

Feb.13,1974

Dear Mr Weisberg,

In a very recent exchange of letters with Dr Wecht to whom, I understand, you have given invaluable assistance in his researches into the autopsy of President Kennedy, I urged on him the view the Zapruder film is decisive evidence Kennedy was hit fatally from a point to the right and in front of the limousine in which he was riding. In reply Dr Wecht conceded the film was of "major evidentiary value," but wrote he could not be certain "JFK sustained only one gunshot wound of the head;" interpreted "the film and the stills" as showing "a minimal and brief forward movement did occur first," i.e. before the "more obvious movement backward and toward the left;" and concluded, "The biggest problem with postulating a second shot to the head from the direction of the so-called grassy knoll area is that we cannot explain what happened to that bullet, and why there was no apparent damage to the left side or left rear of JFK's skull. If a bullet came from the right side, it is extremely difficult for me to explain how there would have been no damage to the left cerebral hemisphere, or any portion of the left side of the calvarium."

The last point is valid; it defines a genuine dilemma, if not in fact then at least for Dr Wecht. How can it be resolved? Dr Lattimer disposes of the problem by misinterpreting the film to support the findings of the Warren Commission. Dr. Wecht, with your help, has discredited the autopsy, largely on the basis of professional incompetence and bureaucratic military interference, but can find no ballistic evidence to corroborate the Zapruder film? What do you think of the matter?

Perhaps you can help me, as you assisted Dr Wecht, to gain greater insight into the strange events which began with the illegal removal of Kennedy's body from Parkland Hospital in Dallas. I have begun a study of the controversy surrounding the autopsy and have received copies of Dr Lattimer's articles, and have asked Dr Wecht for copies of his. I have also come into possession of a Xeroxed copy of a death certificate of President Kennedy, signed by Br. Burkley, physician to the president, in Washington on Nov 23, that is one day after Dr Kemp Clark filled out a death certificate in Parkland Hospital at Dr Burkley's request, which Dr Clark then handed to Dr Burkley to accompany the president's body to Washington Dr Clark testified. I understand you unearthed this second certificate in the National Archives. Prospecting for truth has uncovered a nugget.

The Burkley certificate is not reproduced in the Warren Commission Report, nor in the 26 volumes of Commission testimony and exhibits. There is no reference to it in anything I have read, including your own carefully researched books. When I asked Dr Lattimer about it he said he had not previously heard of it, declined to look at my copy, and dismissed the matter as of little or no consequence. I am waiting for Dr Wecht's comment. What do you make of it? Have you discovered the reason for the issuance of a second certificate? Why was it done? What is its relation to the autopsy? What purpose did

it serve? Whose interest?

Pondering these problems leads, of course, to questions about Dr Burkley's role in the events leading up to and following the autopsy. He was present in trauma room one in Parkland Hospital. He assisted his medical colleagues in trying to revive the president. He was present when the president was pronounced dead. He asked Dr Clark to write a death certificate. Later Dr Burkley was present at the autopsy in Bethesda Hospital in Washington. He could have told the autopsy surgeons about the tracheotomy incision made in Parkland Hospital hours before through Kennedy's throat wound, which obliterated it and left the autopsy pathologists groping for an explanation of a bullet which had entered Kennedy's back, failed to exit, but was not in his body as X-rays showed. Burkley, a rear admiral on active duty in Bethesda Naval Hospital witnessed an army general restrict the autopsy performed by naval pathologists. On the 23rd Burkley issued a second death certificate which gives an anatomic point of reference for the location of Kennedy's back wound, "the third thoracic vertebra," which had been totally ignored until you found it. Dr Burkley's office issued the official autopsy report which, it turns out, contained serious errors and omissions. After the assassination Dr Burkley officially collected the medical data relating to the assassination. He was a busy, knowledgeable, important, establishment official. Yet he was not called as a witness by the Warren Commission. The 26 volumes do not contain a deposition from him; there is nothing from him, not even the death certificate he issued. The index to the Commission report lists a small number of references to him in the testimony of a few witnesses. A similar neglect characterizes the literature of criticism of the Warren Commission.

Is it not strange? Should not Dr Burkley, a grey eminence who moved in the shadow of the assassination and bids fair to vanish into the mist of history, be rescued from obscurity? What was his role? Why is he obscure? Will a spotlight on Burkley reveal significant data about the autopsy? Will it resolve Dr Wecht's dilemma?

What have you discovered about Dr Burkley in the course of your indefatigable researches?

Any help you can give me will be very much appreciated.

Sincerely,


Thomas Stamm

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