

THE LINGERING SHADOW

Misplaced Dot Causing Big Controversy

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The report of the autopsy conducted on President John F. Kennedy committed a key fact. A microscopic examination of tissue removed from his neck wound revealed foreign substances, such as fiber particles.

That would have helped rebut the critics who have assailed the Warren Commission report. A misplaced dot on the autopsy sketch, though, has caused even more controversy.

Cmdr. J. Thornton Boswell, then chief pathologist at Bethesda Naval Hospital, contributed to the controversy regarding just what the autopsy sketch shows because it was he who had placed a dot — indicating the entry of a bullet — in an inexact spot. It is below the shoulder and to the right of the spine.

The critics treat this sketch as a star exhibit. And it is on this dot they have stood pat. They claim it as proof that there was a shallow

back wound, and not a neck wound.

And that would mean that the throat wound was an entrance wound. And THAT would mean another

Tenth in a Series

firing position and another assassin.

The sketch which Mark Lane, Edward Jay Epstein and Harold Weisberg, refer to is the "Autopsy Descriptive Sheet," which is part of Commission Exhibit 397, the written draft of the autopsy report. This sheet is a standard form — NMS PATH 8 (1-63) and has the outlined anatomical form of the male body in front and rear views. It was one of the working papers during the autopsy.

LANE, Epstein and Weisberg each are in error in saying that the marking on the outlines were made by Cmdr. James J. Humes. On what is this based? Humes did not testify he made the marks. In fact, he testified, regarding this sketch and another hand-drawn sketch: "I notice now that the handwriting in some instances is not my own, and it is either that of Cmdr. (J. Thornton) Boswell or Col. (Pierre) Finck."

Boswell has since cleared up this question. He made the marks. He admits the dot is not precise.

"The dot was just meant to imply where the point of entry was," he explains. "The holes describing the point of entry are near this mark and give precise measurements giving the exact location of the wound."

IT IS A hallmark of the critic's general scholarship

that in zeroing in on this sketch none of them points out that although the dot is wrong, the description is clear: 14 centimeters down from the right mastoid process, which is the bony point behind the right ear, and 14 centimeters in from the right acromion, which is the tip of the shoulder joint. That point, on a man of Kennedy's size, is at the base of the neck.

And so the critics plunge ahead constructing their case against the Warren report.

Here's Epstein, handling the descriptive sheets:

"The face sheet shows front and back diagrams of the president's body." (Wrong. They are outlines of a human male and not specifically the president.)

"ON THE front diagram, the throat wound is just below the collar line; on the back diagram the entrance wound is much farther below the collar line. Thus, al-

though Commander Humes testified in March that the entrance wound was above the throat wound, during the autopsy he marked the entrance wound below the throat wound."

(Wrong. Humes didn't make the mark. And Humes' testimony confirmed, exactly with the written descriptive details on the diagram).

Weisberg refers to this same material as "suppressed." He points out that the sheets were not published in the Warren report, which was a summation of evidence. But they are in Vol. XVII, Page 45, of the supporting volumes. Suppressed?

To Mark Lane that errant dot is proof of a below-the-shoulder back wound. He constructs a conclusion that the commission recognized this but had to evade it because it would upset the lone-assassin conclusion.

"A BACK entrance wound was therefore inconvenient, and, though evidently corroborated beyond doubt by the Humes autopsy diagram and corroborated by the holes in the jacket and shirt, it slipped

perished," Lane contends. But as the report says, it was never there — except to such scrutinizers as Lane.

Weisberg goes further. Insisting that the error admitted by Boswell is no error at all, he says:

"Unless the commission is prepared to prove that this original working paper of the autopsy is wrong — not just a little wrong but grossly and inexcusably wrong — wrong in a manner that can never be expected from such eminent experts in both pathology and forensic medicine, its entire report is a monstrous fake!"

BY THE same logic, showing the errors and wrongs of "Whitewash" — as the writers are doing here — would amount to proving Weisberg is right in his charges.

