

WHY WOULD ANYBODY WRITE, LET ALONE PUBLISH, THIS STALE STUFF IN 1972!

WHO SHOT PRESIDENT KENNEDY—

or Fact and Fable in History

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"I do not know who killed Kennedy nor their motives, etc. But I think I have shown satisfactorily from physical evidence . . . that Oswald alone could not have shot President Kennedy. . . . There was a conspiracy to the extent that his accomplice(s) remain undiscovered."

Nov. 22, 1971 was the eighth anniversary of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in Dallas, Texas. What follows here are some observations on the treatment of that event by the special investigatory commission set up by the then-new President Lyndon B. Johnson (the "Warren Commission"). I will concentrate on the implausibility of the "facts" assembled by that commission to support their contention that a single man, Lee Harvey Oswald, was solely responsible for Kennedy's death. It is my contention that the bare physical evidence published by the commission itself, fragmentary as it is, does not support the commission's main findings in the least. On the contrary, this article shows — using the Commission's own cited evidence — that at least two gun men — Oswald possibly being one of them — cut Kennedy down in a hail of bullets on Nov. 22, 1963. The other person (or persons) involved are still at large.

First, let me express a note on the documentation in this article. The Warren Commission published its one-volume, 888-page report on Sept. 23, 1964, and published a short time later a 26-volume compendium of hearings, depositions, and exhibits accepted in evidence before the commission. Citations to the report itself are denoted by the initials WR (Warren Report) and the page number, thus: (WR435), citations to the 26 volumes of hearings are denoted by Roman numerals; as an example; (XXX,114) denotes Volume 25, page 114 of Hearings/Exhibits. See the bibliography at the end of this article for citations from other sources.

Summary

A capsule summary of the main events and official findings according to the Warren Commission report runs like this.

President Kennedy, on a political fence-mending trip in Texas in late Nov. 1963, was scheduled to address an open-air rally at the Trade Mart in Dallas on Nov. 22. His arrival was to be in the grand manner, with an open-car motorcade through the city to precede the speech. Kennedy, his wife Jacqueline, (now Mrs. Aristotle Onassis), Governor John Connally (now Secretary of the Treasury), his wife, and two Secret Service agents (one driving) were the occupants of the lead car in the noontime parade. The crowds were heavy and enthusiastic, with

hundreds taking pictures (of great importance later on for the investigation) all along the parade route.

At the corner of Elm and Houston Streets in Dallas, somewhat past the densest crowds and the city center, the motorcade approached a tall building known as the Texas School Book Depository (TSBD), which housed firms dealing in book distribution and other firms in other lines of business.

At 12:30 p.m. CST Kennedy's car had just passed this building, moving at about 10 mph, when several shots rang out. The first shot hit President Kennedy in the upper back (or neck) and, according to the Warren Commission, passed completely through him at the neck to hit Gov. Connally (seated on a jump seat directly in front of Kennedy) in the mid-back.

This first shot broke Connally's fifth rib — right side — and passed out of his body to the front also, where it fractured his right wrist and lodged finally in his left mid-thigh.

The second shot fired at the motorcade (all shots were later said to have come from the sixth floor of the TSBD) was a probable miss. In any case a bullet did hit the sidewalk near President Kennedy's car, throwing fragments which slightly wounded a bystander, James T. Tague, on the cheek.

The third shot hit President Kennedy in the head, inflicting a mortal wound, from which he died 30 minutes later.

In the ensuing melee and pandemonium, speculation, rumors, and conflicting eye-witness reports of many kinds circulated. No suspect, armed or otherwise, was detained on the spot, though several hobos in a nearby railroad stockyard were picked up for questioning.

