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SEPTEMBER 1992

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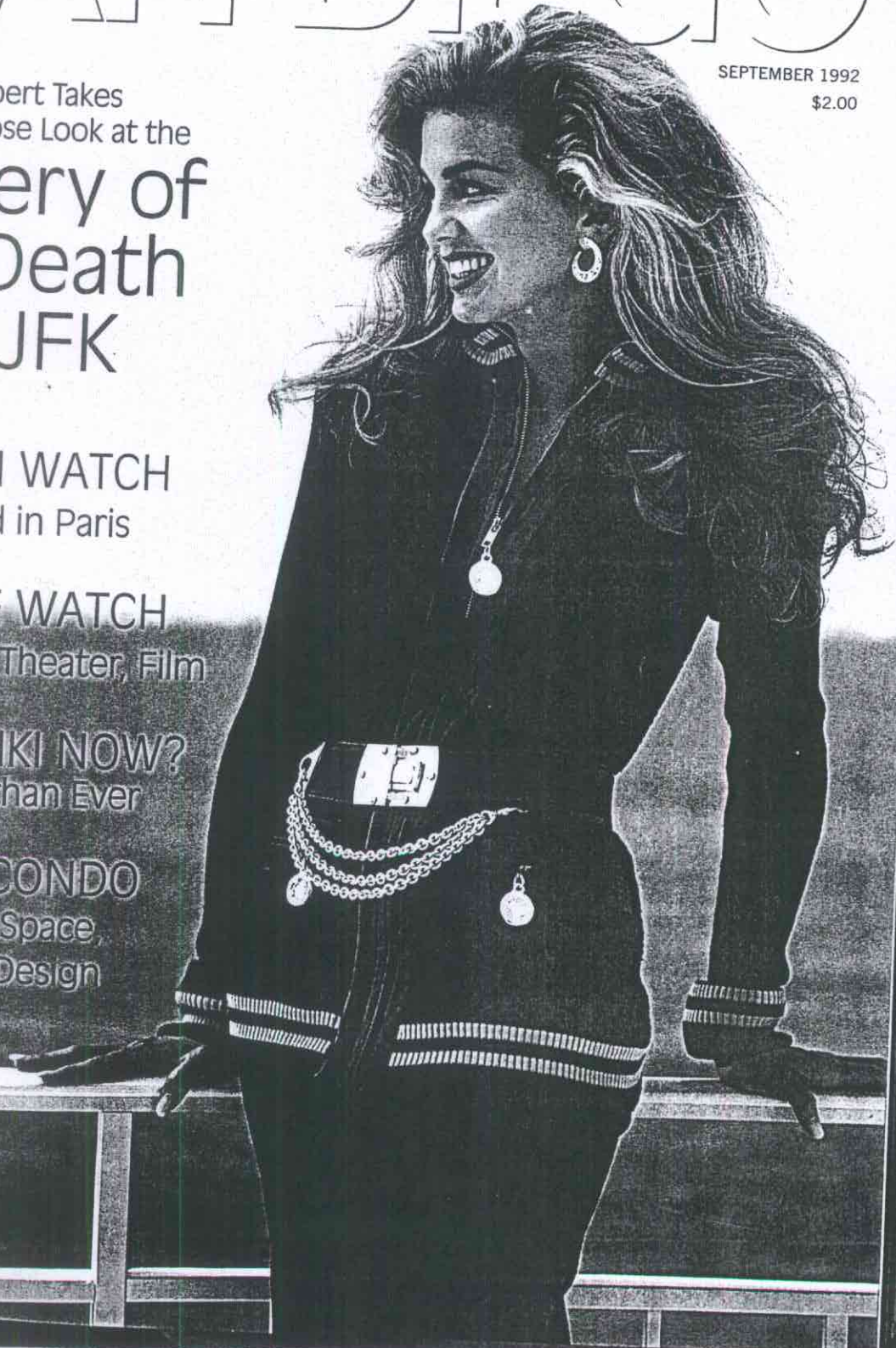
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Another Close Look at the
**Mystery of
the Death
of JFK**

