

NEW INFORMATION ON THE AUTOPSY FINDINGS, THE AUTOPSY PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD AND STATEMENTS OF GERALD POSNER ON JFK'S PATHOLOGISTS

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COPA - 1994

Ever since Josiah Thompson reproduced in Six Seconds in Dallas¹(1) a drawing representing Parkland witness, Robert McClelland's, recollection of JFK's large rear skull defect, controversy about it has not ceased.

The autopsy report described the bullet entrance close to the bottom of the rear of the skull, near the external occipital protuberance. The 'exit' was described as a 13-cm defect, not much larger than the palm of an adult man's hand, "on the right involving chiefly the parietal bone but extending somewhat into the temporal and occipital regions."²(2) However, a diagram prepared on the night of the autopsy by Dr. Boswell showed a "17" next to the word "missing". He explained to the HSCA³ (3) and to me,⁴(4) that the skull defect was 17-cm, fore to aft, not 13-cm. Whichever number is accurate (see below), the defect must have involved the right rear quadrant of JFK's skull if it was truly 'parietal-temporal-occipital'.

Confusingly, in June, 1967, not long after Humes saw the autopsy photographs for the first time Dan Rather asked him, "And (where was) the exit wound?" Humes said: "And the exit wound was a large irregular wound to the front and side—right side of the President's head".⁵ (5) No witness had ever described it there. To muddy the waters further, in the third of three interviews before the HSCA, Dr. Humes seemed to change his mind on the entrance, claiming the bullet entered high, in parietal bone, rather than low, in occipital bone, as per the autopsy report.⁶ (6) Further, in testimony before the Conyers Committee on 11/17/93, Gerald Posner, claimed he'd interviewed Drs. Humes and Boswell and that "they have confirmed their change of testimony that they gave before the HSCA", and that the entrance would be "correctly placed 4 inches higher" in parietal bone. (No evidence can be found that Boswell ever admitted to the high location, though Humes *may have*.) So the location of the entrance wound and exit defect may be uncertain despite the autopsy report's statements.

To add to the confusion, Gerald Posner and JAMA presented Parkland witnesses whose opinions had changed quite a bit from their original sworn testimonies and contemporaneously prepared statements, and who now endorsed a more anterior skull defect, a defect that would have been consistent with the Oswald hypothesis. While it is beyond the scope of this presentation, the witnesses Posner and JAMA produced to refute a rear skull defect, Drs. M.T. Jenkins, M. Perry and C. Baxter, have given such inconsistent accounts over the years as to render any of their statements untrustworthy. Moreover, last year I presented a compilation of all the earliest descriptions, which I (and Posner⁷) believe to be the most reliable, of JFK's skull defect from both Parkland and Bethesda witnesses. I found that with the exception of Captain John Stover, a Bethesda witness who described JFK's defect at "the top" of the skull, every one of 42 witnesses described a defect at the rear of JFK's skull, some indicating that it also extended further anteriorly⁸ (9). Recent statements by expert Parkland witnesses, who have given consistent accounts over 30 years, only reinforce the likelihood of a rear wound.

On 1/20/94 a steel salesman from Tennessee, David Naro, interviewed Kemp Clark, MD, the Parkland neurosurgery professor who examined JFK's wound, and who pronounced JFK dead. Naro reported Clark said, "The lower right occipital region of the head was blown out and I saw cerebellum." This conveys the same message as the document he prepared on 11/22/63 which read, "There was a large wound in the right occipitoparietal region...Both cerebral and cerebellar tissue was extruding from the wound."

