

# EDITORIAL and OPINION PAGE

## How Did JFK Shoulder Wound Become 'Wound at Base of Neck?'

Last of five articles

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The commission's problems with the medical evidence became quite serious when a study of the Zapruder film revealed that a maximum of 1.8 seconds elapsed between the times at which the President and Gov. John Connally were wounded. Since the minimum time in which the alleged assassin rifle could be fired twice is 2.3 seconds, either there were two assassins or both men were hit by the same bullet.

The testimony of both the governor and his wife indicates that he was hit by a separate bullet. The governor testified that it was "not conceivable" to him that he was hit by the first bullet. The commission concluded that the governor had a delayed reaction to his wounds despite testimony to the contrary by medical experts.

The first report on the autopsy performed at Bethesda was released by the Associated Press and published widely. It quoted a "reliable source familiar with the autopsy finding" and described the President's three wounds as a small wound in the back with no point of exit, a massive head wound, and a throat wound caused by the exit of a metal fragment or piece of bone from the fatal shot in the head.

Two FBI agents observed the entire autopsy and asked questions of the doctors at Bethesda whenever necessary. They wrote up a complete report on the autopsy which they submitted to J. Edgar Hoover. On Dec. 9, 1963, the FBI sent a report to the commission which summarized the investigation it had conducted. It contained an account of the autopsy findings which described the back wound as being "just below" the shoulder with no point of exit.

Commander Humes, who performed the autopsy, testified that he was unable to find any path of outlet for the bullet. Two Secret Service agents also testified that no path was found through the body. As

corroboration for the FBI report's description of the location of the wound as below the shoulder, Secret Service agent Bennett saw a bullet hit the President "about four inches down from the right shoulder." Furthermore, Secret Service agent Hill, who observed the body just after the autopsy, stated that he observed "an opening in the back, about six inches below the neckline.

Finally, the matching bullet holes in the jacket and shirt worn by the President are about 5 1/2 inches below the top of the collar. Since films of the assassination show that the President's jacket did not "ride-up" on his back, this in a precise manner corroborates the testimony of the two Secret Service agents and the FBI report. The commission was thus faced with two dilemmas. If the bullet did not go through the President, then how could it have caused the governor's wounds?

Secondly, since the only wound in the front was at the base of the throat, how could a bullet traveling downward and entering below the shoulder have exited higher up at the neckline?

The problem was solved when the "official" autopsy report was released on Dec. 23, 1963. This autopsy report gave the location of the back wound as the base of the neck and said that the bullet passed through the neck and exited at the throat wound! How did the commission explain this?

According to the official account, on the morning following the autopsy, Commander Humes learned that there had been a wound in the throat which was obliterated by a tracheotomy. He then claimed to have "deduced" a path for the bullet from the back wound (now supposedly at the base of the neck) to the throat wound. No explanation is offered for how a wound below the shoulder became a wound at the base of the neck.

One can only become suspicious when it is learned that Humes burned the original draft of the autopsy in the privacy of his

home after writing the "revised" version. Photographs and X-rays taken of the President could have cleared up all controversy concerning the wounds, but they were never viewed by the doctors or the commission during the investigation.

The implication that the commission autopsy report was purposely falsified is almost too disturbing to consider, but the facts beg explanation.

The commission accepted into evidence as Exhibit 399 a bullet allegedly found on Gov. Connally's stretcher. This bullet was ballistically matched to the alleged assassin rifle, and supposedly passed through the President's body and caused all of the governor's wounds. But expert testimony indicated that it could not have caused the governor's wounds. Furthermore, although this bullet is perfectly whole, similar bullets fired in the wrists of human cadavers were quite flattened.

At least 10 witnesses who came forward to testify claimed that they were intimidated by the overzealous FBI. Many witnesses who did not appear before the commission complained to independent investigators of harassment.

The Dallas police lieutenants were unfair and dishonest, yet the commission accepted them into evidence. Sixty-one witnesses alleged that the FBI misreported their testimony. In almost every instance the testimony misreported would have detracted from the commission's case. One can appreciate the FBI's desire to put an end to rumors, but it was the commission's job to ascertain the truth.

One witness, a police sergeant, reported that a commission attorney threatened him and tried to get him to change his testimony.

Many witnesses were the victims of constant threats. One witness was badly beaten and disappeared from Dallas.

A Secret Service agent asked to appear

before the commission to testify on the failure of the Secret Service to take proper precautions. He was indicted by the federal government on charges of attempting to sell government files. Even in the face of such charges he asked to testify, but the commission never called him as a witness.

Warren Reynolds, a witness to the flight of a man from the Tippit slaying and who told police he could not identify the man as Oswald, was shot through the head but miraculously lived to tell about it. A man was arrested who had called a relative and admitted the shooting, but he was soon freed when an alibi was provided by a girlfriend.

Eight days later the girlfriend was arrested for "disturbing the peace" by fighting with her roommate. Two hours later she was found hanging by the neck in her jail cell. Her death was ruled a suicide. About three weeks later her best friend and confidante was found dead in a ditch next to her automobile about 14 miles from Dallas. Meanwhile, an attempt was made to kidnap Reynolds's 10 year old daughter.

The commission was given an unreasonable time limit in which to complete its work. The commissioners were all very busy men who were limited in the time they could devote to the investigation.

When the report was published some important questions still remained unanswered. There was considerable disagreement between attorneys and commissioners during the course of the investigation. The commission, relying heavily on the FBI report's hastily reached conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald was the sole assassin, strove to protect the nation's stability by dispelling rumors. Ironically, the FBI autopsy report now undermines the case for the sole assassin.

Whether or not there was a conspiracy is still a matter of conjecture. Although the evidence clearly indicates the presence of a second assassin.