

Spartanburg

Mr. Pat Butler
Spartanburg Herald-Journal
Spartanburg, S.C. 29301

7627 Old Receiver Road
Frederick, Md. 21701
11/25/88

Dear Mr. Butler,

Please excuse my typing. I must sit with my legs elevated and type sort of side-saddle and I'm recovering from eye surgery, which impairs my vision and typing.

To describe what three former FBI agents told you for your story of November 20 as malarky is to praise it. They distort, misrepresent and are just plain wrong on the basics of what you quote. Please feel free to give them copies of this letter or, if your paper prefers, to use it and edit in an any way you see fit.

Fitch
Mr. Thompson was not "assigned by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover to direct the agency's investigation into the assassination" of President John F. Kennedy. Not in Dallas, not in Washington, not anywhere else.

The Dallas Special Agent in Charge was the late Gordon Shanklin. Under him the case agent in charge was Robert P. Gemberling. Sent from Washington to be in overall charge in Dallas was Inspector James W. Walley. In Washington the director was in charge and very much on top, assisted by his highest assistants. There then was no "criminal division" at FBI headquarters. Thompson was merely a supervisor in the criminal section of the general investigative division, then headed by Alex Rosen.

bragged about
Mr. Rosen, I add, described that fabled investigation other than the three men you quote. according to an FBI record disclosed under the Freedom of Information Act, which I have used extensively to obtain previously withheld FBI records, he "characterized" that investigation as the FBI "standing around with pockets open waiting for evidence to drop in."

Whether or not Mr. Hoover "asked Thompson to see whether the FBI's power *to* investigate the assault on a federal officer applied to the president," normally the function of the General Counsel Division, long before such a legal inquiry could have been undertaken, leave alone completed, Mr. Hoover had himself decided it did not, according to a lengthy account of his own words prepared for him by his then head of the ~~mis~~ titled "Crime Records Division," Martha DeLoach. (I actually handled such functions as leaking and other disclosures, lobbying and defaming those the FBI did not like. It kept secret records of considerable extent on all the media, *among* ~~long~~ many others - not by any means "crime records.")

Whether or not Mr. Thompson "flew his 25-page report back to Washington," it assuredly was not "a key resource of the Warren Commission" and it is less than the equivalent of a flyspeck in the volume of what the FBI dumped on that Commission. The "basic resource," identified by the Commission as its Document No. 1, was a five-volume report prepared at FBI headquarter and provided to the Commission

under date of December 9, 1963, days after the FBI leaked it and pretended that it was investigating to determine who had leaked it.

All these agents "believe" that "Oswald was the only gunman" but you do not quote them as acknowledging that nobody, not the best shots in the FBI, the best shots the Commission could get through the National Rifle Association, or the best shots used by others, including CBS, could duplicate the shooting they attribute to Oswald, rated by the Marines as a "rather poor shot." When the rifle did not misfire, that is, as it often did do. Not even after it was overhauled and improved, either.

Whether Brent Hughes is correct in stating that the FBI's "main purpose was to keep the Warren Commission from having to go to Dallas," even assuming that he meant the Commission members only, its staff having gone and stayed there in great number, it can be argued that the FBI's other purpose in preparing a scale model of Dealey Plaza was to talk the members out of going there.

Where Mr. Hughes is truthful, in saying that the FBI objected to the Commission's single-bullet theory substituted for irrefutable and unwelcome fact, he falls far short of full truth. The FBI knew that one such bullet could not have inflicted all seven non-fatal injuries on the President and then Texas governor John B. Connally. Neither the FBI nor any other agency working for the Commission even tried to duplicate this theory all knew to be impossible.

and while all these agents pretend that they agree with the Commission's conclusions, in fact neither the FBI nor the Secret Service did. Beginning with the FBI's massive report I refer to above, it said that the first shot hit but did not kill the President, the second hit Governor Connally only and the third was fatal. Both agencies ignore still another shot of which both knew, one the Commission did not dare ignore and one of which both agencies knew because it was on the police radio, which the FBI transcribed for the Commission, and reported, with pictures, in the newspapers - the one that inflicted a slight wound on bystander, James Tague.