Ronald C. Jones, MD, Parkland witness, told the Warren Commission there was a "large defect in the back side of the head..." and "(there) appeared to be an exit wound in the posterior portion of the skull".¹⁰ (10) Jones told David Lifton "If you brought him in here today, I'd still say he was shot from the front."¹¹ (11) Jones told student, Brad Parker, on 8/10/92, again, "...if they brought him in today, I would tend - seeing what I saw, I would say that he was shot from the front."¹² (12) Jones told Parker that he fundamentally agreed with McClelland's drawing of the back of the head as seen in Six Seconds. Jones specifically denied to Parker that he had seen a right anterior skull defect. He said, "Yeah. I didn't think that there was any wound -- I didn't appreciate any wound, anyway, in the right temporal

X - READ EBERSOLE'S INTERVIEW WHERE HE, TOO, DESCRIBED A FRAGMENT OF OCCIPITAL BONE BEING BROUGHT IN. IF HSCA'S RIGHT, BOS + EBERSOLE WROTE

area or the right side of the upper part of the head, you know, over the -- in front of the ear say, or anything like that. (13)¹³ These descriptions are fully consistent with the autopsy report of a right rear defect. If the defect did extend forward, the anterior portion was quite small. Only Gerald Posner reports Jones described JFK's wound as "a large side wound".¹⁴(14) Posner neglected to ask Jones about his Warren Commission testimony that undermines Posner's thesis, or about the statements attributed to Jones by Lifton (which Jones repeated to Brad Parker in 1992).

But what was one to make of Humes possible reversal for the HSCA admitting a high wound, and Humes and Boswell's possible flip-flopping for Gerald Posner admitting JFK's skull entrance wound was high, especially after both Humes and Boswell reaffirmed their autopsy report's low location in 1992 interviews in JAMA?¹⁵(15)

Some of these mysteries were clarified in recent interviews I conducted with Drs. Boswell and Humes. As to Posner's claim that Boswell admitted a high entrance wound to him, Boswell said, "No, no, no, no, no. That -- that's -- that's -- first of all, I never talked to him. Jim (Humes) talked to him." So I rephrased with, "Somebody sent me a copy of Posner's testimony before the Conyer's Committee and he said that he'd talked to both you and Jim and said that both of you had changed your mind." Boswell answered, "No, that's not true. I never talked to Posner. He called me and I was out and we never got back together... Jim -- they did talk over the phone..."

Boswell staunchly defended the autopsy report, "...Jim and I sat down a couple of years ago and agreed that the most valid statements are our original report, because we labored over that long and hard... And I would refer anybody back to that -- and swear by it." Dr. Humes seemed annoyed to be questioned by an unknown physician on the phone. But he certainly seemed to back up Boswell when I asked if "the statements you made to JAMA were reliable about where you said the head wound was?" Humes impatiently answered, "I would guess they're reliable, yes, sir."¹⁶(16) Then he testily rushed me off the phone.

Boswell's descriptions of JFK's skull wounds have been consistent with the autopsy report over the years. He also believed one should depend less on Humes' later utterances - when they differed from the autopsy report. He said: "I think some of that testimony that Jim gave in the (HSCA) hearings -- which were sever- several years later and then without any records and were not very knowledgeable questioners (sic), I think some of that testimony might be suspect."¹⁷(17), and, "Well, I tell you -- eh -- what Jim and I agreed in conference with the AMA people (for the 1992 JAMA interviews) was that -- eh -- all of the measurements and all of the information in the (autopsy) report were the most valid. And that anything that might have been said subsequent to that had to be taken with a grain of salt. Because a lot of those people down in the Congressional inquiry, and so forth, they were not knowledgeable people, and they made comments and so forth, and questions and statements -- some of them I think Jim may have agreed with that (sic) I don't think were legitimate."¹⁸(18) To help me assess the Posner assertions which contradict the pathologists' statements in JAMA I asked, "Were you accurately quoted in JAMA?" Boswell answered, "Oh, yea, I tell you, we studied that article very well. I-- eh -- and those were accurate."¹⁹(19)

Thus both Boswell and Humes endorsed their JAMA-autopsy statements about JFK's skull wound and denied to me that they had the 'new' opinions Posner alleged in Congress. Boswell twice and unequivocally denied to me ever having spoken with Posner, and after I specifically asked about his congressional claims. I personally believe that Drs. Humes and Boswell told me the truth, a truth which is consistent with their statements in JAMA endorsing their own autopsy report. But I cannot prove that their statements to me or JAMA are true, nor can I prove that those alleged by Posner are false. Perhaps Posner will fulfill his own promise of proof.

