



## JFK Lancer Online Resources

### PAUL C. PETERS, MD: THIRTY YEARS AFTER WARREN

**Brad J. Parker**

During the writing of his book, Case Closed, Gerald Posner seems to have conveniently solved the mystery of the discrepancy in President Kennedy's wounds between Dallas and Bethesda. Physicians who treated the President in Dallas recanted their original statements, claiming that they did not examine the wounds in detail (Posner 309).

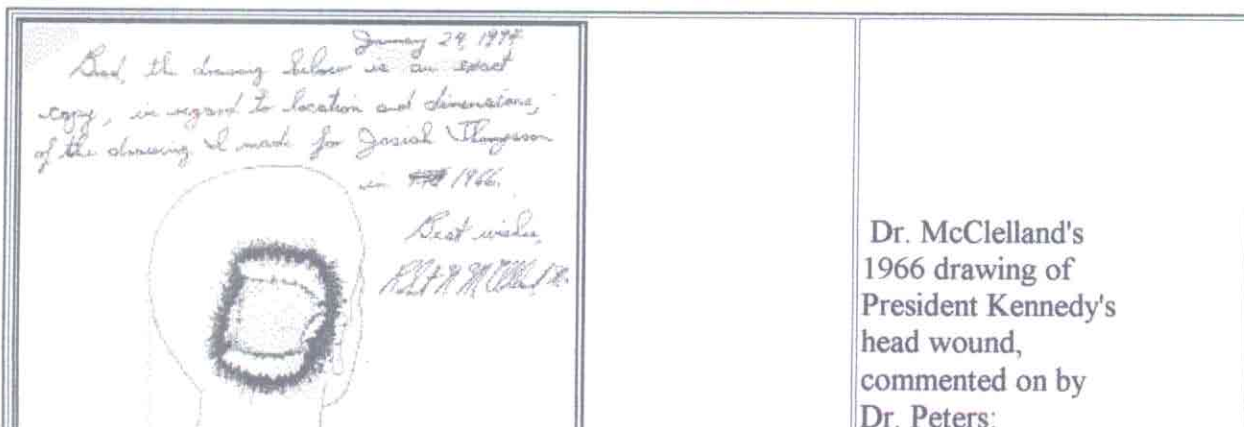
Mr. Posner leaves the impression that Ronald C. Jones, MD has also amended his previous testimony after an interview with the doctor in April of 1992 (Posner 312). However, when interviewed two months later, Dr. Jones stated that "I would stand by my original impression" of the wounds sustained by the President (Jones June 19, 1992). At first glance, it appears as though Mr. Posner has reported a change of opinion by Paul C. Peters, MD. However, subsequent contact with Dr. Peters with this author suggests that perhaps Mr. Posner did not fully explore Dr. Peters' memory and opinion of the President's head wound.

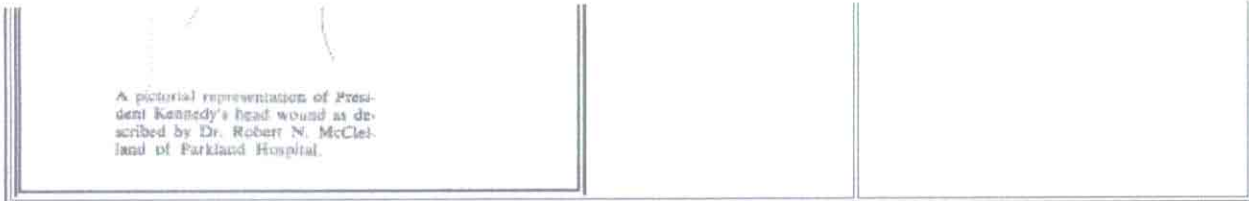
In testifying before the Warren Commission on March 24, 1964, Dr. Peters stated that he "noticed that there was a large defect in the occiput." He went on to describe what "appeared to be a bone loss and brain loss...in the right occipitoparietal area." When asked if he observed a wound below the large occipital injury, Dr. Peters said that he did not. Even though he did not actually observe the throat wound prior to the tracheotomy, he apparently had reason to believe that it was an entrance wound. "We speculated as to whether he had been shot once or twice because we saw the entry in the throat and noted the large occipital wound," he told Arlen Specter. It is not surprising that Mr. Specter did not return to the issue of "the entry in the throat" (6 WCH 71).