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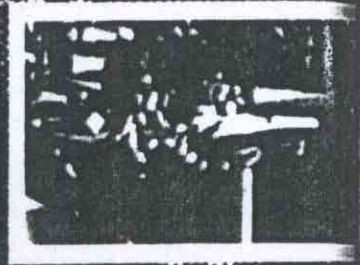
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Oswald's Mannlicher Carcano

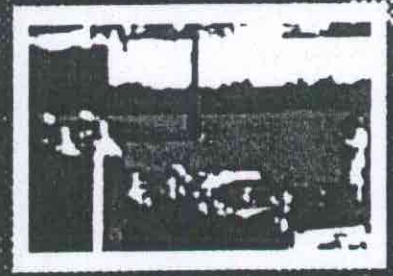
Oak Tree

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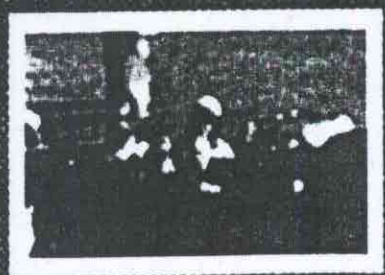


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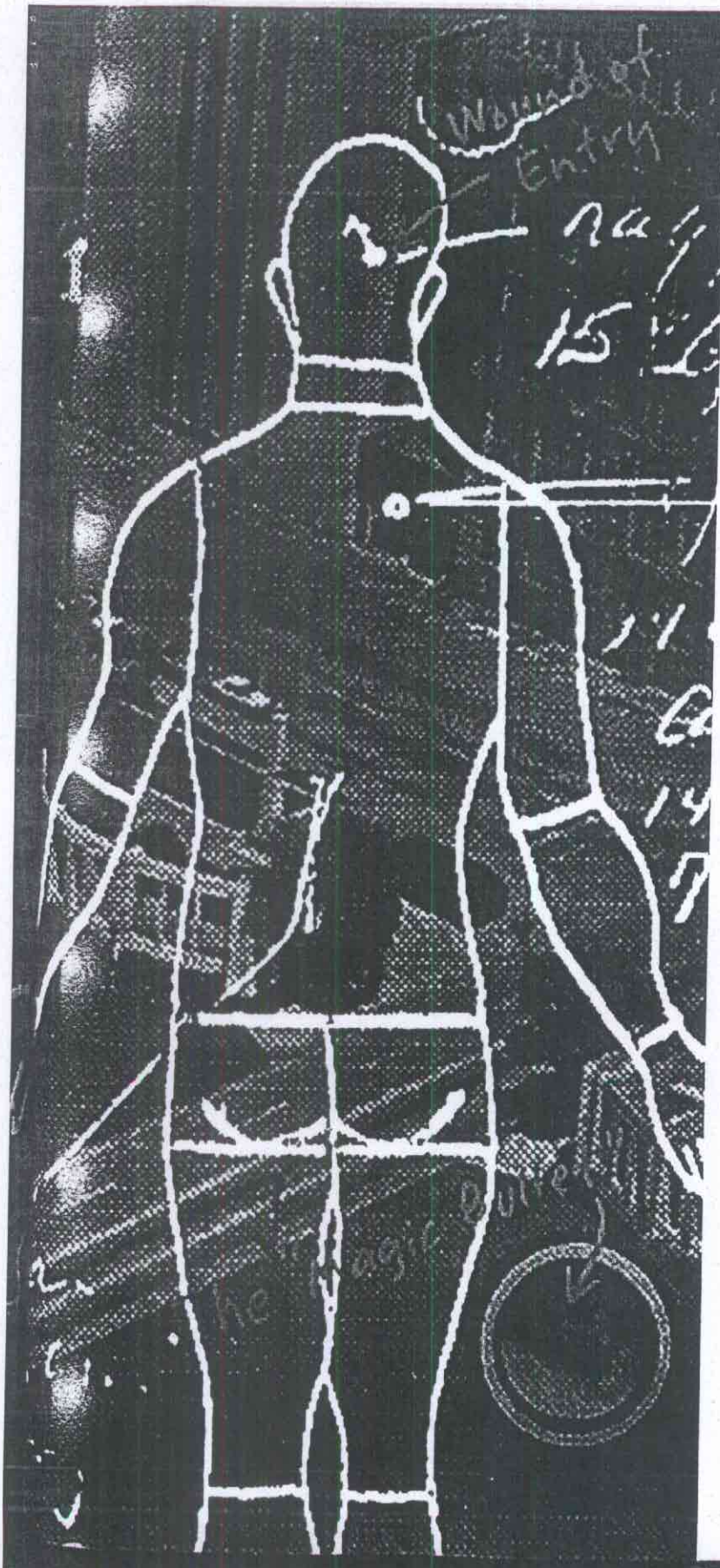
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LOS ANGELES TIMES PHOTO