About an hour later a Dallas police officer, J. D. Tippit, was shot to death in the Dallas Oak Cliff district, resulting in a huge dragnet that bagged Lee Harvey Oswald in a movie theater at 1:45 p.m. Oswald was booked at 2 p.m., and shortly thereafter charged with the murders of both Officer Tippit and President Kennedy. A rifle, thought to be the assassination weapon, had been found on the sixth floor of the TSBD: it was established later

on that it in fact belonged to Oswald. Oswald was interrogated through Friday afternoon (the 22nd) and Saturday (no transcript of these discussions was kept). During this time he maintained his innocence; he even declared, at a tumultuous midnight "news conference" on Saturday the 23rd that he was a "patsy".

On Sunday morning, Nov. 24th, Oswald was to have been moved to a more secure jail (the Dallas city jail having been deluged with death threats against Oswald). The transfer was to be covered on live TV — at least Oswald's departure from the city jail through a below-ground garage. Oswald appeared in the company of several marshals in this garage at about 10:20 a.m. Sunday, walking to the armored-car transfer vehicle. Whereupon, those of us who were watching TV that morning were treated to the ultimate in live-action melodrama: Oswald was shot to death, on camera, by Jack Ruby, a Dallas strip-joint operator who had, somehow, gotten into the heavily-guarded area (WR 1-21 passim). (I saw this happen.)

Facts

Well, what are the facts? What actually is left behind from this reported chain of events that is tangible, measurable, physical evidence?

Here I wish to concentrate on Kennedy's death alone, setting aside Oswald's guilt or innocence, Tippit's murder, Ruby's role, etc.

Narrowing the present inquiry in this way we will examine the following:

- the elapsed time of the President's assassination;
- the rifle purportedly used;
- the number of shots fired;
- the wounds suffered by Kennedy and Connally;
- ballistics evidence linking the TSBD rifle to the shooting; and
- the Warren Commission's tests and reconstructions of the event and the inadequacies thereof.

Elapsed Time

As mentioned earlier, the parade route was lined with spectators, many taking photographs. At least three persons at the assassination site were taking motion-picture film from home-movie type cameras. Only one of these films has been widely seen, however, that of Mr. Abraham Zapruder, which was sold to Life magazine.

The entire assassination sequence is contained on Zapruder's film reprinted serially, frame-by-frame, in XXVIII,1-80. The films of two other movie-makers, Muchmore and Nix were not published by the commission.

What is critical for this inquiry is the fact that any motion picture camera exposes a certain number of still frames per second, which when run in sequence at the exposure speed create the movement seen on a screen. Zapruder's camera, after FBI testing, was found to expose film when fully wound (as his was) at 18.3 frames per second (WR, 49: V, 160-1). Not more than 105 frames, perhaps as

few as 90, show the impact of all the shots hitting Kennedy and Connally. In other words, simple arithmetic shows that the entire shooting of the two men took between 4.9 and 5.6 seconds.

The Rifle

Shortly after the assassination a rifle was found in the TSBD on the 6th floor. It was a 6.5mm Mannlicher-Carcano rifle with a 2.5X power Japanese telescopic sight mounted. The Carcano was the main infantry rifle used by the Italian Army from 1896 to 1945, its design being unchanged in that period. It is a powerful and accurate weapon which is readily and cheaply available in gun shops or by mail-order (I bought one myself in a hardware store in 1966 for \$9.95).

Testing of the alleged assassination rifle by National Rifle Association experts showed that, in firing the rifle, the minimum time between rounds, necessitated by manual operation of the rifle's rather long bolt action, is 2.3 seconds (III,407). This 2.3 seconds is only bolt operation time and does not include aiming, which adds, in my estimation, at least 0.5 second to the complete round-to-round firing time.

It is impossible to aim this weapon while operating the bolt, as it slides back 4-plus inches into the face of the shooter if his cheek is held to the rifle's stock.

Number of Shots

Next to the Carcano rifle in the TSBD three empty ~~shell cases were found~~ by the police. It is entirely possible that more shots were fired. But (1) it has been established already that this rifle could not be fired faster than approximately 2.5-2.6 seconds between rounds; with a stopwatch running from the first round at least 5.0-5.2 seconds were required to get off two additional rounds. (2) The Zapruder film shows the entire event, that is, the inflicting of all the wounds as taking 4.9-5.6 seconds.

