

ABSENCE OF RESPONSIBILITY

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Chapter 12

"A REEVALUATION OF BEST EVIDENCE"

During the period from 1981-89, my contact with other assassination researchers was quite limited. As I pointed out in Chapter 3, my initiation of communications with Lifton in 1981 was totally by chance. One prominent researcher told me in 1990, "your discovery of the pictures and Mr. Fox was a great find...but your giving them to Lifton was a great mistake."

I can't speak for the entire critics community, but to date I have yet to find any other researcher who so adamantly works to insulate his witnesses from other researchers, and insulate budding novices like myself from other researchers.

While David Lifton has made some significant contributions to the ongoing critics investigation, he has also deliberately hampered it in other ways. The most flagrant example of this, was Lifton's failed attempt to insulate me from fellow researcher Robert Groden. Groden had the color autopsy photos, I had the black and whites, our joint research has helped yield vital new perspectives on the medical evidence. Despite the obvious benefits of such a joining of resources, Lifton permitted Groden and I to live, literally minutes away from each other, in total ignorance of the others existence for over 5 years. This apparent practice of pigeon-holing continued even after I met and began working with Groden and his publisher and co-author, Harry Livingstone. Lifton refused to share vital information with Groden and Livingstone on the location of key witnesses, yet persisted in lobbying one of Livingstone's researchers for additional witness locations which he (Lifton) could not obtain.

A serious journalist must not allow personality conflicts to influence his work, but I soon discovered that Lifton's double-standard had also riddle his research with serious errors and quantum leaps of imagination. In 1989 I decided that if I were going to sincerely dedicate myself to researching the photo's and thier significance, then I'd have to reevaluate Best Evidence from a critical journalistic stand point and not merely accept it's conclusions because I'd known David Lifton for 10 years.

I would not be telling the truth if I said I had no problems with Lifton's theories prior to 1989, for I had some doubts stretching back to my first reading of Best Evidence in 1981. I would be the first to admit that as far as being a true "Warren Commission Critic", in 1981 I was just a babe in the woods, but I was by no means a novice investigative journalist.

I had cut my teeth at the age of 15 under the demanding tutelage of legendary Maryland radio newsman, George Deitrich. Deitrich had two huge walls covered with Associated Press Awards by the time I came to work for him in 1970. 3 years later when I graduated from high school, I possessed a knowledge of the fundamentals of journalism that rivaled most college graduates. Deitrich's credentials were so respected in the Maryland and Delaware broadcast community, that upon graduating from high school I was offered the news directorship of WDOV-AM in Dover, Delaware. WDOV at that time was the most powerful and highest rated radio station within 50 miles. For personal reasons I chose instead to go with a new FM station in Milford, Delaware and over the next five years contributed over 200 stories to the Associated Press.

My reason for detailing this background at this point, is to underscore the fact that I should have viewed Lifton's book as a critical journalist and not as a fan, which is regrettably what I did for 8 years.

A serious journalist, when working on an investigative piece, must make certain his facts join together with equal credibility. Lifton wasn't the first critic to take a smidge of this and a pinch of that and use them to try and connect some unrelated facts. Along the way Lifton commits, what any serious journalist would have to term a "dangerous double-standard" by embracing totally unsubstantiated comments while categorically dismissing far more credible evidence, if it damaged his theory.

The logic, if that word can be expanded to such a degree, of Best Evidence follows what superficially seems to be a straight line when in fact it is a very broken zig-zag through the evidence. If you use a simple journalistic technique of working from back to front with Lifton's theory the entire piece unravels like a cheap sweater. This technique is so often used to check the validity of a news story because when a story begins with a small exaggeration or assumption it usually has to end with a huge exaggeration of assumption. When the story is a 700 plus page book the exaggerations and assumptions build slowly so that those at the end don't seem as far fetched as in fact they are.

Much of Best Evidence rests on the recollections of 3 key witnesses at Bethesda. By the time the reader has reached the point in the book where they're introduced to Dennis David, Paul O'Connor and Jerold Custer they have been sold on body alteration and that this alteration was done by secret men in secret places.