JFK

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED IN DALLAS

A look at evidence both old and new prompts a San Diego 'assassinologist' to review the mysteries of Kennedy's death

By **Louis P. Kartsonis, M.D.**

FEW OF US OVER THE AGE OF 39 have forgotten the shock and sadness we felt on November 22, 1963. The emotional strains of history do not fade easily. In the nearly three decades since, the assassination of John F. Kennedy has been the subject of two major investigations, yet the events in Dallas

Montage by Tracy Sabin

JOHN B. CONNALLY

January 28, 1992

Dr. Louis P. Kartsonis
4747 Mission Blvd - Suite 5
San Diego, CA 92109

Dear Dr. Kartsonis:

I did not see the President after any of the shots on November 22. My wife saw him reach up and grasp his throat after the first shot, then saw him no more because she pulled me down in her lap and put her head down over mine after the second shot which hit me.

I think the first shot hit the President. I think the second shot hit me and I think the third shot hit him.

I know there are those that disagree but I am absolutely convinced that this is what happened.

Sincerely,
John Connally
John B. Connally

JBC/mp

The Warren
Commission theorized
that Connally suffered
a delayed reaction,
even though he had
been hit by the same
bullet that struck
Kennedy. Connally
did not agree.
He still doesn't.

continue to be shadowed by nagging doubts about the government's handling of the case.

On November 29, 1963, Lyndon Johnson issued an executive order establishing the Warren Commission. The order charged the commission with finding the facts of the case and reporting them, along with appropriate recommendations, to the American people. The following September, the commission published its findings in an 888-page report, along with 26 volumes of testimony and exhibits.

The commission concluded that three shots were fired at the presidential motorcade from the sixth-floor window at the southeast corner of the Texas School Book Depository Building. Two of those shots caused all of the wounds suffered by President John F. Kennedy and former Texas Governor John B. Connally. One shot missed the presidential limousine altogether. Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, murdered the President. There was no conspiracy. Case closed.

Or was it? Congress reopened the probe in 1976 and concluded two and a half years later that President Kennedy "was probably assassinated as a result of a conspiracy."

Coincidence or conspiracy? The skepticism of the nation is reflected by the public-opinion polls. In a Time magazine poll taken earlier this year, only 11 percent of Americans accepted the lone-gunman theory; 73 percent did not, and 16 percent were uncertain.

Editors' note: We published the original version of this article in November 1983. Because of the incredible surge of interest generated by Oliver Stone's controversial film, JFK, and because a number of the magazine's longtime readers requested reprints of our original article, we asked Dr. Kartsonis for an update.

The author, a San Diego ophthalmologist, has spent 20 years researching the assassination of John F. Kennedy. He has interviewed Lee Harvey Oswald's mother and Dr. Malcolm Perry, the surgeon who attended President Kennedy at Parkland Hospital. In 1979, Kartsonis became the fifth private researcher allowed to study the Kennedy autopsy file at the National Archives. In 1988, he filed a successful Freedom of Information Action against the Justice Department for release of a report on the House Assassinations Committee investigation.