It is immaterial to this discussion whether more wild shots were fired before or after the events shown in this 5-odd second span. Those who argue that Oswald did somehow fire 4 or more shots have to explain why other empty shell cases were not found.

Wounds

Kennedy and Connally are both visibly and seriously wounded within the first 1.5 seconds of the actual assassination sequence on Zapruder's film. Kennedy was wounded first in the upper back at a spot $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches below the top of his shirt collar and about 2 inches to the right of center, as is measurable in a straightforward way by looking at the holes in his shirt and suitcoat (exhibit picture, XVII,25). Evidence of this location for the back hit Kennedy sustained is reinforced by the pathologists' markings on a routine autopsy form made the night of Nov. 22 in Bethesda, Md., at a naval hospital to which Kennedy's body had been flown. (Pathologist's sketch, XVII,45).

The commission later said in its report that this bullet had entered the nape of Kennedy's neck [disregarding the location of the holes in his clothes] and passed through Kennedy completely, hitting at his necktie knot, thence into Connally sitting ahead of him. Since there is a one-plus second lag in Ken-

nedey's and Connally's reaction times (both visible on Zapruder's film), the commission said Connally had a "delayed reaction" to his wound (WR,112-3). However, Connally himself said that he heard the first shot clearly and was turning to see what was happening (all visible on Zapruder's film) before he was struck. Since bullets travel faster than sound this account by Connally is reasonable: otherwise he would have felt the hit before hearing it.

In any event a small hole in Kennedy's neck adjacent to his tie knot, which was much enlarged by a desperate tracheotomy performed at the Dallas Parkland Hospital by surgeons trying to keep the President alive, was construed by the commission as the exit hole for the above bullet which hit Kennedy in the back. This bullet, by the commission's hypothesis, then hit Connally in the mid-back, breaking his fifth rib, exiting from his chest in front to fracture the right wrist before stopping finally in his left thigh. The bullet in passing through Connally left a trail of fragments in both his chest and wrist areas.

The crucial question here is, could one bullet have done all the things claimed for it? Since both men were wounded within 1.5 seconds of each other, it is physically quite impossible for both of them to have been hit by separate shots from the Carcano rifle described above, whose minimum round-to-round time is 2.5 seconds. Therefore, they had to have been hit by one bullet if the single-assassin version of this event was to be upheld. If one shot didn't do it all, then there were at least two assassins.

Commission Exhibit 399, the Magic Bullet

While President Kennedy and Gov. Connally were being treated at the Dallas hospital, a bullet slug, Commission Exhibit #339(XVII,49) was found on one of the stretchers used to carry the men into emergency surgery. This slug is virtually whole, that is, it is neither dented, distorted, crumbled, or reduced significantly from its manufactured weight (160 grains new, 156.4 when discovered).

There are exactly three possibilities:

- (1) This bullet lodged in Kennedy's body and fell out during closed-chest massage performed on him in surgery, in which case it did not hit Connally as above, and therefore there were two assassins.
- (2) This bullet did pass through both men, as the commission expects us to believe, in which case we have extraordinary and very real difficulties in explaining how it came out in its pristine condition after leaving a trail of fragments, and shattering two heavy bones in Gov. Connally.
- (3) A conspirator planted this slug at Parkland Hospital in an effort to implicate the owner of the Carcano! It was established beyond doubt that this slug, Commission Exhibit #399, did come from the Carcano rifle found at the TSBD (see below).

The autopsy findings on Kennedy's death were reported in the initial FBI investigations (FBI agents were present throughout on this occasion (II,131)) as showing that the shot that hit Kennedy in the back did not pass through his body, but lodged in his back after penetrating less than two inches.

