

AP Completes Study of JFK Death; Backs Warren Findings

BY WAYNE THOMIS

This veteran staff member was one of THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE reporters in Dallas on the day President Kennedy was assassinated. He witnessed the slaying of Lee Harvey Oswald two days later and covered the story in its entirety for THE TRIBUNE.



Moody (left) and Gavzer

The Associated Press, one of the country's two great international news-gathering agencies, in an investigation undertaken on its own, has concluded a 6-month inquiry into the Warren commission's report on the Kennedy assassination and said the work of the commissioners was sound, factual, and thorough.

In addition, the AP's staff said that self-appointed critics, skeptics, and dissenters to the commission's findings, have produced no new evidence to upset or otherwise cast legitimate doubt on the commissioners' statements that Lee

Harvey Oswald, acting alone, fired the rifle shots that killed President Kennedy.

Part of this same AP finding reaffirmed the commission's second statement that Jack Ruby, the Dallas night club operator who slew Oswald 45 hours later in the Dallas police station—under national network television lenses—also was a lone actor in the national tragedy. Ruby was convicted of this act by a jury and sentenced to death. He died in a prison hospital of cancer.

Report, Books Studied

AP calls its 11,000 word report, prepared by Thomas Gavzer and Sid Moody, "The Lingering Shadow: The Warren Report & Its Critics." It was released nationally this morning, "as a long-needed rebuttal to the growing debate over the report," according to the agency's press release to Sunday editors.

The initial move in the AP investigation was a careful reading of the commission's work—the report itself and 26 supporting volumes of testimony and exhibits. Then Gavzer and Moody read and annotated books of the critics; specifically Mark Lane's "Rush to Judgment," Harold Weisberg's "Whitewash," Leo Sauvage's "The Oswald Affair," and Edward Jay Epstein's "Inquest."

Forced to Read Record

These findings: "None of these writers produced new evidence to shift or otherwise change the Warren commission's conclusions."

"These dissenting authors took their cases from the Warren report itself—adapting its material to their own ends. They became prosecutors, not investigators. They refrained from using the full report, whenever it was more convincing or damning to use but a small part."

The two also pointed out that, without exception, these critics

or scoffers were forced to read and review the full record as prepared by the Warren commission, to find the small points upon which they hung their dissent. Thus, it is certain that their omissions were not those of choice or even well-meaning ignorance, but were the result of calculated reflection, they said.

Comparison of Allegations

To counter such attacks, Gavzer and Moody conducted a charge-by-charge comparison of allegations of the critics with the pertinent material relating to these charges found in the voluminous and admittedly jumbled and disorganized Warren report. These findings are devastating so far as the critics are concerned—"but the public which has been avidly reading these books, has neither time nor facilities to check out the citations, the innuendoes, and the partial truths as printed," the AP states.

Lane's book was particularly subject to such annotations, they said, "notes on it having run to 80,000 words." Others

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have found Lane, a lawyer, wanting in accuracy and truth. One Stanford university law professor said recently that "nowhere near a tenth of Lane's relevant assertions and implications stand up to careful scrutiny."

Specifics Are Cited

Consider some of the specifics:

Lane mentioned an Illinois ballistics expert, Joseph D. Nicol, who testified before the commission on Oswald's revolver, some empty shells found near the scene of the slaying of Dallas Policeman J. D. Tippit, and slugs recovered from Tippit's body. Lane says Nicol "appeared less than certain that these came from Oswald's gun."

But in the commission report, Nicol questioned by Mel Eisenberg, commission counsel, about his certainty of the identification of the shells, replied:

"Yes, I am certain in my own mind. Marks on the firing pin particularly are very definitive. Apparently this firing pin had been subjected to some rather severe abuse, and there were numerous small and large striations which could be matched up very easily [with marks on the firing cap of the .38 caliber shells]."

Prints on Rifle

Lane implied that Oswald was forced to handle the rifle found in the loft of the Texas School Book Depository building, and suggested that palm and finger prints found thereon had little probative value. But Lane did not mention that FBI photographs of the prints lifted by the Dallas police department from this same weapon showed minute gaps. The Warren report quotes an FBI expert as saying that these gaps exactly matched nicks and pitting in the metal of the rifle from which the prints were taken.