In the last five years alone, 19 new books have been written about the case, and 11 investigative specials have aired on national television. In Dallas, a three-day seminar last November attracted 400 research buffs and "assassinologists" from around the country. To understand the evolution of the assassination debate, it is necessary to begin where Camelot ended.

The most graphic record of John F. Kennedy's murder is the 8-mm home movie taken by Dallas-area merchant Abraham Zapruder. Each frame of the Zapruder film was enlarged and numbered by the Warren Commission for analytical purposes. Zapruder's camera was tested and found to operate at a speed of 18.3 frames per second. FBI marksmen tested the Mannlicher-Carcano rifle found on the sixth floor of the book depository and established a minimum firing time of 2.3 seconds. When these two parameters are multiplied (18.3 frames per second times 2.3 seconds), the result establishes the minimum number of Zapruder frames that must elapse between shots—42.09 or 42 frames.*

The Warren Commission concluded that the first shot was fired in the interval between frame 210, when the President disappears behind a road sign, and frame 225 when he emerges and clearly shows signs of being wounded. In all likelihood, the commission found, a shot was not fired before Zapruder frame 210 (Z-210) because the line of fire from the sixth-floor window of the depository was obstructed between Z-166 and Z-210 by a large oak tree.

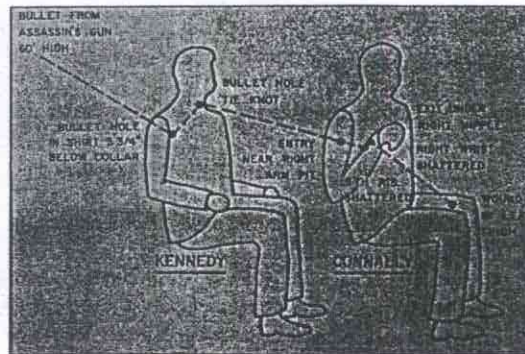
If Z-210 pinpointed the earliest moment for the first shot, then the earliest possible moment for the second shot would have been 42 frames later, or Z-252. Much to the chagrin of the Warren Commission, however, Connally clearly manifests a reaction to his wounds at Z-236. The commission was thus faced with a dilemma of either explaining how the assassination weapon could be fired twice in less than 2.3 seconds or conceding that Kennedy and Connally were hit by two separate bullets fired from two separate weapons, which would thus constitute a conspiracy.

The commission's explanation, which came to be known as the single-bullet theory—more popularly known as the magic-bullet theory—was that the bullet struck Kennedy in the back, exited from his throat and went on to cause all of the wounds suffered by Connally. Since Kennedy was obviously wounded by Z-225 and Connally did not display any overt stress until Z-236, the Warren Commission further theorized that Connally had suffered a delayed reaction, even though he had been hit by the same bullet that struck Kennedy.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 100



The medical evidence does not rule out the possibility that a sniper fired a shot from the grassy knoll; it only means that he would have missed.



THE REMARKABLE PATH OF THE PRISTINE BULLET, ACCORDING TO THE WARREN COMMISSION

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J F K

continued from page 77

John Connally did not agree. Neither did his wife. In correspondence earlier this year, the former governor reiterated his position, which has been rock solid since 1963: that the President was hit by the first shot, and he (Connally) was hit by the second. If that is true, then the single-bullet theory must fail, because the Mannlicher-Carcano could not be fired twice in the time span between Z-210 and Z-236.

At this point in the sequence, medical experts generally agree that Kennedy's neck wound was not severe enough to kill him. What happened next, however, left no doubt about the President's fate. The Zapruder film clearly shows the head shot driving Kennedy to the left and rear of the presidential limousine. To anyone who has viewed the sequence, the impression that the shot was fired from the President's right front is undeniable.

To the President's right front was the infamous grassy knoll and stockade fence from behind which another gunman may have fired. Evidence for a shot from the knoll came in the form of eyewitness and earwitness testimony. Of the 178 witnesses who were questioned, 21 believed the shots came from the knoll, 49 believed they came from the depository, 30 believed they originated elsewhere, 78 could not tell, and four thought the shots came from more than one direction. Seven witnesses claimed to have seen smoke rising from the knoll area.