Dennis David is vital to the Best Evidence theory because he remembers a "gray shipping coffin", being brought to the morgue "in a black ambulance by men in civilian clothing before the motorcade with the Dallas casket arrives". Dennis David states that later that evening he and other Bethesda personnel were discussing the days events and "someone said the body was in the first coffin".

First of all Lifton totally ignores the simple fact that 3 of Kennedy's close aides traveled to Gawler's funeral home around midnight and purchased a coffin, the actual one in which the President was buried. It's entirely reasonable then that autopsy personnel who unloaded the Dallas casket and then later that evening off load the new burial casket from Gawler's would naturally state, "the body arrived in the first one". There was also evidence that there was a casket containing "the remains of an Air Force Officer who was to be buried the next day at Arlington." Lifton checked the records at Arlington and since there were no burials Saturday the 23rd at Arlington then he dismisses the entire statement totally ignoring that there could have indeed been an Air Force Officer who was actually to be buried at some other cemetery. Interestingly, Lifton took the time to search the Bethesda records in order to refute a claim that "a lump on stretcher brought to the morgue was actually the corpse of a stillborn baby", but did not search the actual Bethesda records to see if indeed an Air Force officer died and his body handled by the Bethesda morgue.

Much of Lifton's theory arises like a phoenix from the confusion that evening surrounding caskets in the morgue. We know there was the Dallas casket and then the Gawlers casket and quite possibly a third ceremonial casket..but what about "a gray shipping casket?"

Lifton mentions that there are other people who remember seeing a gray shipping casket that night and therefore if one was there it could only be there for some sinister purpose, mainly to bring the body from a secret alteration location, to Bethesda...but again he wholly overlooked a simple explanation.

In 1990 I interviewed a Pennsylvania undertaker who provided me with information that helped understand how and why a shipping coffin could have been in the Bethesda morgue that night.

I met Terry Starr following a talk on the assassination at a Rotary Club dinner meeting. During my talk I mentioned the "gray shipping casket story" and the significance placed on it by Lifton. When the meeting had ended and most of the audience had left, Starr approached me cautiously and introduced himself.

"Look", Starr tried to explain without offending me, "he may have ended up in a gray shipping coffin, but he was in the Dallas casket for sometime because I saw it about a year after the assassination. The handles had been scratched and the inside was stained very badly...he might have been in a body bag but not while he was in that coffin."

Starr's unique experience provided not only additional detail on the Dallas casket but interesting new perspective on the shipping casket story. According to Starr he was a young mortician in 1964 and had the task of transporting a body from Reading, Pennsylvania to Arlington for burial. He explained in such cases an out of town mortician would usually have to employ the aid of a local establishment. During this particular trip the local firm was Pumphrey's Funeral Home of Bethesda.

When Starr arrived from Reading with "the remains to be interred at Arlington", he had a brief layover at Pumphrey's. While he waited he was shown a very special item of history in Pumphrey's storeroom, The Dallas Casket. As it turned out Pumphrey's was the local mortuary with the government contract with Bethesda Naval Hospital. Pumphrey's was not allowed a major role in preparing the remains of the President but they were given the job of hauling away the casket. Starr's account also indicated that one of the men in the autopsy room that evening, a Thomas Robinson, was actually an employee of Pumphrey's and not Gawlers. How does all this help explain, "a shipping casket brought to the morgue by men in plain clothes, taken from a black ambulance, which came up the back way into Bethesda," ?

Several accounts of the evening tell how the late R.O. Canada, head of the Bethesda hospital, was left in the dark about much of the role his facility would play in the events of the evening. The record also indicates that the initial request for Gawlers to handle the arrangements were transmitted from Air Force 1 directly to The White House.

Since Canada died in 1972, no one can be certain what actions he may have taken in preparation for the arrival of the President's body, but notifying his contract undertaker would seem a perfectly rational assumption.

I've asked Starr and several other undertakers the simple question, "If I called you as a client and said I had a family member who'd died of a gunshot wound..was to be autopsied..then prepared for burial, then what would you bring to the hospital when retrieving the body?" The universal and obvious answer..."a shipping casket and a body bag."