Lane saw something else in the autopsy diagrams. There is an arrow on the back of the head, which is very plain. Lane sees it this way:

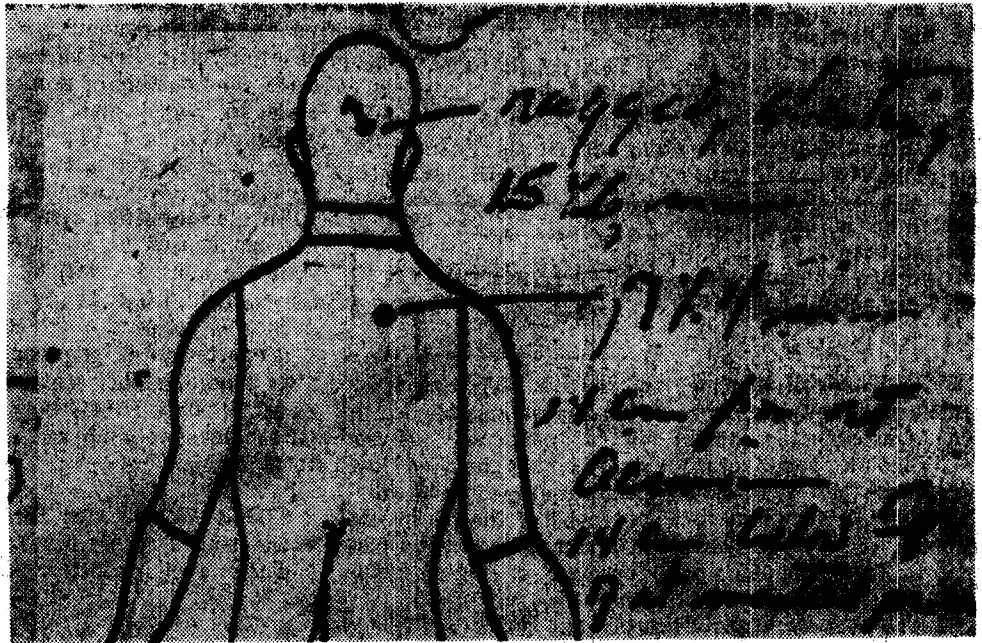
"The diagrams . . . show that Humes apparently believed a bullet to have exited at the left side of the president's skull, for he placed an arrow pointing to the left upon a mark evidently signifying a bullet entry wound."

Now could he know what Humes "apparently believed"? No such stated belief is to be found in Humes' testimony. And Lane has admitted in a published interview that he wrote Humes but received no reply.

BOSWELL made the arrow. What does it signify?

"The arrow is meant to imply that this wound of entry went from external to internal in an upward and inward slanting direction," says Boswell.

Epstein says there is other evidence that a bullet



CONTROVERSIAL ARROW (ON HEAD) ON JFK AUTOPSY SHEET
Mark Misinterpreted by Critic Mark Lane as Indicating Bullet Exit

—AP Wirephoto

never went through the president's neck from back to front. For this conclusion, he turns to the autopsy itself.

"The fact that the autopsy surgeons were not able to find a path for the bullet is further evidence that the bullet did not pass completely through the president's body," Epstein says.

ONE OF THE things on which he bases this is Humes' testimony that pathologists were unable "to take probes and have them satisfactorily fall through any path at this point." But Epstein leaves out Humes' statement that "attempts to prove in the vicinity of this wound were unsuccessful without fear of making a false passage."

The path was determined during the autopsy through recognized pathological procedure in which it was discovered there was bruising of the apex, or tip of the lung, bruising of the parietal pleura, or membrane lining the lung cage, and bleeding near the strap muscles between which the bullet passed. The hole at the back of the neck was characteristic of an entry wound. The hole at the throat did not then have the characteristics of an exit wound because it had been used in Parkland Hospital for a tracheotomy when doctors were trying to give the mortally wounded president an air passage.

BUT LANE, Weisberg and Epstein won't buy that, not when they have the FBI summary report of Dec. 9, 1963, to play with.

Two FBI agents, James W. Siebrt and Francis X. O'Neill, were in the autopsy room. So were some Secret Service agents.

The FBI summary report, which was not published in

the Warren report or its supporting volumes—thereby providing other fodder for the critics—said, in part:

"Medical examination of the president's body revealed that one of the bullets had entered just below his shoulder to the right of the spinal column at an angle of 45-60 degrees downward, that there was no point of exit, and that the bullet was not in the body."

LANE says this report had to be the correct version of the autopsy finding.

"Clearly Hoover (FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover) would not presume to summarize the 'medical examination of the president's body'—the autopsy report—in so vital a document unless the autopsy report had been studied carefully. The undated autopsy report prepared by the military physicians and published by the commission, however, does not permit the conclusions offered by the FBI. Indeed it flatly contradicts them," Lane says.

Next: J. Edgar Hoover Explains.