE: Police at first identified the murder weapon found in the Depository as a 7.65 caliber German Mauser, then changed their story and said it was an Italian-made 6.5 caliber Mannlicher-Carcano.

ANSWER: True. The officer who made the faulty identification was one of Mark Lane's favorite witnesses, Constable Seymour Weitzman, who once sold sporting goods, but admitted to the Commission he made the identification at "a glance." He was also wrong on his identification of the Japanese-made telescopic gunsight.

COMMENT: No one — not even Lane — has ever advanced a reason why, if the police were going to "plant" a rifle to incriminate Oswald, they would plant a Mauser and then say it was a Mannlicher-Carcano.

CHARGE: Police falsely reported finding a map marked with the route of the Presidential motorcade in Oswald's room in Beckley ave.

ANSWER: True. It was a

Turn to Page 41, Col. 1

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE ASSASSINATION

Fact vs. Report Critics

Continued from Page 5

map he had used in job-hunting with the Book Depository marked.

COMMENT: It had no more relevance to his guilt or innocence than another false story put out by police—that he had munched a chicken lunch just before the assassination. (The chicken bones were left there by another employee.)

CHARGE: Oswald's civil rights were violated.

ANSWER: Probably true. Dallas police searched his part-time home in suburban Irving —out of their jurisdiction— without a warrant. There is little evidence to suggest they exerted themselves to get him a lawyer of his choice during the 45½ hours they held him prisoner. Under present U. S. Supreme Court rulings, pre-trial publicity virtually precluded him a fair trial.

COMMENT: His murder by Ruby had rendered his opportunity for any trial moot by the time the Commission met. As a fact-finding body, not trying Oswald for murder, the Commission was able to take evidence that might have been inadmissible in court but which shed invaluable light on the case.

But of all the aspects of the Kennedy assassination that have attracted the fire of Warren Report critics, none is more popular than the "single-bullet theory"—the Warren Commission's unprovable theory that one bullet fired from Oswald's rifle (later to become Exhibit 399) tore through President Kennedy's neck, ripped through Governor Connally's back, fracturing a rib, came out of his chest under his right nipple, shattered his right wrist, then lodged in his left thigh, fell out of that wound, and was found later at Parkland Hospital.

According to the theory, Bullet 399 was the first to hit any occupant of the President's car. One shot went wild; another struck the President in the head and fragmented.

What makes the theory unacceptable to the critics is the fact that the bullet which the Commission says did all this damage — Lane calls it "the magic bullet" — was recovered in remarkably good shape. Its nose was hardly blunted, almost not at all. And it had lost little weight in its remarkable flight.

President Johnson Receives Report From Chief Justice Earl Warren on the Assassination of President Kennedy
(AP Wirephoto)

A normal copper-jacketed slug for a 6.5 mm rifle weighs 160 to 161 grams. When found at Parkland Hospital — after falling off Governor Connally's emergency cart, according to the Commission — Exhibit 399 weighed a flat 158.6 grains.

The Commission adopted the single-bullet theory only after lively debate behind closed doors. Assistant Counsel Arlen Specter; who evolved the theory, argued that it was the only way to explain how Kennedy and Connally could have been hit in such a short space of time.

The Zapruder film showed that they were hit, or at least reacted visibly to their wounds, within 1.8 seconds.

SEEMED DESIRABLE

The Commission had already accepted 2.3 seconds as the minimum time in which Oswald's bolt-action rifle could get off two rounds. Thus, the single-bullet theory seemed desirable, if not necessary, to support the single-assassin concept.

Nevertheless, because of the almost-pristine condition of the bullet, and because Connally testified it was "inconceivable" he was hit by the same bullet that pierced Kennedy's throat, some members of the Commission balked at adopting Specter's hypothesis as a finding or conclusion.

Senator Richard Russell, of Georgia, Senator John Sherman Cooper, of Kentucky, and Representative Hale Boggs, of Louisiana, were skeptical. Former CIA Chief Allen Dulles, Reprensentative Gerald Ford, of Michigan, and John McCloy, former president of the World Bank, thought it reasonable. Chief Justice Warren wanted a unanimous report.

In what McCloy later described as a "battle of the adjectives," Ford suggested that the evidence for the single-bullet theory should be called "compelling." Russell thought the Commission should say only that it was "credible." McCloy finally suggested the word "persuasive" as a compromise.

The Commission then concluded: "Although it is not necessary to any essential findings of the Commission to determine just what shot hit Governor Connally, 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."

RESORT TO TRICKERY

A study of that "evidence from the experts" is, indeed, very persuasive that Kennedy's neck would and all of Connally's wounds were caused by Bullet 399. A study of the arguments against the single bullet theory reveals again that the critics of the Commission departed from logic and resorted to trickery—this time to prove their preconceived notion that those wounds were inflicted in some other undefined way.

For example, in a final effort to prove that the bullet which struck Kennedy's back never left his body—and thus couldn't have slammed into Connally—Epstein says: "The fact that the autopsy surgeons were not able to find a path for the bullet is further evidence that the bullet did not pass completely through the President's body."

The fact is, the autopsy surgeons did find a path for the bullet, as well as a point of exit. Dr. James Humes, the chief autopsy surgeon, testified before the Commission that early in the examination the doctors "were unable to take probes and have them satisfactorily fall through at this point." Epstein evidently stopped reading there. They hesitated to probe further for fear of making a "false passage," Dr. Humes explained. But, he testified, two pages farther along in the Hearings, on dissection they found that "in the apex of the right pleural cavity there was a bruise or contusion or eccmymosis of the parietal pleura as well as a bruise of the upper portion, the most apical portion of the right lung."

By the color and condition of the damaged tissue they concluded these bruises marked the path of a bullet through the neck, rather than any damage caused by the tracheotomy. "So we feel," Dr. Humes testified, "that, had this missile not made its path in that fashion, the wound made by Dr. Perry in the neck (the tracheotomy) would not have been able to produce . . . these contusions in the musculature of the neck."

MISSING FRAGMENTS

Both Lane and Epstein argue next that the bullet found at Parkland could not have inflicted the damage it did on Kennedy and Connally and come out so undeformed. They imply that more metal was found, or left, in Connally's wounds than was missing from Bullet 399. Here they both employ tunnel vision—seeing just what they want to see in the record, while ignoring the testimony the Commission finally found "persuasive."

They invoke as witnesses Dr. Pierre Finck, who performed the autopsy on Kennedy but did not see Connally's wounds. Both expressed the opinion that the bullet which went through Kennedy's neck could have gone through Connally's body, but doubted that it could have then shattered the governor's wrist and embedded in his thigh with so little loss of weight.

Dr. Humes thought it "extremely unlikely" because reports he had read from Parkland told of metal "fragments" in Connally's wrist and thigh bone. "I can't conceive of where they came from this missile," he added, referring to Bullet 399. Dr. Finck took the same position because there were "too many fragments described (in reports from Parkland) in that wrist."

If this was the opinion of the doctors at Bethesda, who read about Connaliy's wounds, what about the doctors at Parkland who actually attended the wounded governor? The Commission called three of them and each, independently, expressed his opinion that the same bullet that traversed Connally's body also caused the wrist and thigh wounds.

(Copyright © 1967 by Charles Roberts. Published by Grosset & Dunlap, Inc., New York.)

TOMORROW: Jack Ruby: Hired Killer?