The commission's mammoth hearing/exhibits include things like Jack Ruby's mother's dental records

(XXII,394-5) and what amount to Lee Oswald's 7th grade school report cards (XXII,558-9). However, the commission declined to publish this report! Its important details however can be found in facsimile in Epstein, pp. 184 and 198.

The commission claims the President was wounded in a different spot than that indicated by the holes in his clothes and that the bullet passed all the way through, but provides no evidence in support of this claim other than sketches done by a naval medical corpsman who never saw the body (Comm. Exhibits #s 385,386; XVI,977). Perhaps this point of entry for the first shot was changed to provide a straight-line trajectory between Kennedy and Connally that would dispose of the difficulty raised immediately below in this article (see (3) below). Further difficulties and doubts arise about this autopsy when we learn that the notes taken by the autopsy pathologist, Naval Commander Humes, had been burned (XVII,48).

The physical evidence to this point alone has us in a cul-de-sac:

- (1) There is no physical evidence at all to support the back hit on Kennedy entering the nape of his neck.
- (2) Even if this is granted, and the bullet slug passed through him as claimed, it could not possibly have then also hit Connally, fractured two bones and left a trail of fragments and emerged from it all unscathed as it was discovered on the stretcher at Parkland Hospital.
- (3) The bullet slug could not, by anybody's arguments, have hit Kennedy where the holes in the shirt and coat are, then curved upwards to exit at his tie knot, then plunged downwards violently to hit Connally as would be required by the commission's hypothesis. Bullets do not trace such gyrating trajectories unless they are ricocheting. No bony structures in Kennedy were hit aside from his head (WR,543; XVI,983).

Where then did the small front wound near Kennedy's tie knot come from? Autopsy surgeons suggest that it came from the exploding impact of the shot which struck Kennedy's head, which threw over 40 fragments in all directions. One of these fragments passed out of Kennedy's head in a depressed forward trajectory making a small 4-5mm diameter hole (FBI report of Jan., 1964; facsimile in Epstein, 198-9). Indeed, the surgeons from Parkland Hospital interrogated by the commission said that the front neck wound might have been an exit hole for a virtually whole bullet, but only if the bullet in effect fell out of Kennedy with no energy left to hit Connally (VI,55). Any bullet passing out of a body at high velocity will make a larger exit than entry hole owing to the mushrooming, snowball effect of tissue being forced ahead and to the side of the passing slug. The hole in Kennedy's front neck was, however, smaller than the 6.5mm dia. of the Carcano's slugs (XVI,976).

Ballistics

All modern firearms with "rifled" barrels — i.e., manufactured with spiral ridges in their barrels which spin the passing slug and stabilize its flight — are unique in that every weapon makes a slightly different pattern of impressions from its ridges on the passing slugs. The science of taking the "fingerprints" (so to speak) of a gun by micro-photographic analysis is called ballistics. The bullet found in Parkland Hospital on the stretcher was beyond any

doubt fired from the Carcano rifle, which purportedly belonged to Oswald. No other slugs were recovered intact, though many fragments were found in Connally, and on the floor of the Kennedy car, and on the street. The commission said these fragments were "consistent" with being fired from the Carcano rifle, a claim I will accept even though such fragments do not ordinarily provide absolute ballistics identification of a rifle used.

The fragments are, however, patently inconsistent with the commission's own Exhibit #399, the whole bullet found on the stretcher, which, on the commission's own analysis, must have been the one from which all these fragments emerged. For, if this bullet did not hit Connally, then Oswald did not have time to get off the second shot whose impact on Connally is recorded on the Zapruder film. Further, if the second shot did hit one of the two men, then how do we account for the wounding of the bystander with the presumed stray second shot? Indeed, bullet #399 was said by the hospital orderlies who had found it to have come from Kennedy's stretcher, but the commission later said they were mistaken and that it had come from Connally's stretcher.

