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November 26, 1966

Mr. Hoover's statement of Nov. 25 does not, in my opinion, satisfactorily answer the critics' questions concerning the performance and reporting of the autopsy of President Kennedy.

First, let us examine Mr. Hoover's interpretation of the FBI Supplemental Report of Jan. 13, 1964. He states that the doctors' early observation that "the bullet had penetrated only a short distance into the President's back" was referred to "in conjunction with the laboratory findings" concerning the damage to the front of the President's clothing "to point up" the "probability" that this early observation was in error.

Frankly, I do not see how any such intention on the part of the FBI can be read into the relevant section of the Report, (entitled "Laboratory examinations ... President's clothing.") The first half appears primarily intended to show that traces of copper from the bullets allegedly used were found in the clothing at the back wound. The second paragraph deals with the throat wound. Since no bullet fragments were found in the clothing, why was the fragmentation of the bullet which struck the skull mentioned? The implication seems to be that a fragment of metal (or bone) from the last shot caused the exit wound in the throat.

It should be noted that the latter interpretation was common in news reports apparently based on the FBI version of the shooting. (E.g., Washington Post, Dec. 18, 1963; NYT, Jan. 26, 1964, p. 56)

Since the intent of the Jan. 13 report is not clear from its text, one may ask whether, in fact, the laboratory examination of the clothing did indicate that the bullet had passed through the body. The Warren Report, on the basis of the testimony of FBI agent Frazier, states that "although the characteristics of the slit established that the missile had exited to the front, the irregular nature of the slit precluded a positive determination that it was a bullet hole." (P. 92) As Frazier put it, "that [the shape] is not specifically characteristic of a bullethole to the extent that you could say it was to the exclusion of being a piece of bone or some other type of projectile." (5H61) Testifying on the basis of his examination of the clothing, he said, "I can say that this hole in the [front] collar area could have been made by this bullet but I cannot say that the bullet which entered the back actually came out here or at some other place because I am not aware of the autopsy information as to the path of the bullet through the body." (5H61)

This unusually careful testimony, plus the text of the report itself, suggests that the Jan. 13 report did not mean to imply (or at least should not have meant to imply) that the laboratory examination "clearly" indicated that the medical observations were "probably" in error.

Even if my analysis is incorrect, how is one to interpret Mr. Hoover's statement that "since the F.B.I. knew the commission had a copy of the official autopsy, its contents were not repeated in an F.B.I. report"? (Emph. added) The point at issue is not why there was no FBI report specifically on the autopsy report, but why the Jan. 13 report did not reflect the autopsy report. At best, the Jan. 13 report is supposed to have pointed up the probability that the original observation was in error. Yet the autopsy report, which the FBI admittedly had in hand, seems to be a much stronger statement, precluding the possibility that the original observation was correct. Is it customary for the FBI to hint that an observation is in error (by putting it in the past perfect tense and "in conjunction with" a statement that may be a refutation) when it has solid evidence that it was in fact in error?

Mr. Hoover's statement is inadequate in other ways as a response to questions that have been raised. For example, it may well be that the FBI obtained a copy of the "original uncut" Zapruder film and "reproduced this for the commission, which since has turned it over to [the] national archives." However, FBI agent Shaneyfelt testified that he prepared Commission Exhibit 885, which he (incorrectly) described as the "majority" of the frames in the Zapruder film. As published by the Commission, four frames were spliced out, and two others were printed in reverse order. No explanation has ever been provided publicly. Also, Mr. Hoover's account of when and how the doctors decided that the bullet had gone through the body is inconsistent with the account on pp. 83-89 of the Warren Report, but that is another story altogether.

One would be much less suspicious of the entire investigation into the assassination if the FBI (or the Warren Report) had admitted, clearly and unequivocally, that they had made some mistakes. It is true that Commission staff members are now admitting that there were loose ends, contradictions, mistakes, and misstatements. (For example, Mr. Niebeler has advised that the Dec. 9 FBI report was not "of principal importance," as the Warren Report had claimed.) How many more "imprecise" statements are there in the Warren Report, which will be acknowledged only when the critics turn up irrefutable counter-evidence?

References: Statement by J. Edgar Hoover, New York Times, Nov. 26, 1966, p. 25.
FBI Supplemental Report, Jan 13, 1964 (See Appendix B of Inquest.)

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" I, personally, feel that any finding of the Commission will not be accepted by everybody, because there are bound to be some extremists who have very pronounced views, without any foundation for them, who will disagree violently with whatever findings the Commission makes."

J. Edgar Hoover
May 14, 1964

5/21/69

Dear Paul,

I have just reread your excellent 11/26/66 memo on Hoover's statement you date at 11/25 (which I think is that of publication rather than issue). I now notice in it what I did not recall from the original reading. At that time I was rather more interested in the evidence that it had, in large part, been inspired by the contents of WHII, which was not yet printed, especially those parts never published or used in appearances.

He said the nick in the tie was on the left side. That is not consistent with it having been caused by a projectile that cut both inside edges of the collar, for such a projectile should have hit the tie close to the middle. It is, however, consistent with a right-handed surgeon working from the head of the patient. If you add to this the absence of traces of metal (copper) and the absence of mention of these traces from the FBI summary and supplemental reports, I think some of Hoover's strange language assumes significance: he was trying to keep the FBI in the clear, knowing there was a fake explanation. Not inconsistent with this is what you properly describe as the "unusually careful testimony" by Frazier. It is not the normal course of events for him to have been making these kinds of studies he was making without awareness of the medical reports. In fact, it is certain that, with the record of the feds, he was intent upon making his work as consistent with that as he could get away with. It also is possible to give this "careful" testimony another and fingers-crossed-when-uttered explanation. What he actually said is not that he hadn't seen the autopsy report but "I am not aware of the autopsy information as to the path of the bullet through the body". He could have spent hours studying that report and still have said this for there is no "autopsy information" on the "path" of the bullet. That path, as from the time of WHITEWASH has remained unchallenged and now Finck has confirmed, was never traced. As I prove in POST MORTEM, they knew they hadn't traced it (Specter memo on doctors interview) but had projected it. In the light of this, the original opinion in these reports and cited by the SS agents is worth recalling.

Remember, also, that at the time these FBI reports of various characters were prepared Hoover fully expected they would never be made public. Did he not write you to that effect? Therefore, he had to keep himself and his agency in the clear in private, not public.

Frazier's testimony on the "character" of the front holes is not consistent with that he gave, limited as it was, on the jacket.

You might want to note on your filex copy (page 2, par. 1, that as published Ex885 also had the last 9 frames eliminated and as in the Archives, as of 5/16/69 one with Hill and Moerman in it still is placed after 313 and as published 283 is repeated twice whereas there is no 284.

If you can spare me two more copies of this, I'd like to file them as a reminder. It would help when I get them, for I forget so much now, if you could underline Hoover in one and Frazier in the other, in red.

I have the published copies of his statement and a mimeographed copy that I had marked up. When I decided to include in RM I wrote and phoned for a mimeo copy, without response. I got the copy I have from a reporter, not the FBI.

Sincerely,