

AUTOPSY / EMBALMING

INTERVIEW, January 12, 1977, THOMAS EVAN ROBINSON

Interviewed by Andy Purdy and Jim Conzelman

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Purdy: Please state your name and occupation and home address.

Robinson: My name is Thomas Evan Robinson. I live at 1320 Ballencray Lane, Virginia. I've been a funeral director most of my life. (McLean)

Purdy: And you are aware that the tape recorder is running and we're with the Select Committee on Assassinations staff and it's with your permission that we are taping you now?

Robinson: Yes.

Purdy: We've just gone through the backgrounds of when you were present at the autopsy prior to beginning your work. Could you please detail for us your recollection of events and what you saw once you began your work.

Robinson: Once I began the work? I remember the tracheotomy; I remember the bones of the skull and face badly shattered.

Purdy: Where on the face were they shattered, which of the bones?

Robinson: You cannot see that from the outside. This is looking through the opening that the physicians had made at the back of the skull.

Purdy: How big was that opening? Was it an official opening?

Robinson: Well, there, of course, was an opening from the bullets, but then they had enlarged that. The brain had been removed, and you could see it.

Purdy: Could you tell how large the opening had been caused by the bullets.

Robinson: Not really, well, I guess I can because a good bit of the bone had been blown away. There was nothing there to piece together, so I would say probably about (the size of) a small orange.

Purdy: Could you give us an estimate of inches and the nature of the shape?

Robinson: Three.

Purdy: And the shape?

Robinson: Circular.

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Robinson: I think when that bullet hit that bone, it just shattered.

Purdy: Do you feel that any significant portion of the bullet after it hit the head, exited from the head, not just being picked up by the doctors? Do you feel that possibly exited, where could some it exited from the head? If any. You mentioned one possibly was that right temple.

Robinson: Yes, that did go through my mind. Well they had the little pieces, They picked them out.

Purdy: So you feel that's the only place that the significant size of the bullet could have exited.

Robinson: It was no bullet, it was a fragment or a piece of the bone.

Purdy: You would say that there is no other part of the head where that bullet would exited or a part of the bullet? Were there other little holes anywhere?

Robinson: No.

Purdy: What is your understanding of what happened to the bullet once it hit the head? You say the bullet went into pieces.

Robinson: That's what I would say.

Purdy: You mentioned earlier that the FBI agents said something to you about the bullets shattering.

Robinson: Yes, I was watching all this and I asked him about it. After he discussed with me the reason why all those people had to be there, I had questions for, I wanted to know.

Purdy: What did he say about the bullets shattering?

Robinson: He just explained to me that on occasion that happens. The bullet will smash into a great many pieces.

Purdy: You gathered from what he said that it was his impression that that is in fact what happened in this case? That the bullet did shatter/

Robinson: Yes.

Purdy: From your examination, that is what you have concluded as well.

Robinson: Yes, I watched them pick the little pieces out. They had something like a test tube or a little vile or something that they put the pieces in.

Purdy: You think they pulled out a fairly many pieces of it?

Robinson: I think so.

Purdy: Do you know that this man was an FBI agent, or. .

Robinson: He showed me some credentials, I don't know whether it was Secret Service or, to me they all belong to the same. No he was not military. There were military people there.

Purdy: So he was either FBI or Secret Service or some other plain clothes type, but he show you some credentials.

Robinson: Yes. I'm pretty sure he told me that was his field.

Purdy: Bullistics? About the thorax area, you said that there was some irregular look . . .

Robinson: I said it was nasty looking.

Purdy: Tracheotomy. Did you ever hear any discussions that would have indicated why that was the case or what might have caused that, caused obviously the tracheotomy occurred prior to the time the body came there?

Robinson: Yes, those things are done very quickly. By nature of the situation, but it was examined very carefully. The throat was. All that was removed.

Purdy: Was it your understanding that that was just a tracheotomy. Or was there some other cause that may have made it ragged or something else?

Robinson: There is something about the bullet exiting from there. A bullet exiting from there. I don't know whether I heard the physicians talking about it or whether I read it now.

Purdy: What was your impression at the time or now thinking about it as to, if you assume a bullet or part of a bullet exited there, or something exited there. Where did that something come from? Where would it have entered from the other side? From the your examination of the body, where could it have come from?

Robinson: You mean you're looking for another hole?

Purdy: Another hole or some other place, either coming from the head down and out or from the back.

Robinson? It might have been coming from the head and down. These are all in straight lines here coming down like that.

Purdy: Was there any other mark, hole or wound in body?

Robinson: No. If we had found something like that, we would have given it to them.

Purdy: In your impression, where is the lowest point on the body that any metal fragments were found?

Robinson: Somehow I feel like there was something found in the thorax.

Purdy: Is that what I normally call the chest?

Robinson: Yes.

Purdy: You remember it to be metallic or a piece of bone?

Robinson: I think that they found a piece of metal, a piece of bullet.

Purdy: Do you remember there being anything unusual or any larger pieces of metal turned over to anyone or turned over to the President's doctor or to the FBI agents?

Robinson: No, he had his function there, but it was the pathologist who did the work.

Purdy: You said that later, when you read some things about the assassination or the autopsy, you heard or read somethings which struck you as incorrect. What would those things be?

Robinson: The time the people moved (autopsy). The body was taken and the body never came lots of little things like that

Purdy: Can I ask you what your impression is of (from your work on the body) the nature of the wounds or bullet which would supplement what you've already said or which would contradict what some other people might have felt? You said a bullet came at the back of the head shattered the bone.

Robinson: Yes, I remember that big wound so well. and it caused us the most concern, that's why I remembered it.

Purdy: So you were not surprised that such a large piece of bone would have been shattered at the point of entrance of the bullet. That did not surprise you or did that impress you your experience? Is that normal?

Robinson: No, I don't know. I have seen them so many ways, but he was obviously hit there and that I remember thinking my God, "how could he have lived" any time at all with a wound like that.

Reference copy, JFK Collection: HSCA (RG 233)