

WARREN COMMISSION

Twenty-seven years ago, the Warren Commission concluded President John F. Kennedy was murdered by lone gunman, Lee Harvey Oswald, setting off a debate that even after a quarter-century has not been settled.

Established by President Johnson seven days after the November 22, 1962 murder, the Commission, headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren, was ordered to evaluate all the evidence and circumstances of the assassination and report a conclusion.

After nearly 10 months' work, the panel, which included former CIA head Allen Dulles, and then-Representative Gerald Ford, (R-Mich.), transmitted its report to President Johnson on September 24, 1964. It was released to the public three days later.

Unlike the media scrutiny associated with Watergate and subsequent intensive investigative journalism, the established press of the time did little to refute the Commission's findings. However, critical reaction to the 26-volume document, with its scores of irrelevances and inconsistencies (and, amazingly, no index), was immediate and has remained strong throughout subsequent decades.

In fact, national polls spanning time from the immediate post-assassination period to the present day, consistently reveal that a vast majority of Americans do not believe Oswald

acted alone and that some form of conspiracy to kill the President existed.

THE MAGIC BULLET THEORY...

The most controversial and most challenged of the Warren Commission findings throughout the years is the "magic bullet theory"; the determination that one bullet hit both President Kennedy and former Texas Governor John Connally. The "magic bullet" scenario contends the Governor Connally, riding in the front seat of the President's car, was hit by the same bullet that pierced the President's neck, after it changed direction. The path of the bullet makes it highly unlikely it could have done all the damage it did to both men, and that it emerged in pristine form to be found beside Governor Connally in the hospital makes it impossible.

The Warren Commission had concluded that the two men were hit less than 2.3 seconds apart. But Oswald's rifle, a single-shot Italian model, was found by the Commission to be incapable of firing faster than one shot every 2.3 seconds. Thus, unless the same bullet went through both the President and the Governor, they had to be shot by two different gunmen.

More than any other issue, the "magic bullet" theory split the Commission. Congressman Gerald Ford and Allen Dulles were among the Commission's strongest supporters of the single bullet scenario. Other members, however, including Congressmen Hale Boggs (D/LA), Senator John Sherman Cooper (R/KY), and Senator Richard Russell (D/GA), strongly believed

there was no evidence to support the single bullet theory.

Nonetheless, the Warren Commission's final report language stated there was "persuasive evidence that one bullet caused all the wounds."

CONSPIRACIES THEORIES

WARREN COMMITTEE MEMBERS AND PRINCIPALS

In general, the Commissioners met infrequently and rarely attended witness hearings. In fact, all seven commissioners were never present at any one hearing session.

The Commissioners included:

Chief Justice Earl Warren: Warren was reluctant to chair the committee but was persuaded by President Johnson.

Allen W. Dulles: Dulles had a long and colorful history in intelligence and covert operations. He seemed predisposed to believe in the lone gunman scenario. At the Commission's first meeting, Dulles presented his fellow Commissioners with a book about American Presidential assassins that concluded a majority were committed by a single individual. Dulles handled all liaisons with the CIA during the investigation, especially inquiries concerning CIA/Mafia plots to kill Castro and other covert operations and their relation to the assassination.

Senator John Sherman Cooper: A Kentucky Republican, Senator Cooper always remained "unconvinced" of the conclusions of the Commission.

Senator Richard Russell: Russell did not believe in the

lone gunman theory and requested a footnote to the section on the magic bullet theory noting his dissent. Warren, however, insisted on unanimity in the Report.

Congressman Gerald Ford: Ford was thought to be the strongest supporter of the single or "magic" bullet theory.

Congressman Hale Boggs: Boggs never believed in the lone gunman theory and was thought to believe the FBI withheld evidence from the Commission. He subsequently became a sharp critic of the FBI and its director, J. Edgar Hoover.

John J. McCloy: McCloy had been Assistant Secretary of War during WWII. He served as High Commissioner of Germany from 1949-52 and during that time helped build the modern U.S. intelligence apparatus. Later, he served as chairman of the board of the Chase Manhattan Bank and the Ford Foundation.

David Belin: Belin served as a staff counsel to the Commission and has been, since that service, a strong apologist in the media and on the speaking circuit for the Warren Report.

Arlen Specter: Today, Specter is the senior senator from Pennsylvania. In 1964, as a junior counsel on the Commission staff, he was a major architect of the "single bullet theory."

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