

Surgeon for JFK, Oswald settles suit against detractors

Conspiracy theorist claimed libel

By Hugh Aynesworth
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DALLAS

A former Parkland Hospital surgeon whose best-selling 1992 book claims that autopsy photographs were falsified to protect a conspiracy in the John F. Kennedy assassination, has agreed to settle a \$35 million libel suit he brought against the Dallas Morning News and the American Medical Association, The Washington Times has learned.

Another defendant, a prominent Des Moines lawyer, will be severed from the suit, sources added.

Dr. Charles Crenshaw of Fort Worth, who played a minor role in assisting more experienced doctors trying to resuscitate both Kennedy and accused assassin Lee Harvey Oswald — and co-author J. Gary Shaw, a Cleburne architect who has promoted several different conspiracies regarding the JFK murder, will receive approximately \$200,000 from the AMA, sources say.

"I hoped we could try this case," said one defense lawyer who requested anonymity. "I think it's horrible to allow such an outcome."

One well-known Texas journalism professor, Darwin Payne, chairman of the Southern Methodist University journalism department, decried the settlement yesterday: "An out-of-court settlement of this size will likely have a chilling effect on some people who are engaged in the continuing debate of the facts surrounding the assassination of JFK and who want to challenge some of the ill-informed, often half-baked assertions about conspiracies.

They'll be reluctant to step into the fray for fear they'll be hit with a libel suit themselves."

The Dallas Morning News has agreed to no financial settlement, but will allow the two plaintiffs to write a rebuttal article for publication at a later date. The AMA has agreed to publish a similar rebuttal article.

David Belin, the Des Moines lawyer involved, was counsel to the Warren Commission, which in 1963-64 handled the official investigation of the JFK case.

Mr. Belin has vociferously argued since that the Warren Commission findings that Oswald acted alone in killing the president were, indeed, correct.

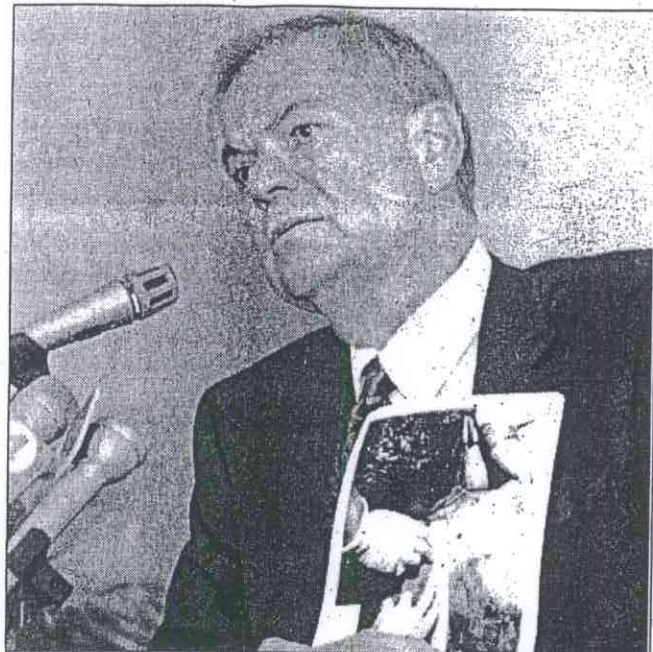
"He won't be agreeing to anything and he won't be signing anything," said Tom McGraw, Mr. Belin's Dallas lawyer.

After 29 years of silence and to the surprise of several others who helped treat the two victims that weekend, Dr. Crenshaw wrote in his book that he realized immediately that Kennedy had been shot from the front, and since the "official" investigation claimed the shots came from the Texas School Book Depository building, to the right rear, "it was a coup d'etat."

Then a third-year resident at Parkland, Dr. Crenshaw said he examined the president's wounds and said he realized that they had come from the "grassy knoll" area off to the right front of the motorcade that afternoon.

"More disturbing than the images of President Kennedy are the questions about President Johnson," Dr. Crenshaw's book says.

Dr. Crenshaw said in the book he was called to the phone during the Oswald resuscitation attempts at Parkland. The caller identified



Dr. Charles Crenshaw, while touting his book in 1992, shows a photo he says was taken during the autopsy on President Kennedy.

himself as President Johnson and demanded "a deathbed confession from the accused assassin," adding, "I will expect full cooperation in this matter."

After the book was published by Signet in April 1992, not all reviewers accepted Dr. Crenshaw's long-secret revelations. Three in particular riled the author and, his lawsuit claimed, seriously damaged his reputation and cut into potential book profits.

These reviews were the ones published in the Dallas newspaper and in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA).

Writing in the News on June 28, 1992, free-lance writer Lawrence Sutherland accused Dr. Crenshaw and his co-authors of "peddling lies."

And JAMA, in an issue dated May 27, 1992, printed a scathing rebuttal to the Crenshaw book, including strongly worded rebukes from several others at Parkland — all more prominently involved in the emergency treatment of the two victims than Dr. Crenshaw.

George Lundberg, editor in chief of JAMA, wrote that Dr. Crenshaw's book was a "sad fabri-

cation based on unsubstantiated allegations."

Another objectionable article to Dr. Crenshaw was a May 17, 1992, interview with Mr. Belin in the Dallas Morning News that attacked conspiracy theorists as persons "who tell lies about the assassination."

Dr. Crenshaw's allegations were often countered, and his story did not remain entirely intact.

In lengthy depositions, Dr. Crenshaw last year admitted that some of the book's claims were less than correct but said he wasn't able to make corrections on the galleys because the publisher rushed him too much.

Charles "Chip" Babcock of Dallas, attorney for the AMA, said yesterday he could not comment "until it's [the settlement] completely finalized."

Michael McCarthy, the News' legal spokesman, said the settlement shouldn't be viewed as a victory for the plaintiffs. "It's so far from any kind of victory," he said. "We made that offer [to allow a rebuttal article] beforehand. They didn't win anything from us."