Dr. Peters subsequently described the severity of the intercranial injury to numerous researchers.

"I could see the occipital lobes clearly, and so I know it was that far back on the skull. I could look inside the skull, and I thought it looked like the cerebellum was injured, or missing, because the occipital lobes seemed to rest almost on the foramen magnum." Furthermore, he stated that "the cerebellum, and brainstem, might have been injured, or missing" (Lifton 324).

Gerald Posner's interview with Dr. Peters failed to yield any specific location for the wound. "The only thing I would say is that over the last twenty-eight years, I now believe the head wound was more forward than I first placed it. More to the side than to the rear." After clearly describing the damage to the cerebellum, and perhaps the brainstem, in previous statements, he told Posner, "I saw the photograph of the brain when I was in Washington for the 'Nova' program, and I saw the cerebellum was depressed, but not lacerated or torn. It was definitely pressed down and that would be that damage I referred to in 1964" (Posner 311). And with that, Mr. Posner asserts that the medical controversy resulted from errors of epidemic proportions among the Parkland trauma team.





A pictorial representation of President Kennedy's head wound as described by Dr. Robert N. McClelland of Parkland Hospital.

In a March 4, 1994 letter to the author, Dr. Peters stated that,

"the wound, I still maintain, was occipitoparietal. . ." In commenting on a 1966 drawing by Robert N. McClelland, MD (see figure) which depicts a posterior skull wound, he wrote that the injury in the drawing "extend(s) too far down toward the neck." "I believe the drawing pictures the wound a little farther posterior than it actually was." "At the time of the surgery itself, we could see a large hole in the occipitoparietal area" (letter to the author).

Addressing the issue of his prior descriptions of the cerebellum, Dr. Peters said that "the brain I was shown" [author infers that Dr. Peters is referring to a photo of the brain and not the brain itself.] when he reviewed the autopsy materials in 1988 showed the cerebellum to be "severely depressed on the side of entry of the bullet" (letter to the author). He told Gerald Posner that it was this depression of the cerebellum to which he had mistakenly referred as a laceration in previous statements (Posner 311). Regardless of its condition, one must assume that the cerebellum was observed in Trauma Room One, as it is unlikely that he would describe a structure which was not exposed. It is interesting to note that the view of the brain through the wound as described in the autopsy report would not have provided a view of the cerebellum or brainstem (WCR 538-546).

In spite of many of his colleagues, who have chosen to change their descriptions of the head wound by appearing in *JAMA* and *Case Closed*, Dr. Peters maintains that his original opinion is essentially correct. The massive injury involved "the outer portion of the occipital area and part of the parietal area of the skull. I have not changed my mind. The review of the autopsy findings at the National Archives 25 years after the injury merely reinforces my statement which I gave to the Warren Commission. I told them there was a 7 cm. (at least) hole in the occipitoparietal region" (letter to the author). Interestingly, the autopsy findings to which he was referring should have reflected a thirteen centimeter wound to the right temporoparietal skull (WCR 538-546). One is left only to speculate as to what Dr. Peters observed in the National Archives which reinforces his description of an injury which directly contradicts the autopsy findings.

#### SOURCES:

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Lifton, David S., *Best Evidence*, New York, Carrol and Graf Publishers, Inc., 1988.

McClelland, Robert N., MD Professor of Surgery, U.T. Southwestern Medical School, 1966 drawing of President Kennedy's head wound, published by Josiah Thompson, 1967.

Peters, Paul C., MD., Professor and Chairman, Division of Urology, Department of Surgery, U.T. Southwestern Medical School, Letter to the author, March 4, 1994.

Posner, Gerald, *Case Closed*, New York, Random House, 1993.

The President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy, Hearings Before the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy, Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1964.

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