It was to keep the number of shots down to three, already a known impossibility, under those established conditions, that the Commission hoked up its single-bullet theory. Supposedly I have obtained from the FBI all the relevant records of headquarters and the Dallas and New Orleans field offices and there is no record in them in which the FBI undertook to inform the Commission that ~~the~~ ^{its} theory was impossible.

Instead Robert Frazier, a headquarters firearms expert, testified that he could and did duplicate Oswald's alleged shooting - which he did not and could not do.

The Commission's single-bullet theory "shook" more than us "critics." It shook the late conservative Senator Richard B. Russell to deceive whom the words "not necessary to any essential findings of the commission" were inserted in the summary.

The transcript of the executive session in which Senator Russell and another

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member raised their objections was replaced by an inaccurate ^{paraphrase} summary. From the time I placed a copy in Senator Russell's hands until his death he encouraged my investigation of his Commission's investigation.

Hughes says that "if the (Kennedy) family would allow an unbiased forensic pathologist to examine just one photograph of President Kennedy's back wound, we could know for sure exactly where the first bullet struck." *He doesn't know what he is talking about.*

The Kennedy family never ^{denied} ~~did~~ the Commission access to anything at all. The FBI refused a copy of the autopsy protocol when it was offered and it never did get the official certificate of death. I found all copies hidden in the National archives by misfiling and published it. It could not be more specific in locating that wound, as the autopsy body chart also did, slightly to the right of the third thoracic vertebra. This is five inches down on the back, exactly where the clothing pictures show it was.

That the fabled FBI, on its own initiative, did not seek the certificate of death is, I think, a fair characterization of the intended failures and omissions in its investigation.

And, of course, qualified medical experts, including pathologists, have examined what ~~Mr.~~ Hughes says was never examined.

Perhaps Mr. Hughes did report that "if the bullet hole in the body ^{of} matches the bullet hole in the coat and shirt, as it surely must, the bullet could not have exited the throat," but if he did the FBI kept it secret and testified to the exact opposite to the Commission.

Mr. Hughes should know better than to refer to criticism as "conspiracy theories" and to limit his mention of conspiracy to theories. Conspiracy is a matter of fact, not theory. Quite separate is conjecture over whom the conspirators may have been. He is wrong, however, in saying that the first shot could have been much earlier than in the Commission's account. That bullet, truly a magic bullet in the official accounts, was testified to by Firearms Examiner Frazier. He testified that if the bullet had struck coarse cloth or leather, which are not nearly as hard as three branches, they would have made microscopic marks he would have detected and he detected ^{such} no microscopic marks at all on this bullet. (I'll return to this.)

He is utterly ridiculous in saying that "a puff of smoke seen by many coming from the grassy knoll can be explained by a car backfiring." Such a car would have to have been moving on its side or atop a fence, the slope of that knoll is that steep and the location of that smoke ^{is} so far up it or at the fence. The precise location is not known, thanks to the FBI's refusal to investigate it.

Agent Paul Stombaugh was assigned to the laboratory where he was what the story does not make clear, a hair and fibres expert, although it does say he examined them.

He states that there was much blood on the limousine floor and that they "found bullet fragments in the blood." That they were found ^{in pools of blood} ~~there~~ ^{was} not previously stated ~~and is not in~~ to the best of my knowledge ~~or~~ the reports I've read. However, what he does not say and what the FBI should have ^{and did not do} ~~done~~ ^{was} to examine the blood on those fragments to determine whether the blood ~~type~~ ^{type} of both the President and the governor were present or whether they had ~~been~~ ^{been} planted ~~because~~ the Secret Service had searched the car before the FBI did and did not find those fragments. In fact, the FBI got some fragments from underneath a jump seat. The Connallys were sitting on them at the time of the shooting, which makes one wonder how the ~~fragments~~ ^{fragments} did get there.