The explanation I offer which reasonably accounts for the discovery and condition of bullet #399 is

- (1) that in fact it lodged in Kennedy's back, as the initial autopsy reports first showed (it would appear that, in effect, the official autopsy report was later altered in a manner not well explained);
- (2) that it hit in the spot indicated by the hole in Kennedy's clothes;
- (3) that it penetrated "less than a finger length" in the soft back tissues that would not damage a bullet as the FBI report suggested (Epstein, 196);
- (4) that it fell out of Kennedy onto his stretcher during closed chest massage performed by the doctors at Parkland who were in fact using this method to try to revive Kennedy's heart action (WR, 538).

These statements are well documented; but the official version is both incredible and undocumented.

If my explanation of bullet #399 is correct, then Kennedy and Connally could not both have been shot by the same man. They were wounded too close in time for this to be in any way conceivable.

There is an argument that Oswald, in his extremity of fear, desperation, and rage, performed a superhuman feat of mechanical manipulation in his use of the Carcano rifle. In regard to this argument, (1) there is no evidence for such a claim but imagination, and some counter-evidence as to Oswald's marksmanship capability (see below) and (2) such explanations allow anybody to explain anything any way they see fit. It is a fudge-factor explanation.

Reconstructions and Tests

The Warren Commission ran numerous tests of the rifle, and tried to duplicate wounds sustained by Kennedy and Connally in test carcasses, etc., to lend support to its thesis that Oswald did it all himself.

I wish to point out the following:

- (1) The telescopic sight on the Carcano rifle was improperly mounted and had to be remounted and realigned by a machinist before this wea-

pon would shoot straight for test purposes (III,443-5).

- (2) The commission had three riflemen attempt to duplicate Oswald's gunplay. They fired from a thirty-foot-high tower at fixed targets 18 inches on a side 180 to 265 feet distant, with a repaired rifle, with as much time as they wanted for the first shot and with no trees obscuring vision anywhere on the test range. These three riflemen, I must add, were all rated as masters by the National Rifle Association; that is, they are qualified for the most exacting Olympic competition and are crack shots.

Oswald, on the other hand, was sixty feet from the ground in his supposed perch in the TSB, had the same distance to shoot through, but at a moving target (granting it was moving fairly slowly and almost entirely away from him with little lateral movement), with a faultily aligned scope, and no time at all to deliberate on the first shot as his alleged vantage point to the target was obscured by a large oak tree until 0.5 seconds before he let loose the first round and Kennedy was struck. Further, Oswald was rated by his former Marine Corps commander as a "rather poor shot" while on military duty in that service (WR, 191; VIII, 304ff).

What were the test results? All three master riflemen were able to hit their (fixed) targets with the same regularity as Oswald, but only one of the three equalled Oswald's alleged speed. (III,445). We are not told whether the three hit their silhouette targets in the actual target area or not — they merely had to put bullets into the advantageously large squares that included both a white background and the black head-upper body silhouette (III,445-6).

I wish to conclude my article by emphasizing that I am nursing no devil theory of history. I do not know who killed Kennedy nor their motives, etc. But I think I have shown satisfactorily from physical evidence — the number and types of wounds, the time elapsed, ballistics evidence involving bullet #399 and the types of wounds it is compatible with — that:

Oswald alone could not have shot President Kennedy.

I suggest that there was a conspiracy to the extent that his accomplice(s) remain undiscovered. I am convinced that the entire case should be reopened for a properly-handled, full-scale investigation.

Bibliography of books used and recommended to anyone interested in pursuing this matter:

1. Report, President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy (Washington, Govt. Printing Off., 1964). Citation in the article to this hardbound edition. Paper editions available.
2. Hearings before the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy, 25 vols. (Washington, Govt. Printing Off., 1964).
3. Epstein, Edward J., Inquest: The Warren Commission and the Establishment of Truth (Viking Press, New York, N.Y., 1966); paper edition available.
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5. Lane, Mark, Rush to Judgment (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, N.Y., 1966); paper edition available.
6. Thompson, Josiah, Six Seconds in Dallas (Bernard Geis Associates, New York, N.Y., 1967).