Starr indicated that there was probably a little friction between the Gawler's and Pumphrey's firms. Gawler's was the Cadillac of Washington undertakers....morticians to the rich and famous you might say. Pumphrey's was a typical community undertaker who served both the rich and poor.

The nation and the entire world for that matter was tuned into every detail as Air Force One winged it's way back to Washington that Friday afternoon. It takes no imagination at all to expect that officials at Pumphrey's heard that the President of the United States body was headed for Bethesda. Does it seem so improbable that with or without instruction from R.O. Canada they quickly loaded a "black ambulance" with a shipping coffin and body bag?

Pumphrey's was located at 7557 Wisconsin Avenue, just a few block from the hospital. They'd have certainly been practiced in discreetly entering the hospital grounds from the back entrance, as Dennis David believed they did. As a journalist I can't offer any more substantiation than what you see here, but I have offered a very reasonable and probable explanation for the appearance of a shipping casket at Bethesda that night.

When Lifton queried David on when this casket arrived David indicated perhaps from 15-30 minutes before the gray Navy ambulance with the Dallas casket. As Lifton so frequently points out, "the time is critical". What Dennis David saw and what he heard, second hand, hours later has been structured to have us believe he sees a gray shipping coffin, which arrives before the Dallas coffin, and most importantly, contains the body. Lifton now must actually place the body in the gray shipping coffin and to do that he relies on the recollections of Paul O'Connor.

Paul O'Connor is a crucial witness for the Best Evidence theory. Lifton relies on him to provide conspiratorial evidence concerning the headwound, the brain and most importantly the shipping coffin and a body bag. Lifton must connect the casket that O'Connor removes the body from to the one Dennis David remembers seeing brought in. O'Connor is Lifton's star witness and as

Lifton points out "the time is critical", with this in mind one should observe what Paul O'Connor claims is his "most vivid recollection of the evening", that being, "I logged the body in at 8:00 p.m."

The problem here is 8:00 p.m. just doesn't work because others present at 8 p.m. remember the body being taken out of the Dallas Casket, wrapped exactly as Aubrey Rike claims he did at Dallas. This won't do so Lifton claims his star witness's "most vivid recollection" IS WRONG! It's not wrong by 5 minutes or 10 minutes or even 30 minutes..but in order to synchronize it with Dennis David's shipping coffin...Lifton claims O'Connor made a 45 minute mistake!

Researcher Harrison Livingstone has conducted extensive interviews with O'Connor and claims Lifton carefully structured O'Connors recollections to fit the Best Evidence theory. I have seen a drawing made by O'Connor in 1989 purporting to show how the President's wounds appeared and this drawing is totally contradictory to the appearance of the head wounds, as Lifton tries to portray them in Best Evidence. If O'Connor's "most vivid recollection" must be dismissed in order to fit the Best Evidence scenario and his skillfully and detailed hand drawn recollection of the wounds is totally out of sync with Best Evidence, then how can Lifton rely so heavily on O'Connor for critical testimony concerning the more mundane matters of coffins and body bags. I don't believe Paul O'Connor is a liar, but I know David Lifton is skillful at making people say what he wants them to say and the Best Evidence of how he accomplishes this ,rests on his interview with Jerold Custer.

While Lifton swiftly dismisses O'Connors, "most vivid recollection" he is equally swift to embrace Jerold Custer's "most vivid recollection." Custer's most vivid memory is that he "saw Jackie that night while on the way to develop X-ray's of the President's body." This, Lifton claims, is the crowning gem of proof that the body was indeed in the morgue well before the Dallas Casket arrives. Lifton takes this "vivid recollection" and embellishes it with a seemingly innocent series of presumptions.

In his video interviews with Custer, Lifton asks him didn't he think it was strange that he was carrying x-rays of the President's body upstairs for processing, while the Dallas casket is sitting right out front in the Navy ambulance, obviously empty. Lifton has added the ambulance/casket part to the statement. Custer never saw the ambulance out front with the Dallas casket, Lifton surmises this based on a simple statment in William Manchester's, "Death Of A President" that "when the motorcade arrived at

Bethesda, Jackie immediatly went upstairs to the 17th floor Presidential Suite and remained there until time for the body to go the White House."