Nor was the "magic" bullet ~~tested~~ ^{tested} to see whether the blood of both victims was on it. ~~In fact, it was not even tested to determine whether there was any blood on it.~~ Even though the FBI knew it could not have inflicted those ~~seven~~ ^{alleged bullet} wounds in its ~~career~~ ^{career}, ~~nor equaled even in mythology.~~

For Mr. Hughes and the others to say that "the throat wound could have been caused by bullet or bone fragments" is a ~~virtuoso~~ ^{so} display of ignorance or, given their expertise, mendacity. There is no other bullet ^{that could have} ~~to have~~ fragmented and the "magic" bullet is ~~virtually~~ ^{virtually} pristine. The fatal shot was later ^{when} ~~that~~ the President ^{reacted visibly} ~~reacts~~ to the wound in his throat ~~and~~ ^{and} the ~~bone~~ ^{bone} base of his skull was intact. That no bone could have caused it thus is ~~also~~ ^{also} obvious. Moreover, in what they say did not happen, an examination by forensic experts - ^{and these were the} ~~the~~ Department of Justice's own forensic ~~experts~~ ^{experts} - bullet fragments were identified ⁱⁿ ~~at~~ the neck ~~area~~ ⁱⁿ from the X-rays.

"Hairs on the (Oswald's) blanket matched Oswald's, further cementing the link between Oswald and the blanket," these ~~demon~~ ^{demon} investigators are represented as saying. What hairs is not stated. They were his pubic hairs, ~~and what a fantastic presentation,~~ complete with cross-sections and dissertation on ~~the~~ ^{the} arcane science ^{of} Stombaugh prepared for the Commission, and what ^{an abstract} ~~a~~ display it made of this irrelevancy in its Report.

When the blanket was indubitably Oswald's, beyond ^{why} any question, ~~what~~ ^{to make this his deal, cannot} was it necessary ~~to all to examine~~ those public hairs? They "cemented" nothing except the deliberate deceptiveness of the FBI's misuse of science. ~~And~~ ^{and} who ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ the world should have cared whose pubic hairs were on Oswald's blanket other than his wife?

Mr. Stombaugh is quoted as saying he has no questions at all and that Oswald was entirely alone. He knows better.

Under the Freedom of Information act I got from the Department of Justice what the FBI withheld from the Commission, clear photographs of some of the President's clothing, particularly of the front of the shirt collar. In the Report the Commission says, supported by testimony it took from the FBI itself, that the "magic" bullet

entered the back of the President's neck. In this it lied, to the permanent silence of the FBI and all its agents who knew better. Of whom, from one of my Freedom of Information cases, in which I deposed Agent Frazier under oath, ~~Mr. Stombaugh personally~~ is one. Before this bullet ^{or} ~~alleged~~ engaged in unparalleled gymnastics at close to 2000 feet per second inside and outside of governor Connally, it ^{or} ~~alleged~~ went through the shirt collar and nicked ^{the} ~~the~~ tie at the ~~upper left-hand extreme of the knot, as word.~~

In its wisdom the FBI untied the knot, the knot, not the tie itself, ^{having} ~~being~~ the ^{evidence,} ~~and~~ posed the only clear picture ^{of the tie} it gave the Commission, ^{It made a} ~~of a counterfeit~~ knot with this damaged ^{about} perfectly centered in it. Exactly what is essential to the fictional history of ~~the~~ this bullet ^{whose} career in the official investigations would have made ~~ago~~ and the Grimm brothers ^{enviously} ~~incredibly~~ jealous.