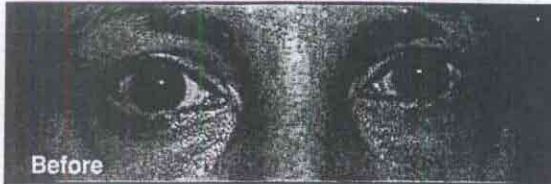
IN 1979, THE KENNEDY FAMILY attorney, Burke Marshall, granted permission for me to study President Kennedy's autopsy file at the National Archives—only the fifth time a private researcher had been given such access. Examination of these materials refuted the theory that Kennedy was hit from the right front.

The autopsy photos reveal an elliptically shaped bullet hole measuring 7.5 mm horizontally and 15 mm vertically in the back of the President's head approximately 100 mm above the occipital protuberance (the bony prominence on the back of the head). This bullet hole corresponded to a wound of entry and left no doubt that the President had been

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shot in the head from behind.

Had the President also been hit from the right front, then one of two things would have happened to that bullet: It would have either exited from the left side of the head or lodged in the brain. There are no wounds on the left side of the President's head, and an examination of the post-mortem skull x-rays revealed only fragments of metal in the right hemi-cranium, no whole bullet. A second head wound was noted on the right side of the President's head and measured 13 cm in its anterior-posterior dimension; an everted skull fragment was still attached to the lower rim. The size and characteristics of this wound were consistent with a wound of exit.

To the majority of medical experts, the forensic evidence is unequivocal that the President's head wound was caused by a single bullet entering from the rear and exiting out the right side. This does not rule out the possibility that a sniper fired a shot from the grassy knoll; it only means that he would have missed. It also does not adequately explain the backward lurch of Kennedy's body. The most tenable theory is that the explosion of Kennedy's head created a jet-propulsive effect backward, analogous to the activation of forward thrusters by an airliner upon landing.

One of the key questions in any analysis of the assassination is whether Lee Harvey Oswald, alone, had the ability as a marksman to accomplish the feat attributed to him. In the last 28 years, there have been three major studies to test that hypothesis. Of the three, the 1967 investigation by CBS News included a reenactment of the assassination under conditions that most closely simulated those in Dealey Plaza. Author Josiah Thompson reviewed the CBS study in his book, *Six Seconds in Dallas*.

A tower equal in height to the sixth floor of the depository and a ramp with the same contours as Elm Street were constructed. A motor-driven dolly mounted with an FBI target simulating a man's head and torso moved along the ramp at the same speed as the presidential limousine. Eleven marksmen were selected, includ-

ing three Maryland state troopers, three employees of a ballistics lab, two sportsmen, one weapons engineer, one ballistics technician and one ex-paratrooper. A Mannlicher-Carcano rifle of the same year and model as Oswald's was procured and equipped with a four-power telescopic sight.

What did the results show? Recall first that the Warren Commission situated the first shot in the interval Z-210 to Z-225 and the last shot at Z-313 (head shot). The commission thus credited Oswald with firing three shots and scoring two hits within 4.8 to 5.6 seconds.

CBS conducted 37 series of three shots each. In only 27 percent of the trials were the experts even able to fire three shots within the required 5.6 seconds. In those tests in which the CBS marksmen did fire as rapidly as Oswald, the average score was only 1.3 hits. And the experts did not have to contend with an oak tree, as Oswald would have.

Could Oswald have done it alone? It is not a mathematical impossibility. But the conclusions of scientific analyses are based on probabilities, not remote possibilities. Based on the CBS study, most casual observers and students of the case would conclude that more than one sniper fired shots in Dealey Plaza on November 22, 1963.

Even CBS questioned how fast Oswald could have fired three shots under normal circumstances. In the end, however, narrator Walter Cronkite reasoned, "These were not normal circumstances. Oswald was shooting at the President." And so, Cronkite concluded rather weakly, Oswald fired "probably fast enough."