Custer offers no indication of the time but does say it was his second or possibly third trip upstairs to process X-rays. Assuming a reasonable amount of time to actually take X-Rays, which is Custer's job, then take them upstairs, process them and return, if this is indeed his third trip then the body has to arrive sooner than Dennis David's recollection!

In all my research I have not found any direct indication that Jackie did come downstairs where O'Connor could have seen her, but if we are to give such great credability to Manchester's account dealing with this single point then we must also carefully examine ALL the indications of his research.

Manchester interviewed many people about thier recollections of that evening and relies heavily on those of Ken O'Donnel, Larry O'Brien and Dave Powers for what was happening around Jackie Kennedy. If you throughly read Manchester's Chapter entitled Lace, you can appreciate how Jackie could have made an unreported trip to an area of the hospitol where Custer sees her. The three men, Powers, O'Donnel and O'Brien leave around 11:00 p.m. on thier various errands of purchasing a casket, gathering up the clothes the President will be buried in and other needed tasks on behalf of Jackie. It appears, based on Manchester's account, that Jackie could have easily made a trip downstairs which wouldn't have appeared in Manchester's interviews. The next question would be why?

There are numerous reminders in Manchester's book about the pressure from upstairs to "hurry things along". There were constant back and forth communications with "the tower suite". The testimony of radiologist James Ebersole and the recollections of others indicate there were at least two X-ray sessions, one around 8 p.m. at the outset of the autopsy and another between 11 and midnight. There seems universal agreement that the autopsy doctors finished thier duties around midnight and turned the body over to the undertakers. Is it unreasonable to assume that around midnight, word is passed up to the tower that, "they're finally done". Hearing this Jackie and Bobby start downstairs and reach the lobby before someone realizes that the message has been misunderstood..that the autopsists are done but the undertakers have just started. This would easily explain how Custer experineces "his most vivid recollection" and it's occurrence is not the least bit sinister. He simply sees Jackie getting back into the elavator to return unstairs until the undertakers are finished, and yes he is hauling the second or third set of x-rays of the President's body upstairs for processing.

I can hear Lifton now, screaming in indignation, "Mark what proof do you have to back up such conclusions! You're just assuming certian things happened THE WAY YOU WANT THEM TOO BE!" He would right too, making assumptions is a dangerous journalistic practice but again Lifton is employing his now famous double-standard. After he has made all the assumptions to connect the recollections of his 3 key eyewitnesses he moves from assumption to sheer unfounded speculation in order to explain certian obvious questions.

If one wishes to conceed that the body is in the gray shipping coffin, at some point in time then they, like Lifton ,must find a way to get the body in there. Lifton's anwser was to take Manchester's research, dismiss the statements of those who claimed to have been with the President's body the entire time it's on Air Force one, then wholly embrace all other accounts of where people are ,in order to arrive at a brief 8 minute window when the casket is unattended...again a witness is right or wrong based on how thier account meshes with the Best Evidence theory. In Best Evidence, Lifton leaves the reader thinking that getting the body out of the Dallas casket is the hard part and that it could thereafter be easily slipped into the cargo hold for removal from the right side of the plane, after it lands at Andrews. The only problem with this is that it would require that the persons responsible for this would have to literally rip up the floor in the rear of Air Force One and do it in 8 minutes and without arousing the suspicions of the many others aboard. Lifton leaves the reader thinking that there is perhaps some secret rear access to the cargo hold, of perhaps that ripping up the floor is a simple task. Lifton is wrong on both accounts and that comes from the man who redesigned Kennedy's 707 for President Richard M. Nixon.

George Payne worked for the Boeing company for many years and was a principal participant in the redesigning of Air Force One, or more specifically *26000, for Nixon in 1969. Since Johnson left the plane basically unchanged from the way it was when it was Kennedy's then Payne's information is very applicable.