(In fact, the FBI had a minor industry of untying and retying the knot. It was retied for ^g testimony before the Commission by many witnesses, ^{including the FBI's. It was} then untied again when I got a court order for pictures of the shirt and tie to be made for me, then it was tied again for use by witnesses before the House Select Committee on Assassinations, ^{move over,} ~~move over,~~ ^{make room for the FBI and its laboratory} ~~scientists.~~)

Now this FBI laboratory photograph of the front of the President's shirt, this photograph from ~~me,~~ ^{Stombaugh's own shop,} leaves it beyond any reasonable question that the damage to the ~~shirt front~~ ^{neck band} is not from ^{a/} ~~bullet holes.~~ ^{or are no bullet holes. There} There are two slits. Neither coincides with the other. One ^{extends} is higher, ^{by much,} the other longer, ^{also} by much. ~~Magic indeed!~~ And neither comes close to coinciding with the ~~damaged~~ spot on the tie, ^{which is not at the center but at the upper left extreme as worn.}

Thus, in FBI science, we have an even more magical bullet: it makes slits, not holes, and it maneuvers so magically, faster than the speed of sound, that it makes slits that do not coincide while going through a buttoned shirt collar and then manages to inflict no damage at all to the cloth between the center of the shirt collar and its most extreme and higher front edge on the left side, where the tie has this minor damage.

I showed this photograph to Agent Frazier when we deposed him and asked him to account for ~~slits instead of hole,~~ ^{what I account above} ~~slits that do not coincide with each other or with the damaged point on the knot of the tie.~~ ^{It} He twice testified that he had had questions about this and that he had referred the picture for the proper study of it and the shirt ^{who made says he has not questions at all} by this self-same, ~~unquestioned,~~ ^{Stombaugh's} Oswald-alone-did-it expert, Paul Stombaugh, ^{his} called for ~~a hair-and-fibers~~ written report.

But it does not exist! Not in the Commission's evidence, where ~~Mr. Stombaugh~~ ^{in testifying} made no mention at all of this test he was directed to make. Not in those hundreds of thousands of pages of FBI records I have. Not even in the court case in which Mr. Frazier testified to it.

I think it is only fair to ask if ^{Dr.} Stombaugh could have done anything more effective to assure that there would be no lingering questions about the investigation, ~~and~~ none at all about Oswald's lone guilt.

There is, ~~of course,~~ no real mystery about this, ~~and it not only~~ is in the Commission's own sworn testimony, ^{But Dr. Carrico} which the FBI also had. It was confirmed to me in detail by ~~the~~ ^{the} only doctor who saw the President before his clothing was removed and under whose direction it was removed.

Dr. Charles Carrico testified ~~under~~ ^{ate} oath and repeated himself in stating that the wound in the front of the President's neck was above that shirt collar ^{are}.

~~New~~ Senator Arlen Specter ^{then} was the counsel conducting that hearing and asking the questions. He neglected to ask this basic question- basic at least to those not proceeding on a preconception, ^{to anyone} ~~and~~ seeking fact and truth, ^{But} ~~as~~ Allen Dulles, former director of Central Intelligence, asked it.

What happened, also testified to by the nurses assisting Dr. Carrico and also ignored by the Commission and the FBI, is that the ^{normal} procedure ~~was followed~~ in such ~~emergencies~~ ^{essential to life} was followed. Time is ~~of the essence~~ so Dr. Carrico slipped his stethoscope past ^{the} buttons he unbuttoned while the nurses used a scalpel to cut the tie off. The cut, ^{at} ~~no~~ ^{at} ~~against~~ the point where there is damage ^{of} the knot, is ~~quite visible and identified as obviously a~~ ^{"V"} cut, ^{same place} ~~once~~ from the top, ~~once~~ from the bottom. The scalpel ~~snicked~~ ^{snicked} the upper left extreme of the knot and ~~sliced~~ ^{slit} the neckband.

^{There} ~~is~~ absolutely no question at all about this. Yet it is not in the Commission's Report, not in the hundreds of thousands ~~of~~ ~~pages~~ of FBI records and ~~Stombaugh's~~ ^{not in} report, ^{which} either was never made or is ~~suppressed~~ ^{still} after 25 years.

Great job he did on Oswald's pubic hairs, though!

What more appropriate way to commemorate the assassination of our President, the most subversive crime possible, than with this demonstration of the purity of FBI science and the dedication of its many skilled and competent agents.