Concerning Lane's implication that Oswald and his rifle were brought together in the

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police station to provide these prints. A government witness who gave testimony to the commission said:

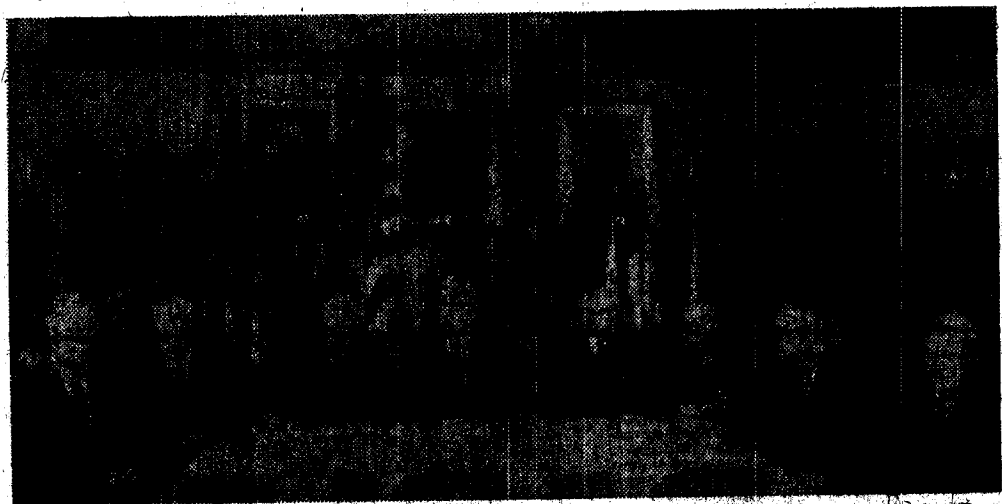
"Do you think anyone could have gotten Oswald to touch that rifle with a 10 foot pole, once he was in the police station?" Other witnesses said the rifle was shown to Oswald but not until all fingerprints had been lifted from it; and even then Oswald did not touch it and denied ownership.

Had Money Order Stub

When arrested in a little Oak Cliff movie theater where he took cover after the street slaying of Tippit, Oswald had in his wallet the stub of a money order. It was made out in his handwriting but signed "A. Hidde." The mail-order rifle with which the President was slain—and ballistics reports on recovered bullets leave no doubt that the shots came from this weapon—was sold to A. Hidde and sent to the Dallas postoffice where only the holder of this stub could have claimed it.

Lane, Weisberg, and Epstein, each in his way, make capital of the extremely detailed report of the Warren findings on the President's autopsy.

What finally emerges is that the President was shot twice, once thru the base of the neck,



Chief Justice Earl Warren with members of the Warren commission. From left: Rep. Gerald Ford (R., Mich.); Rep. Hale Boggs (D., La.); Sen. Richard Russell (D., Ga.); Chief Justice Warren; Sen. John Sherman Cooper (R., Ky.); John J. McCloy, New York banker; Allen Dulles, former Central Intelligence agency chief; and J. Lee Rankin of New York, chief counsel for the commission.

[AP Wirephoto]

from behind, with the slug passing thru flesh and muscle, then continuing on to wound Texas Gov. John Connally riding in the front seat of the Presidential car, and just ahead of Kennedy. The same bullet penetrated Connally's chest, his right wrist and struck his thigh. It later was picked up on the Connally stretcher at the Parkland hospital.

The second shot was the fatal one. It struck the President on the top of the skull and killed him. A third shot was fired and it apparently missed, shattering against the street or the curbstone. All the shots came from behind and above, thoro reviews by all the agencies involved in the Warren inquiry have determined.

Yet Lane, Weisberg, and Epstein struggle to show that one of Kennedy's wounds was in the throat, with entry from the front. Their purposes were

to suggest that Oswald had fellow conspirators who also were firing.

Confusion Is Told

Confusion of witnesses, of police, even of FBI agents, is depicted in the testimony before the commission. Yet the doctors, in their ultimate reports, were conclusive. Both the President's wounds were from the rear, and one bullet continued on—having struck no bone or otherwise impeding material—and wounded Connally.

