

COMMENTARY

'JFK' the film mangles t

By ARLEN SPECTER

When I was first asked about the new movie *JFK* by the news media in early December, I tossed it off with a laugh, saying that I would try to see it during the holiday season because I enjoyed fiction. When I saw it a few weeks later, I thought that it was anything but funny, because it portrayed to about half of America (those under 12 when President John F. Kennedy was murdered 28 years ago) a false story as a matter of first impression in a docudrama format that intermixes authentic black and white newsreels with black and white fictional clips so that the viewer cannot tell which is which in an otherwise color film.

The strength of our democratic institutions resides in the unabridged freedom of citizens to criticize their government. That right to criticize was eloquently articulated by Thomas Jefferson: "Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter."

Our government at all levels has lots of problems, and no one ever said it better than Winston Churchill: "Democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time." Government has an absolute duty not to lie to its people. There is at least some duty on the part of the critics, especially those using the technique of a movie docudrama, not to fraudulently and intentionally deceive a whole generation of Americans about an important historical event.

Look at a few of the falsehoods.

The movie: Kennedy had a large exit wound in the back of his head indicating that the bullet came from the front.

Facts: Kennedy had a small entry hole in the back of his head and a large exit wound at the top front showing that the bullet came from the rear and above.

The movie: Lt. Col. Pierre Finck, an autopsy surgeon at Bethesda, says the government agents at the autopsy ordered a coverup on the medical findings.

Facts: Finck testified under oath before the Warren Commission that an initial bullet hit Kennedy in the back of the neck, hit nothing solid,

The single-bullet theory has withstood the test of time.

and exited from his throat — supporting the single bullet theory.

The movie: Jack Ruby tells Chief Justice Earl Warren to get him out of Dallas so that he (Ruby) can tell about his part in the conspiracy.

Facts: Ruby testified before the Warren Commission that he had no part in any conspiracy.

The movie says there was a gigantic conspiracy involving President Lyndon Johnson, Warren, the FBI, the CIA and many others. For that to be true, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy (in charge of the FBI), the President's brother, would have to have been a part of — or at least indifferent to — the conspiracy. How ridiculous can you be?

If that far-flung conspiracy involving so many agencies and people could be kept secret for more than two decades, it would have been the most successful undertaking of the U.S. government in its 200-year history.

The Warren Commission concluded that there was no conspiracy. The House of Representatives Select Committee on Assassinations found the "probability" of a conspiracy based on a sound tape, believed to be a recording of the assassination, with two shots 1.6 seconds apart, which would be too fast for both to have come from Oswald's rifle. Further study by the National Academy of Sciences proved that the tape did not record the shots in the assassination.

It is impossible to prove conclusively a negative — that something did not happen. Had there been a conspiracy, I believe it would have come to light in the intervening 28 years, given the impossibility of keeping secrets in our free society.

The movie mangles the facts on the single-bullet theory. The House assassinations committee, very critical of the Warren Commission on other matters, confirmed the single-bullet theory.

When the autopsy surgeons disclosed that the bullet, which passed through the President's neck, hit nothing solid and exited with tremendous velocity, it was apparent that a bullet with that

trajectory would have to have hit the interior of the vehicle or someone else. We noted that the entry wound on Gov. John Connally's back (slightly to the left of his right armpit) was slightly irregular, which was consistent to some other object's having been hit first without significantly slowing the bullet's velocity.

The commission then conducted elaborate tests such as firing Oswald's rifle at the same distance at substances, recreating the President's neck, to measure entrance and exit velocities; grazing the rib of an anesthetized goat (simulating Connally's rib wound); firing Oswald's rifle at cadaver skulls and wrists; etc.

From the evidence, the single-bullet theory emerged. Using the neutron activation analysis (not known during the time of the Warren Commission investigation), the House committee more than a decade later concluded that the metallic fragments in Connally's wrist came from the single bullet.

Over the years I have debated critics on live television such as Mark Lane on British television for four hours and 45 minutes and Josiah Thompson on Philadelphia public television for two hours at the University of Pennsylvania Law School. I think it is fair to say that

The magic

In the movie "JFK," the following passage is spoken by Kevin Costner, who plays New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison.

Rather than admit to a conspiracy or investigate further, the Warren Commission chose to endorse the theory put forth by an ambitious junior counselor, Arlen Specter. One of the grossest lies ever foisted on the American people. We've come to know it as the magic bullet theory.

"The magic bullet enters the President's back, headed downward at an angle of 17 degrees. It then moves

he facts

the single-bullet theory has withstood the test of time for those willing to listen to the evidence and follow the facts.

Historians, columnists and media critics have thoroughly discredited and ridiculed the movie *JFK*. But that is not sufficient for all the men and women who are being defamed by the movie's dredging up stale conspiracy theories that have been discredited over the past two decades. Most of those defamed are not alive to defend themselves. Their families inherit their anguish, as illustrated by television journalist Cokie Roberts, who commented recently on ABC's *This Week With David Brinkley* that the movie was unfair to her father, Louisiana Rep. Hale Boggs, who was a member of the commission.

Considering the facts that debate continues on the assassination of Abraham Lincoln and just last year the body of Zachary Taylor was exhumed on the suspicion that he was poisoned, it is not surprising that doubt remains about the Warren Report. But then who has read the Warren Report — let alone the 25 volumes containing 17,000 pages of supporting evidence?

In a curious way, this absurd movie, which no one is taking seriously once acquainted with the facts, may lead people to read and accept the extensive factual analysis and sound conclusions of the Warren Commission's report.

Arlen Specter, Pennsylvania's senior U.S. senator, was an assistant counsel to the Warren Commission.



Special to The Inquirer / ELEANOR MILL

bullet turns right then left

upward, in order to leave Kennedy's body from the front of his neck. Wound No. 2. Where it waits 1.6 seconds. Presumably in mid-air, where it turns right. Then left. Right. Then left. And continues into [Gov. John] Connally's body at the rear of his right arm pit. Wound No. 3.

"The bullet then heads downward at an angle of 27 degrees, shattering Connally's fifth rib and exiting from the right side of his chest. Wound No. 4.

"The bullet then turns right. And re-enters Connally's body at his right wrist. Wound No. 5. Shattering the

radius bone, the bullet then exits Connally's wrist, wound No. 6, makes a dramatic U-turn and buries itself into Connally's left thigh. Wound No. 7, [from] which it later falls out. And is found in almost pristine condition on a stretcher in a corridor of Parkland Hospital.

"That's some bullet.

"Anyone who's been in combat will tell you that never in the history of combat has there been a bullet this ridiculous. Yet the government says it can prove it. With some fancy physics in a nuclear laboratory. Of

course they can. Theoretical physics can prove that an elephant can hang from a cliff with his tail tied to a daisy....

"This single-bullet explanation is the foundation of the Warren Commission's claim of a lone assassin. And once you conclude [that] the magic bullet could not create all seven of those wounds, you have to conclude that there was a fourth shot. And a second rifle. And if there was a second rifle, by definition, there had to be a conspiracy."