"No way..absolutely", claims Payne when asked about the only two possible ways the body could be taken from the rear passenger area, down to the cargo hold. According to Payne, removing the "floor plates" as he describes, them is not only a long noisy process, but would potentially place the plane at risk since the floor of a plane...like the floor of a house..adds a certian amount of structural integrity. Payne also went to great lengths to explain how the rear cargo holds are "Class D" unpressureized and thusly any

compromise of the floor seal would prove disasterous when the plane reached a cruise altitude above 22,000 feet.

Just as Lifton can offer no reasonable explanation for how the body get's into the gray shipping coffin he has an equally hard time trying to get it out at Bethesda, rewrapped as it was in Dallas, then back into the Dallas coffin for his documented 8 p.m. entry into the morgue. He provides absolutley no eyewitness account or even speculation for how this can occur, but since he has painted himself into a corner with his interpetation of the accounts of David, O'Connor and Custer he must therefore surmise that it simply happened...period. Lifton does try to hint that this took place during his so called "Clandestine Intermission" when those in the autopsy room were reportedly asked to step outside while the X-rays were being taken. The problem is that since there's only one entrance to the morgue and the area is crowded with "military brass" it seems highly imporbable that this coming and going of caskets arroused no ones suspicions. Secondly, who's responsible for X-rays? Jerold Custer! Why doesn't he mention this peculiar sheel game with the body?

For some inexplicable reason, Lifton feels he has the gifted perception to assume certian things take place, even in the absence of any proof, but someone who follows a similar logic when trying to explain a more rational scenario is dismissed by Lifton because, "they can't prove it."

In 1990 I began a cooperative research effort with High Treason co-author, Harrison (Harry)Livingstone. Livingstone had been highly critical of Lifton and Best Evidence in the opening chapters of High Treason. Initially I had thought Livingstone's critique an unwarranted attack on a fellow critic, but after Livingstone shared his interviews with Lifton's key witnesses, I realized he (Livingstone) had actually been very kind. It was clear that even Lifton's key witnesses had problems with the way he had carefully reconstructed thier words to fit the Best Evidence hypothesis.

The Best Evidence theory suffered a near fatal blow in the fall of 1988. The highly respected PBS science program, Nova took the unprecedented step of bringing several of the Dallas doctors to the National Archieves to view the autopsy photos. Here finally would be the chance to either validate or dispose of the Best Evidence Theory. To a man, the Dallas doctors said the autopsy photo's showed the wound's essentially the same as they had appeared in Dallas. It was obvious that the doctors had the most trouble explaining what happened to the hole at the back of the head. They offered no contradiction to the large wound on the right side of the head.

The Dallas doctors basically validated the conclusions of High Treason not Best Evidence. Livingstone's major point of contention with Lifton had been the large wound towards the top right side of the President's head, Lifton claims it wasn't there at all in Dallas while Livingstone felt it was there but the "flaps" of skull and scalpe had been folded back into place by Jackie on the ride to the hospital.¹ Lifton claimed this large wound was part of the "surgery to the head area.namely in the top of the skull."

Lifton's explanation for the doctors testimony was that they had been confused because of the "reconstruction" that preceeded the taking of autopsy photos. This line of reasoning actually contradicts Best Evidence because if there was reconstruction, as Lifton purports, then it was designed to cover-up his pre-autopsy surgery and should have returned the appearance of the headwound to a state more like Dallas..not less.

Following the Nova broadcast, Lifton gradually began to change his technique for selling The Best Evidence theory. Since he could no longer rely on the differances between , "what the Dallas doctors saw and what the Bethesda doctors saw", he began to focus on the X-rays.

The X-rays disagreed with the photo's, and all eyewitnesses both Dallas and Bethesda. The X-rays showed the front right temple area of the President's head blasted away. This contradiction had been written about extensively by Harry Livingstone in 1979. I myself, in 1981 had queried Lifton on this blatant discrepancy. His reply was that, "the bones are too shattered and overlapping to make such a statement."