In some other aspects the FBI was not quite this ^{pure} or, perhaps, even more pure, depending on how it is interpreted. When the White House asked for information about those of us critical of the investigations, ^{The FBI transformed} ~~it~~ ~~expected~~ ~~that~~ ~~my~~ ~~wife~~ ~~and~~ ~~I~~ ~~had~~ ~~into~~ ~~what~~ ~~it~~ ~~could~~ ~~never~~ ~~coincide~~ ~~with~~, our alleged annual celebration of the Russian revolution!

The terrible ^{truth} is that the crime itself was never investigated and no investigation of it was ever intended. When a nearby police department recommended ^{that} ~~the~~ ~~FBI~~ ~~office~~ ~~investigate~~ ~~persons~~ ^{considering whether those known to have} ~~been~~ ^{FBI} threatened the President's life ~~is~~ ~~considered~~ ~~as~~ ~~suspect~~, the supervisor in ~~its~~ Dallas office wrote at the bottom of

typical
 cover
 this ~~lead~~ Not necessary to investigate as true subject located." This was typed, researched, annotated, ~~and even index~~ ^{of} and filed before Oswald was even charged. In Washington the Acting Attorney General, as soon as Oswald was safely dead and it was certain there would be no trial, wrote the White House, that "The public must be satisfied that Oswald was the assassin; that he did not have confederates ~~who~~ who are still at large; and that the evidence was such that he would be convicted at trial." ~~This was~~ ~~the only~~ ~~thing~~ ~~that~~ ~~was~~ ~~done~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~Dallas~~ ~~FBI~~ ~~at~~ ~~the~~ ~~time~~ ~~that~~ ~~he~~ ~~was~~ ~~charged~~ ~~and~~ ~~it~~ ~~was~~ ~~clearly~~ ~~before~~ ~~any~~ ~~real~~ ~~investigation~~ ~~could~~ ~~have~~ ~~been~~ ~~conducted~~.

When on the first working day after the assassination Eastman Kodak invited the Dallas FBI office ~~to examine~~ ^{still and motion} (assassination pictures) it was processing, still and motion picture, Agent Milton L. Newsom went, returned and reported that the motion pictures failed to show the building from which the shots were fired." This, too, was before any real investigation could ~~possibly~~ ^{be made to establish} have concluded that all, if any of those shots came from that building. ~~Moreover,~~ ^{However,} there are 87 individual pictures of not only that building - of the very window from which the FBI claims all shots were fired ~~and at close to the moment~~ ^{just before instant} of the shooting. There is nobody in that window. He said of the 35 mm. picture, clear and taken with a Leica, that although they ~~it~~ "did depict the President's car at the precise time shots were fired; however, the pictures were not sufficient ^{by} clear for identification purpose." In plain English, the FBI didn't want it because it did not show Oswald with a smoking gun. All it showed was the President being killed. ~~so it had no value to the FBI~~ ^{except what it had to the FBI} ~~it didn't get either sets of pictures, and later, when asked to investigate them by the Congress, stonewalled for years and then quietly didn't do it at all.~~ ^{investigate them}

"There are a million unanswered questions," your subhead states, quoting former FBI Agent Hughes, "No one will ever know the truth."

The FBI itself saw to it that there would be these lingering, troublesome questions but there now is no real question about the FBI's performance. We now do know the truth about that.

These agents and others defame those of us who are critical of their work, accuse us of theorizing conspiracies only. Mine has been a long and detailed study not of any whodunit but of how the basic institutions of our society worked or failed to work in that time of great stress and since then. The conclusion is ~~clearly~~ ^{clear}: obviously, that our institutions failed and ~~continue~~ ^{they} to fail and thus they endanger our system and freedoms. These three agents have ~~helped clarify this sad record of failure~~ ^{manifested what they and the FBI did in} when our system was nullified by an assassination that had the effect of a coup d'etat.

They allege the critics conjecture. + don't. They still do.

Harold Westray

NG

3 Upstate residents had major roles in assassination probe

By PAT BUTLER
Staff Writer

Fletcher Thompson didn't have time to mourn the president.