The irony of this situation is that all three critics gathered their ammunition for attacking the report from the pages of the record. Allegations that the commission "suppressed," "ignored," or "evaded" the truth come from the inclusion of material from the widest possible variety of sources. It was the commission which presented the confusion, the early

incomplete records from the hospital, the early statements of the surgeons in its publications. And in addition to these inconclusive and partial records, it also presented the full and final findings that give the lie to the dissidents.

Lane, who apparently could find nothing believable or straightforward in the commission's records, even suggests that the bullet found on Connally's stretcher was "planted." Careful examination of nurses, hospital attendants, and those present when both the President and Connally were in the hospital's emergency rooms, eliminates the suggestion.

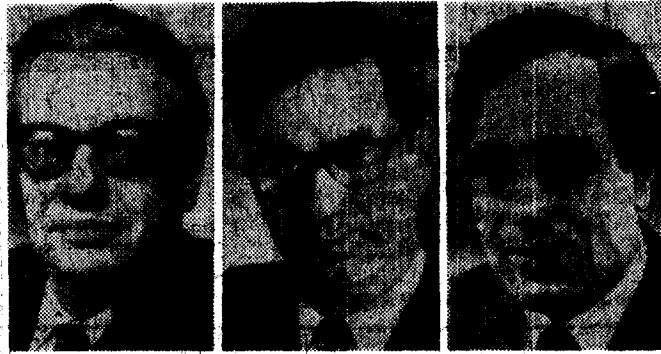
Bullet Weight Cited

An example of the "bullet inquiry" attitudes of the three challengers follows:

The 6.5 mm. copper jacketed bullet of the Mannlicher-Carcano rifle with its Mauser-type bolt action, weighed 158.6 grains when measured in the laboratory after recovery from the stretcher. A standard 6.5 mm. slug, however, weighs 160 to 161 grains. The bullet thus lost between 1.4 and 2.4 grains in the firing.

The writers claimed this was far too little to have caused the wounds both to Kennedy and Connally. They claimed fragments were left in the governor's chest, wrist, and thigh. But the Warren record is as follows:

Dr. Robert Shaw who operated on Connally testified: "We saw no evidence of any metallic material in the X-ray that we had of the chest and we found none during the operation." X-rays made seven days after



Authors who have written books differing with the Warren report. From left: Leon Sauvage, Mark Lane, and Edward Epstein. [AP Wirephotos]

the shooting showed only evidence of healing.

"Three metallic flakes were seen in X-rays of the wrist," said Dr. Charles F. Gregory, who treated this wound. "I would estimate they would be weighed in micrograms."

Dr. George T. Shires who treated the thigh wound testified no bullet fragments were recovered from it but one small flake "weighing maybe a tenth of a grain" remained in the femur.

Thus the men who were closest to the wounds concurred with the minimal loss of weight of the bullet.

Every Phase Covered

One small point was developed from the AP's inquiry. This involved microscopic examination of tissue removed from the wound on the back of the neck. In it the doctors found fibers from the coat, showing without question that the bullet carried these into the flesh in its passage—again a corroborative point. This was left out of the autopsy report but was included in notes which are part of the 26 volumes of testimony and exhibits.

The AP exposure of the

challenges to the report go on and on, covering every phase of the inquiry from witnesses who were believed deranged to liars who retracted their early statements [when proven wrong] to those who apparently injected themselves into the investigation merely to be associated with a "great event." At the end of it all the AP report says:

"To read the report, all of it, is to appreciate the depth and integrity of the investigation." And after suggesting that the critics are basically suggesting that the FBI, the secret service, and other investigative groups summoned to support the Warren commission are not to be trusted, the AP's writers say:

"In suggesting these agents were not trustworthy, critics suggest either subconsciously they sought to defend their professionalism, by charitably treating witnesses and evidence, or, far worse, they were involved in a superplot. If the latter it would mean, because of the intricacy and range of the inquiry, a conspiracy of almost universal dimensions. And there is no such evidence."