When Lifton rereleased Best Evidence in the fall of 1988, he included several paragraphs on the photo/x-ray mismatch and claimed this was his unique discovery. He now tried to embrace and franchise this mismatch as the "new" proof that the body was altered. The Afterword of the 1988 rerelease of Best Evidence, skillfully danced around the issue of the large wound on the top right side of the Presidents head. He had chosen instead to focus on the size of the throat wound/traceotomy during interviews with

¹ During my tenure as station manager at WCTR I forged a friendship with Chief Deputy Sheriff Lamotte Cooke. Cooke once related to me the details of a tragic event where a woman's estranged husband had confronted her on her parent's front porch and fatally shot her in the head with a shotgun. Cooke, a trained paramedic, was first to arrive on the scene and related to me the heart wrenching story of how the victims parents refused to allow him on the porch as they frantically tried to gather-up peices of thier daughters skull and place them back on her head. Cooke, a 20 year veteran police officier/para medic said this behavior was not unique in his expericnes and was indeed a sadly common in such cases.

the Dallas doctors. He was avoiding confronting the Dallas personal with the simple question of whether there was a large flapped open area visible in Dallas. If the large flapped wound was there then "surgery to the head area" could no longer stand up.

The way Lifton skillfully avoids touching on areas that would cast a shadow on Best Evidence is painfully visible in a May 1990 interview with Dallas doctor Robert McClelland. The interview was part of a series of Lifton appearances on the TV tabloid program, Hard Copy. The entire segment with McClelland centers on the autopsy X-rays, despite the fact that viewers can easily see the autopsy photo's spread out before McClelland! I was shocked that Lifton never asked McClelland one simple question, How are these pictures different from what you saw in Dallas? Lifton couldn't risk having McClelland openly discuss the photo's and indicate that the flapped open area could likely have been overlooked in Dallas. Instead Lifton tries to absorb the photo/X-ray mismatch into his Best Evidence theory, and steer clear of the photo's.

I have discovered in my numerous lectures that it's sometimes hard for the casual observer to grasp the importance of deciding whether the assassination was concealed by altering the body or by altering the photo's. This is the major contention that divides Lifton and Livingstone. The problem with Lifton's theory is his "reconstruction" hypothesis. This requires that a "forensic hairpiece" be placed on the back of Kennedy's head for the photo's. Lifton's assertions that this was done would implicate as coconspirators, many of the Bethesda witnesses he relies on so heavily for recollections in Best Evidence. On the other hand photo alteration does not require any coconspirators at Bethesda. As I will explain in future chapters the photo alteration was easy once all the film was safely tucked away in the Secret Service safe at the White House.

During the production of the Nova broadcast, producer Robert Reichler "borrowed" an early generation print of the famous Zapruder film from Moe Weitzman who originally processed the photo's from the film that appeared in Life magazine. In late 1989, over a year after the Nova broadcast had been completed, researcher Robert Groden called Weitzman to ask for the film and discovered it had never been returned following the Nova production. Groden and Weitzman were later to discover that Lifton had secretly hijacked the film and was anxiously "enhancing" it in Los Angeles in an attempt to prove it was altered. Why would Lifton launch such a desperate attempt to impune the most valuable piece of assassination evidence?

The answer went back to early 1989 when Groden had allowed Lifton access to his many enhanced prints of Zapruder. In these stunningly clear close-ups of the President as he suffers the fatal head wound, the "flap wound" on the right side of the head can be clearly seen. Lifton realized that when these vivid enhancements became widely circulated they would validate the autopsy photo's which also show this flap. You must remember, if there's a headwound anywhere but on the back of the head, then there's no basis for secretly intercepting the body and "enlarging" the headwound with surgery to the top of the head!

Robert Groden who served as a photo expert to the House Select Committee's investigation into the assassination had told Lifton that in the actual Zapruder film there is picture printed around the sprocket holes. When an 8mm camera first films a scene, the lens focuses an image on the entire width of the film, including that area on the edge where the sprocket holes are located. When a "copy" of the film is made then the information in this "sprocket area" is lost. Groden maintains that there was no printer in existence in 1963 that could copy a film and include the "sprocket area". This fact firmly establishes that the Zapruder original is not a doctored copy. Lifton has stated that there was indeed such a printer, but even if this singular assertion is true..it fails to answer a host of other questions.