As a stricken nation watched John F. Kennedy being laid to rest 25 years ago, Thompson sat at a desk in the Dallas FBI office, working frenetically to finish a report on the investigation into the president's assassination.

"I can remember a very eerie, weird feeling," Thompson said. "They had a radio on close to where I was working, and I remember hearing the commentators describing the funeral procession on Pennsylvania Avenue. I can remember thinking, 'This is unreal. I'm down here sorting through reports during the funeral of the president of the United States.'"

Thompson, now a Spartanburg lawyer, was assigned by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover to direct the agency's investigation into the assassination. While the rest of the nation tried to recover from the

"There are a million unanswered questions. No one will ever know the truth."

*Brent Hughes,
retired FBI specialist*

shock of losing one of its most popular leaders in history, Thompson and fellow FBI agents were working around the clock to find out how it could have happened.

As Thompson was putting together a report for Hoover, Brent Hughes, a retired FBI information specialist now living in Boiling Springs, was also in Dallas, examining the scene of the crime so that he could reconstruct it for the Warren
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Commission. And Paul Stombaugh, now running the Greenville County Crime Lab, was examining the FBI's evidence, including the rifle Lee Harvey Oswald used to shoot the president.

On Tuesday, 25 years will have gone by since the three former FBI agents began working on what they all remember as one of the most fascinating cases in their careers. Though they say some questions have never been answered, they believe the FBI investigation still stands up to the barrage of criticism and conspiracy theories that have been thrown at it over the past 2½ decades.

On Nov. 22, 1963, Thompson was a supervisor in the criminal division at FBI headquarters in Washington. He was in charge of investigating certain crimes, including the assault or murder of a federal officer.

Hoover desperately wanted his agency to handle the investigation of the Kennedy slaying, and he asked Thompson to see whether the FBI's power to investigate the assault of a federal officer applied to the president. Thompson checked but found that killing the president was not then a federal crime, though it has been made one since.

But Hoover was foiled only temporarily. On Sunday, the day Dallas bar owner Jack Ruby killed Oswald and two days after Kennedy was killed, Lyndon B. Johnson, in one of his first acts as president, told Hoover to start an FBI investigation and to have a report ready on Tuesday.

"Mr. Hoover never did admit there was anything the FBI couldn't do, so he said, 'We'll have it,'" Thompson said. He and another agent were put in charge of the investigation and were flown to Dallas, where a Texas agent picked them up and took them to their hotel.

The next time they saw the hotel was when they went to pick up their unused luggage after the investigation was over.

Each agent in Dallas was concentrating on a specific category, including checking into Ruby's background; searching the Texas School Book Depository, where the assassin's gun was recovered; and talking to witnesses from Dealey Plaza, where the president's motor-

cade came to a grisly halt.

"My job was to sort through all the voluminous material and set up some type of a chronology as to what we thought had happened," Thompson said. He flew the 25-page report back to Washington, where it became a key resource for the Warren Commission, which Johnson convened on Nov. 29 to make a comprehensive report to the American people.

"I will say with some pride that based on what I've seen and heard and read in the 25 years since then, our little report that we put together in the hours after the assassination is pretty accurate," said Thompson, whose FBI number and badge were retired when he left the agency as an assistant director in 1975.

There were questions in Thompson's mind when he submitted the report 25 years ago, and he said there haven't been any answers since then.

"I think there's no question that Lee Harvey Oswald killed the president. But the question is whether others were involved," Thompson said. "I don't know the answers to those questions."

Conspiracy theories about Kennedy's death abound, with everyone from Cuban assassins to Mafia hit men and even Johnson himself accused of either pulling the trigger or directing Oswald to do so. Some say Oswald was the only gunman -- a lunatic who killed the president to satisfy his twisted sense of glory. Others bring out reams of evidence they say proves conclusively that Oswald could not have pulled off the crime of the century by himself.

Thompson said he believes Oswald was the only gunman, but he says it is possible that Oswald was hired by someone else.