THOUGH SEEMINGLY UNTENABLE, the single-bullet theory has weathered a generation of critical attacks for one simple reason: Alternative theories of conspiracy are fraught with overwhelming discrepancies and inconsistencies. A case in point is the theory that Kennedy and Connally were hit by two separate bullets fired from separate weapons. The previous arguments strongly suggest that possibility. But if that is true, where was the

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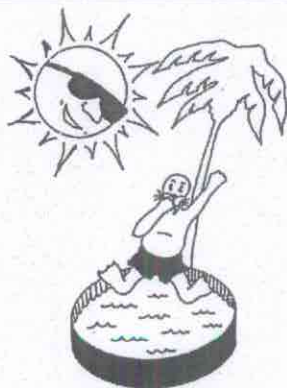
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other sniper? One weapon and three shell casings were found on the sixth floor of the depository. If the President and the governor were hit by two different bullets, then what happened to the bullets? One bullet (Commission Exhibit 399) was later recovered on a stretcher at Parkland Hospital.

According to the Warren Commission, CE-399 traversed Kennedy's neck, entered Connally's back, punctured his right lung, shattered 10 cm of the antero-lateral portion of the right fifth rib, tore a 2-inch gash below the nipple upon exiting, entered his right wrist and fractured the distal wrist bone (the radius), exited from the wrist and lodged in his left thigh—seven wounds, two broken bones. Yet CE-399 emerged in magnificently unscathed condition, sustaining but 1.5 mm of flattening at its base.

When similar ammunition was test-fired into goat carcasses and cadaver wrists, the bullets were severely mutilated. The few test specimens that resembled CE-399 were those fired into cotton.

In light of these test results, critics scoffed at the single-bullet theory. The Warren Commission was mocked as the Warren Omission. *Tonight Show* host Jay Leno quipped this year, "If the Warren commissioners had been asked to investigate Wilt Chamberlain's sex life, they would have concluded only one woman was involved."

Still, ballistics tests performed on CE-399 determined that it had been fired from Oswald's rifle. Furthermore, neutron activation analysis indicated that the metal fragments removed from Connally's wrist probably came from CE-399. Since no metal was recovered from the President's neck, it can never be positively established that Kennedy, too, was struck by CE-399. But if he was struck by some other bullet, then what happened to it?

With so much time passed, there is little hope that the tenets of the Warren Report will ever be fully reconciled with the seemingly endless theories of conspiracy. Witnesses have died, much evidence was mishandled, and the President's postmortem examination illustrated how *not* to perform an autopsy.

In the end, it is fair to say that the Warren Commission failed because it began with a conclusion that there was no conspiracy and worked *backward* toward the premise that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone, instead of examining all of the available evidence and working toward a credible conclusion.

In defense of the commission, Oswald's involvement is irrefutable, given the overwhelming evidence against him. For those who have forgotten, he also stood accused of murdering Dallas Police Officer J.D. Tippit. Later, Oswald was identified by six eyewitnesses as Tippit's assailant.

Today, thanks to the Oliver Stone blockbuster film, *JFK*, there are renewed calls to open all government files on the case. In March, Senator David Boren (D-Okla-homa) and Representative Louis Stokes (D-Ohio) introduced a joint resolution to do just that. Unfortunately, the resolution calls only for a review of the files by a court-appointed panel. Government agencies such as the FBI, CIA, Secret Service, and even Congress, reserve the right to postpone the release of any documents.

There may be hope in other areas. Perhaps scientific technology will someday supersede the bureaucratic inertia of the government and provide a solution to this celebrated case. It was, after all, an advance in science that enabled explorers to find the *Titanic*. Radiocarbon dating solved the mystery of the Shroud of Turin. Perhaps new photographic techniques will someday give researchers clear images of the grassy knoll and the Texas School Book Depository at the crucial moment.

It should not take an act of Congress to open the files on the Kennedy assassination. If we truly live in a free, open and democratic society, then the right of the American people to know how and why a President was murdered must outweigh the departmental interests of the FBI, CIA and Secret Service. There can be no justification at this point in time for further governmental stonewalling.

Three decades after the fact, justice can do more in this case. But history and the truth demand that we do no less. □