

Bob ConsidineDispelling the Smog Over Kennedy Death

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They won't let John Fitzgerald Kennedy rest.

Three years after his assassination, a half-dozen books of conjecture and speculation about the whys and wherefores of that black day in Dallas, and the events that followed, are selling feverishly through the land and the world. Together with countless magazine and newspaper features, the books have cast a smog over the Report of the Warren Commission.

To combat this massive blight on the creditability of the distinguished panel that investigated the murder, the Kennedy family recently turned over to the National Archives certain grisly evidence calculated to demolish the commission's detractors.

It consisted mainly of photographs and X rays taken during the autopsy performed on JFK's corpse at Bethesda-(Md.) Naval Hospital, after White House aide Kenneth O'Donnell and several Secret Service men literally wrenched them from Texas doctors and police at the Dallas hospital, where the President drew his last breath.

The dread documentation was turned over originally to the President's grief-numbered brother, Robert, then Attorney General, by Chief Justice Earl Warren. The Chief Justice felt that the pictures might otherwise fall into unscrupulous hands; might even be exhibited in what he called a "circus carnival". Hence his decision to deposit them with the surviving head of the Kennedy clan.

The photos and X rays are available now to Government investigators, accredited historians and other interested parties. It is not likely that they will ever be reproduced in public prints or on television. The assassin's third bullet carried away with it portions of the President's skull, a gaping wound that ruled out all thought of an opened coffin at the lying-in-state.

Morbid Bookshelf Spreads Doubts

The delivery of this conclusive evidence strikes at erratic conclusions by anticommision authors to the effect that Lee Harvey Oswald was not the lone killer. It confirms without sensible contradiction the findings of the team of doctors which performed the autopsy. It illuminates the commission's theory that the bullet that struck the President in the back of his neck did emerge from the front of his neck and in all probability continued its short flight to his second target, Gov. John Connally. It destroys the contention of several of the detracting authors that the wound in the front of JFK's neck was the point of entrance of a second assassin's bullet. It was the exit wound of a bullet fired from Oswald's Mannlicher-Carcano rifle.

But will history "buy" this unfettered truth in the light of all the doubts that have spread? One must wonder. The public's access to the Kennedy family documents now in the National Archives is minuscule compared to the easy access it has to a wealth of suspect but absorbing literature. That ever-mounting and increasingly morbid bookshelf now is dominated by:

Edward Jay Epstein's "Inquest", with an introduction by New Yorker Magazine's Richard H. Rovere. This one broke the logjam of critiques. It was swiftly followed by "Whitewash", by Harold Weisberg, privately printed at first and laced with ludicrous charges of dark conspiracies. In short order there followed "The Oswald Affair" by Leo Sauvage, printed first in French; Sylvan Fox's "The

Unanswered Questions About President Kennedy's Assassination"; Richard N. Popkin's "The Second Oswald", with an "it's got to be true" introduction by Murray Kempton, and Mark Lane's "Rush To Judgement", introduced by Hugh Trevor-Roper, a quarrelsome tome that has climbed high on the best-seller list.

Poll Shows Public Is Still Skeptical

The passage is typical of the obfuscation that abounded before the Kennedy family yielded its grim portfolio, and may still abound.

The Louis Harris Poll revealed the astonishing dimensions of that doubt. It indicated that fewer persons than before believed Oswald killed the President, and 54 percent suspected that the Warren Commission suppressed important portions of the story of the tragedy. Nearly one-third of the samplings felt the Kennedy assassination was part of some broader plot. Eleven percent were convinced it was Communist-inspired, five percent were sure there was some conspiratorial link between Oswald and Ruby, and a troubling - or troubled - two percent thought Lyndon B. Johnson had masterminded the catastrophe.

Two yet-to-be-published books, Jim Bishop's "The Day Kennedy Was Shot", and William Manchester's "The Death of a President" will not join in the broadside against the Warren Commission. But the minute-by-minute examination by each painstaking author will leave many questions unanswered.

The rash of anti-Warren Commission books has caused the Kennedy family additional grief. But the reaction at the White House and the FBI has been one of pure indignation.

The FBI is taken to task in all the anti-Warren Commission reports. Burden of the author's complaints are two FBI reports on the autopsy turned in by agents Francis X. O'Neill and James W. Sibert. They were present, along with Secret Service agents, on the night when the team of doctors headed by Commander (now Capt.) James J. Humes, USN, performed the autopsy.

Conflicts Bring Crass Commercialism

The Warren Commission report, based on a much more extensive autopsy report turned in by the hospital long after O'Neill and Sibert had departed, declares that the first of three bullets fired from Oswald's gun struck the President in the back of his neck, not "below his shoulder", and proceeded through the neck, emerged, and then passed through Gov. Connally's chest and wrist and imbedded itself in his left thigh.

A more or less intact bullet from Oswald's gun was found at Parkland Hospital, Dallas, near the stretchers that were used to carry JFK and Connally into the emergency room. It was first felt that this may have dropped out of the President's back during emergency heart massage inasmuch as Connally was hit a split second after the President was (judging from home movies taken of the sequence by a man named Abraham Zapruder). This led to much later speculation that another assassin must have fired at the Kennedy car.

Oswald, a poor shot, could not have operated the bolt action of his obsolete rifle fast enough to get off separate shots wounding Mr. Kennedy and Connally in that elapsed flick of time. Clearly, the first bullet wounded both men, the second missed completely, and the third killed JFK.

But, on those conflicting FBI reports, and the puzzles rising from Oswald's abruptly ended life, a phenomenon of the publishing industry has been found. It rides on JFK's shroud. It began innocently, soon turned pro, now is crassly commercial.

The progenitor of the skepticism, Epstein, has been the only representative of it to date who has publicly stated that the photos and X rays turned over by the Kennedy family probably destroys his and all the other premises.

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