"I still have an open mind as to what motivated (Oswald) and whether there was someone else behind it," he said. Oswald's ties to the Soviet Union and Cuba can't be ignored, he said, but like many others, he believes those questions will never be answered with Oswald and Ruby gone.

Brent Hughes was also in Washington at the time of the assassination, working in the FBI's exhibits section, responsible for making charts, maps, diagrams and models for use in prosecuting cases. He and

two others from the department went to Dallas in early December to study Dealey Plaza and provide investigators in Washington with a model of the scene. "Our main purpose was to keep the Warren Commission from having to go to Dallas," Hughes said. "We brought the crime scene to them."

They built a precision scale model of the plaza, showing, among other things, the motorcade's route, the Texas School Book Depository and the "grassy knoll," a sheltered area ahead of the motorcade that has been skeptics' favorite location for a second gunman.

While he was in Dallas, Hughes had a chance to examine the site thoroughly. Although his role was not to uncover evidence or theorize about assassins, he developed strong opinions about the investigation and the findings of the Warren Commission.

"People who are interested and look into (the assassination) . . . no longer put any stock in the Warren Commission report," he said. Hughes's main objection to the commission's findings is its much-maligned "single-bullet theory."

That theory, that Kennedy's back and throat wounds and all of Texas Gov. John Connally's wounds were caused by one bullet, is based on a grainy, out-of-focus movie taken by bystander Abraham Zapruder. The commission analyzed the movie, frame by frame, trying to determine the points when the president and Connally were shot.

But even with Kennedy being hit at the earliest possible point and Connally the latest point, the assassin would have had less than 2 seconds to eject the first cartridge from the rifle and inject a new one -- an impossible feat.

So the commission decided that Kennedy and Connally had to have been hit by the same bullet. That finding contradicted the testimony of Connally and his wife, who have insisted to this day that the two men were hit by separate shots.

The Warren report said Connally was wrong -- he and Kennedy must have been hit by the same bullet. The report also said that in any case, that question was "not necessary to any essential findings of the commission," a statement that shocked critics.

To support its theory, the commission had to give the single bullet an amazing trajectory: It had



MIKE BONNER PHOTO

Former FBI agent Paul Stombaugh, who now runs the crime lab in Greenville, had the task of studying the physical evidence in the case.



MIKE BONNER PHOTO

Spartanburg lawyer Fletcher Thompson spearheaded the investigation into the assassination of President Kennedy 25 years ago.

to enter Kennedy at the base of his neck, exit at his throat, enter Connally's back, exit his chest, pass through his wrist and finally enter his thigh.

But the bullet that the commission said did all this damage, exhibit 399, was virtually unscathed. A test bullet fired through just the wrist of a cadaver came out grossly deformed, leading critics to believe a bullet could never do what exhibit 399 is purported to have done without major damage.

Many critics are even more disturbed by the fact that the bullet holes in the president's coat and shirt are more than 5 inches from the top of the collar, meaning the bullet could not have come out his throat.

The official autopsy report says that the bullet completely passed through Kennedy's neck, but the doctors who performed the autopsy didn't even find the throat wound, which had been obliterated by a tracheotomy incision performed in the emergency room. Doctors

probed the back wound and found that it was only a finger's length deep, meaning the bullet, found on a stretcher in the hospital, couldn't have gone all the way through Kennedy, Hughes said.

Doctors learned of the throat wound later, and by then it was too late to re-examine the body. Photos and X-rays of the body have been sealed at the request of the Kennedy family, which worried that a sensationalist tabloid would get hold of them. Hughes said that if the Kennedy family agreed to reopen those records, a lot of questions would be answered.

"Now, 25 years later, if the family would allow an unbiased forensic pathologist to examine just one photograph of Kennedy's back wound, we could know for sure exactly where the first bullet struck," Hughes said in a summary of the assassination he recently wrote. "If the bullet hole in the body matches the bullet hole in the coat and shirt, as it surely must, the bullet could not have exited the throat."