WAS JFK'S SKULL DEFECT 13-cm OR 17-cm?

On the "13-cm" vs. "17-cm" discrepancy, Boswell explained that JFK's skull defect was 17-cm long when first examined, but only 13-cm after a late-arriving fragment was replaced into the defect. I asked: "On the face sheet -- was the "17 cm"(meant) to reflect the size of the wound before placing fragment of bone that arrived late into the autopsy into the OCCIPITAL wound, and the 13 cm. to reflect the size of the wound after the fragment was in place?" He answered, "Right." I followed with, "Was there one large defect in the head from fore to aft, or was there (sic) two?" Boswell answered, "Just one defect." I pushed further, "Does the Rydberg diagram (CE-388) show the

bone fragment back in place?" Boswell answered, "Yeah, the eh -- that fragment -- the defect -- the wound of entrance was at the base of that defect and, eh, the shelving on the inner surface of the bone was half on the intact portion of the skull and half on that fragment that we received from Dallas and replaced."

Boswell's face sheet diagram was prepared on 11/22/63. As it was preped closer to the event than even the autopsy report, the diagram should be considered at least as reliable. If there was a 17-cm continuous skull defect extending to the external occipital protuberance, it seems very unlikely Oswald was responsible.

THE INTEGRITY OF THE AUTOPSY PHOTOGRAPHS

While the HSCA claimed the autopsy photographs were "authenticated", there are problems with the extant photographic record. All of JFK's pathologists and photographers, as well as Bethesda pathologist-witness, Robert Karnai, MD, recalled the taking of photographs that do not now exist. The major argument that the photographic file is inviolate and dependable is the 11/10/66 statement regarding the X-ray and photographic inventory which was signed by Humes, Boswell, Ebersole, and Stringer after they examined the materials. It read, "The X-rays and photographs described and listed above include all the X-rays and photographs taken by us during the autopsy, and we have no reason to believe that any other photographs or X-rays were made during the autopsy."²⁰ (20) It seems unlikely that anyone would write such a statement about a group of photographs they took three years before and never saw. But the signatories did not write the statement, they merely signed this statement, which was prepared for them by a government agent. This is proved by a recently released document which reads, "On the afternoon of November 10, 1966, I (Carl W. Belcher) took the original and one carbon copy of the document entitled 'Report of Inspection by Naval Medical Staff on November 1, 1966 at National Archives of X-Rays and Photographs of Autopsy of President John F. Kennedy' to the Naval Medical Center, Bethesda, Md., where it was read and signed by Captain Humes, Dr. Boswell, Captain Ebersole and Mr. John T. Stringer. Certain ink corrections were made in the document before they signed it..."²¹ (21)

Much evidence exists that autopsy photographs are missing. Finck, for only one example, was certain he never saw the photos of the skull (not scalp) wound, internal and external aspects, whose taking he'd directed. In addition to noting the absence in his own notes, Finck had the following exchange before the HSCA:

Charles Petty, MD: "If I understand you correctly, Dr. Finck, you wanted particularly to have a photograph made of the external aspect of the skull from the back to show that there was no cratering to the outside of the skull."

Finck: "Absolutely."

Petty: "Did you ever see such a photograph?"

Finck: "I don't think so and I brought with me memorandum referring to the examination of photographs in 1967...and as I can recall I never saw pictures of the outer aspect of the wound of entry in the back of the head and inner aspect in the skull in order to show a crater although I was there asking for these photographs. I don't remember seeing those photographs."²² (22)

It was Andy Purdy himself who reported that, "STRINGER (sic) said it was his recollection that all the photographs he had taken were not present in 1966 (when he first saw the photographs)."²³ (23) No photographs now exist of the interior of JFK's chest, but it was unanimous that such photographs were taken. (Finck was apparently never asked about interior chest photos.) As Mr. Purdy conducted many of these interviews, and should have known the content of all of them, he apparently never explored this important controversy. The records speak for themselves:

