

Warren Report Shortcomings Outlined

Shortcomings in the publicly announced portions of the Warren Commission report which dealt with forensic sciences were described by panelists at a session of the 18th Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences in Chicago.

The panelists made clear that their review of the Warren Commission report on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy was not intended to be overly critical of its purpose and good efforts. They sought specific aspects and unanswered questions where addition of information would have strengthened it.

Autopsy Incomplete: From the viewpoint of a forensic pathologist, Cyril H. Wecht, MD, LLB, who is associated with the Pittsburgh, Pa., coroner's office, said, "By standards found in most good medicolegal investigative facilities, the autopsy report would not be deemed to be a complete one. Certain essentials are missing, and many questions have been raised and have gone unanswered, at least officially, because of the absence of such information in the official autopsy report and in the subsequent testimony given before the Warren Commission."

Among the questions which might have been publicly revealed through the autopsy findings, Dr. Wecht said, were: (1) if President Kennedy had Addison's disease (an issue raised in the 1960 presidential campaign), and (2) if the first shot which struck the President inflicted a wound of such "fatality" that he could not have survived.

Lack of Information: Dr. Wecht stressed, however, "In this particular case, all of us are handicapped by not having been involved in the autopsy (with the exception of those few Armed Services pathologists who were called in to perform the autopsy). Consequently, we are limited in our evaluation to those portions of the record that have been made public through official sources.

"The only other medical facts that we have are those that were released by the physicians at Parkland Memorial Hospital in Dallas, where President Kennedy was taken and treated before being pronounced dead officially. Thus, we must preface any remarks, particularly any that may seem to be critical, with the caveat that we are not in possession of all the facts. Also, we can appreciate the fact that the pathologists who performed the autopsy, being members of the Armed Services, may not have been permitted to publicly release all their findings."

'Conspiracy' Disproved: Psychiatrist Maier I. Tuchler, MD, Phoenix, Ariz., pointed out that the Warren Commission report "pat to rest irrational apprehension and anxiety created by the assassination of our President at a critical time in the nation's history." The findings reported, Dr. Tuchler explained, "are sufficiently detailed to negate rumors of a conspiracy," and they point to Lee Harvey Oswald as "a lone assassin."

But in his study of the past history of Oswald as developed in the Warren report, Dr. Tuchler said, he was "astonished to find that, of the 522 witnesses interviewed and of the thousands of reports presented to the Commission, not one psychiatrist studied any portion of the data gathered throughout these otherwise intensive interviews for the purpose of professional psychiatric opinion."

Dr. Tuchler said that the Commission, "a body of outstanding attorneys, appeared to follow that practice common to a group of intellectuals of functioning as 'lay' psychiatrists." He emphasized that he is reluctant to accept the evaluation of critical and of significant witnesses interviewed by legal or investigative personnel whose training, however extensive, does not qualify them for the important task of evaluation of motivation."

Weaknesses Cited: Attorney Jay Schwartz, Kenosha, Wis., was critical of a number of aspects in the handling of the case. He said, "The government is weak because it cannot establish a decent chain of evidence. It is weak because it spoke before it was ready. It is weak because it failed to maintain original notes. It is weak because all of the volumes of the report are based on assumption which must be taken on faith rather than fact. The [Warren] Commission inherited all of these weaknesses."

Schwartz made these observations:

• "It is worth mentioning that the Parkland

Hospital notes are probably the only original notes still in existence. Commander Hume [Bethesda Naval Hospital pathologist] burned his original notes. Police Captain Fritz, who interviewed Oswald, didn't keep his, and [FBI] Agents Hilly and Goshorn as well as Secret Service men who were present didn't make any notes during Oswald's 12 hours of interrogation. One might have expected a stenographic report or tape recording in such a situation, but there were none."

• "The Commission found that there were between two and six shots fired, the best guess of the Commission is three shots based upon the proposition that there were three spent cartridges found at the Depository [building]. It claims that one shot missed and one shot ran from the President's shoulder, through his neck, through Governor Connally's back, chest, wrist and thigh. No witness including Dr. Hume or Gov. Connally believes this. Curiously the number of shots is determined by belief that all the shots were fired by Oswald. This in turn is based on the uncorroborated autopsy which set forth the wounds of entrance and exit."

• "If, in fact, there were four shots, Oswald could not have fired all of them. It is doubtful that he could have hit two out of three as the Commission contends he did. Three near-miss men had difficulty in so doing, and there is no credible evidence that Oswald, who had missed a set-up on General Walker (if that testimony is believed) could compare with them."

• "If the body and the limousine had remained in Dallas [instead of being taken to Washington, D.C.], in accordance with the law, Dr. Hume, the FBI and the Secret Service need not bear the responsibility they bear."

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