If the Zapruder film was altered then you implicate Abraham Zapruder, the FBI, Life Magazine and Kodak Labs in a conspiracy to cover-up the truth. The Zapruder film, unlike the autopsy photo's, was processed in hours not days after the assassination. Even if Lifton is able to string together some explanation of these points then he must still answer one remaining question. If "someone" altered the Zapruder film, then why not conceal all incriminating evidence like the rear headsnap, the wound on the back of the head and the visible skull matter and brain being propelled backward. On this latter point, alteration would have been easy since the "debris" from the President's head is seen against the black background of the truck of the limosene. It would have been very easy to have simply blacked out this incriminating indicator of a forward headshot.

When I learned what Lifton was trying to do, our relationship took a pronounced nosedive. I challenged Lifton to explain how he could impune the Zapruder film when it was indeed the rear headsnap, seen on the film, that he reports in Best Evidence as drawing him into the case? His answer was inconclusive. I accused Lifton of attempting to impune valuable evidence solely for the purpose of maintaining his theory, his reply was that I did not possess his degree of understanding of the case. I understood the case well

enough to point out the implications of the photo/x-ray conflict 7 years before he accepted it!

Lifton's work on the Zapruder film follows a predictable course that is also present in his interviews of witnesses and his evaluation of other important evidence. If a statement or a fact or a simple recollection, lends the least bit of additional credibility to interception, alteration or reconstruction of the body, then it's given validation as absolutely authentic and unaltered. If on the other hand there exists a fact that counters these assertions it's labeled as wrong, mistaken or altered. Lifton's attempt to "corrupt" the evidence of the Zapruder film not only allows him an out for explaining the flap wound but should any other challenge arise from the film he can simply shrug it off by claiming the film is altered and therefore the challenge is invalid.

What Lifton, who purports to be presenting a "legal" argument fails totally to realize is that you can't present a conclusion based on evidence that you assert is "reliable and credible" from a certain source..then turn right around and corrupt or impune that same source when other evidence from it contradicts your conclusion, to do so is to defeat your own argument. Could anyone possibly imagine a defense attorney placing his client on the stand in an effort to establish thier charecter and credibility, then when the witnesses own statements under cross-examination show him to be guilty, the defense attorney comes back under redirect and tries to show his client is a mindless bafoon and therefore his incriminating statements made during cross examination should be disregarded!

Consider the major points I've discussed. Paul O'Connor is a reliable source of information that the body comes out of a shipping coffin..but makes a mistake with his own "most vivid recollection" of the time. Lifton claims "time is critical" but makes no attempt to pinpoint the time when Custer reportedly see's Jackie and instead builds in his assumption that "the Navy Ambulance is out front with an empty Dallas casket." Dennis David simply states he helped unload a gray shipping coffin, but Lifton gives weight to a second hand off the cuff comment, that the body is in this coffin.

When one reads Lifton's formulations of the basis of his theory on pages 584,585 and 586..it becomes apparent that he operates from an extreme double standard. While he dismisses time differeances when trying to reconcile his theory he then turns around on page 584 and cites just such a differeance as credence for his theory, His selection of when a witness is

right or wrong once again rests solely on how that witnesses recollections fit his theory.

Lifton attempts to posture his Best Evidence theory as credible proof that would stand up in a court of law. I don't know how many murder trials David Lifton's covered, as a reporter, from start to finish, but I can easily recall a dozen that I've sat through. While Best Evidence brings out some interesting points, it can hardly be viewed as credible legal evidence, in the strict definition acceptable in an American courtroom.

Much of the set-up for the critical accounts in Best Evidence relies on such normal anomalies as typographical errors, simple statements and grammatical errors, twisted and exaggerated beyond all reason. No serious journalist would dare build a story on such a house of cards..to do so in today's environment of multi-million dollar lawsuits, would be instantly fatal to one's career.

Lifton was right about one thing, the body is The Best Evidence, but beyond that his accuracy is sacrificed for sake of his theory.