"STRINGER remembers taking 'at least two exposures of the body cavity'"²⁴ (24)

HUMES: "...specifically recall(ed photographs)...were taken of the President's chest...(these photographs) do not exist."²⁵ (25)

BOSWELL: "...he (Boswell) thought they photographed '...the exposed thoracic cavity and lung...' but doesn't remember ever seeing those photographs."²⁶ (26)

ROBERT F. KARNAI, MD: "He (Karnai) recalls them putting the probe in and taking pictures (the body was on the side at the time) (sic)."²⁷ (27)

FLOYD REIBE: "he thought he took about six pictures--'I think it was three film packs'--of internal portions of the body."²⁸ (28)

It appears far from certain that an undiminished photographic record now exists. It seems certain, however, that someone gave Mr. *Carl W. Belcher* of the Criminal Division of the United States Justice Department the completed memo for the witnesses to sign. That person may have wished the photo and X-ray record to appear undiminished. It is not surprising some believe there was also additional photo tampering.

- ²⁹1. Josiah Thompson, Ph.D. *Six Seconds in Dallas*. New York. Bernard Geis Associates, 1967. p.107.
- ²⁹2. Warren Report. Commission Exhibit #387.
- ²⁹3. HSCA. Vol. VII:253.
- ²⁹4. Personal interview with J. Thornton Boswell, 3/30/94.
- ²⁹5. CBS News Inquiry: "The Warren Report, Part II," 6-26-67, in: JAMA 10/7/92.
- ²⁹6. HSCA. Vol. I:323-332.
- ²⁹7. Gerald Posner. *Case Closed*. Anchor Books, 1993, p234. (See p. 235 in hardcover version.)
- ²⁹8. Dallas ASK conference, 1993.
- ²⁹9. WC--CE#392.
- ²⁹10. WC-V6:53-54.
- ²⁹11. David Lifton. *Best Evidence*. New York. Carroll and Graf, 1988, p. 705.
- ²⁹12. Ronald C. Jones, MD, from an interview with Mr. Brad Parker, 8/10/92.
- ²⁹13. IBID.
- ²⁹14. Gerald Posner. *Case Closed*. New York, 1993. Anchor Books, p.311.
- ²⁹15. JAMA. 5/27/92.
- ²⁹16. Transcript of recorded interview with James Humes, MD, 3/30/94.
- ²⁹17. Transcript of recorded interview with J. Thornton Boswell, MD, 3/30/94.
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- ²⁹19. All quotations from transcript of recorded remarks of Drs. Humes and Boswell.
- ²⁹20. *Report of Inspection by Naval Medical Staff on 11/1/66 at National Archives of X-rays and Photographs of President John F. Kennedy*. In: Weisberg, H., Post Mortem, p.573.
- ²⁹21. From: Carl W. Belcher, Chief, General Crimes Section, Criminal Division, US Dept. of Justice, 11/22/66. Agency: DOJCIVIL, Record # 182-10001-100021
- ²⁹22. HSCA interview with Finck, p.90.
- ²⁹23. HSCA rec. # 180-10093-10429. Agency file # 002070, p. 11. Stringer apparently was not satisfied with the explanation given him for the missing photos, for the HSCA reported, "He (Stringer) noted that the receipt he had said some of the film holders (sic) had no film in one side of the cassettes. He said the receipt said this happened in two or three of the film holders where one side only was allegedly loaded. He said he could understand it if the film holders were reported to have poorly exposed or defective film but could not believe that there were any sides on the film holders which were not loaded with film...."
- ²⁹24. A. Purdy. HSCA rec. # 180-10093-10429. Agency file # 002070, p. 2.
- ²⁹25. HSCA record # 180-10093-10429), Agency file # 002070, p. 17.
- ²⁹26. A. Purdy. HSCA rec# 180-10093-10430. Agency file # 002071-p. 6
- ²⁹27. A. Purdy. HSCA, JFK Collection. RG #233, file #002198, p.5.
- ²⁹28. David Lifton, *Best Evidence*, p.638.

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- ⁶6. HSCA. Vol. I:323-332.
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