Instead, Hughes and other commission critics say one bullet, probably exhibit 399, entered Kennedy's back, and another, which was shattered into fragments found on the limousine floor, did all the damage to Connally. The throat wound would have been caused by bullet or bone fragments.

Everyone agrees that there was at least one more bullet — the one that hit Kennedy in the head, shattering his skull and covering Jacqueline Kennedy and others nearby with brain tissue.

Hughes believes the Warren Commission bungled its report primarily because of pressure from Johnson, who wanted the investigation concluded quickly. "LBJ purely and simply wanted to get the assassination out of the way and off the front page, and get his re-election campaign back on the front page," he said.

Despite his criticisms of Johnson and the Warren Commission, Hughes doesn't place much con- See PROBE, page A9

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fidence in conspiracy theories. He believes Oswald acted alone, and says rejection of the single-bullet theory does not mean there had to be a second assassin. Hughes believes Oswald could have made the first shot much earlier than the commission put it, shooting through the branches of an oak tree.

But Hughes, too, said questions remain. A puff of smoke seen by many coming from the grassy knoll can be explained by a car backfiring, he said, and the fact that many thought the gunfire came from there is probably due to acoustics in the plaza.

But there still is no explanation for a man seen by a Dallas police officer who ran to the knoll immediately after the shooting. The man seemed startled when the officer confronted him, but then showed a badge and claimed to be a Secret Service agent.

All the Secret Service agents stayed with Kennedy that day; none could have been in the grassy knoll.

"There are a million unanswered questions," Hughes said. "No one will ever know the truth."

While Thompson and Hughes went to Dallas, Paul Stombaugh stayed in Washington. As a special agent in the microscopic analysis laboratory, his duty was the painstaking examination of physical evidence. The evidence began coming in on the night of the 22nd — including the presidential limousine.

"There was a good quantity of blood on the floor board . . . still liquefied," said Stombaugh, who now directs the Greenville County Crime Lab and is in charge of the forensic division there. Examiners found bullet fragments in the blood, fragments that were later traced to the rifle that was found in the Texas School Book Depository and linked to Oswald.

The rifle itself, a 6.5mm Mannlicher-Carcano, was brought in the next day. Stombaugh, whose expertise was in fiber analysis, found numerous fibers, including one good tuft of them on the butt plate. He later examined Oswald's clothes and was able to match the fibers from the gun with those of Oswald's shirt.

He also examined the blanket that the gun had been kept in. Hairs on the blanket matched Oswald's, further cementing the link between Oswald and the rifle. Stombaugh later testified on his findings for about 2 hours before the Warren Commission. "The most I could say is that (the fibers) could have come from



THOMAS E. McCARVER PHOTO

Brent Hughes
... reconstructed the scene

that shirt because you don't know how many of those shirts were made," said Stombaugh, who will retire next week, almost 25 years to the day after the assassination.

Unlike Thompson and Hughes, Stombaugh says he has no lingering questions about the assassination. He believes the evidence clearly indicates that Oswald killed Kennedy, and he believes Oswald was acting alone.

"We kicked it around in the lab time and time again, and we all came to the same conclusion," . . . that Oswald had shot and killed the president," he said. "It's just a guy who shot and killed the president, got himself caught and then got himself killed."

With attention once again turning to the Kennedy assassination on its 25th anniversary, the three former agents say they have started thinking again about their roles in trying to solve the whodunnit of the century.

At the time, the three veteran FBI men regarded the case as, in Stombaugh's words, "just another murder."

"It was really just another assignment in a 37-year career," Thompson said. "This one was just shuffling paper." In fact, the agents said, the sheer magnitude of the investigation — hundreds of agents took part — meant that each had a relatively small role.

But as history and mystery have fanned the flames of speculation, the agents have come to realize they helped shape the outcome of possibly the most memorable event of our time.

"At the time, you really don't see the significance of it. You don't realize you're working on the most important case of your life," Hughes added. "We didn't have the overview that we have now."