



Cyril Wecht was a consultant for Oliver Stone's "JFK."

Post-Gazette

Q & A

WECHT: ONE-BULLET THEORY 'IMPOSSIBLE'

Dr. Cyril Wecht, a forensic pathologist who lives in Squirrel Hill, was a technical consultant to Oliver Stone during the filming of Stone's controversial movie, "JFK." Wecht, a former county coroner and commissioner, has been a critic of the Warren Commission's conclusion that the same bullet that struck President John F. Kennedy in the back and exited his neck on Nov. 22, 1963, fractured a rib and the right wrist of Gov. John Connally, who was seated directly in front of Kennedy in the limousine. He recently discussed the movie and the "single-bullet theory" with Post-Gazette staff writer Mark Belko.

Q: How do you feel about being associated with this movie? It has encountered a lot of criticism since its release — people saying it has distorted history, that there were distortions of the truth, distortions of testimony, that sort of thing.

A: The answer to your question is that I'm very proud and happy to be involved in the movie. As a movie it is a work of art, it is really top-notch and the actors are outstanding. So I'm pleased. It was a lot of fun.

I frankly am very puzzled by the reactions [of] the New York

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Times, et al. I don't understand what is responsible for their incredible spasmodic convulsive reaction to this.

It is incredible hypocrisy, it is quintessential hypocrisy for The New York Times and their ilk to be attacking Oliver Stone and his right to make a movie when they can editorially [attack] anybody, any time on anything, [even] the same U.S. government that they are now allied with, their big, big bosom buddy.

Rewriting history? According to whom? According to them. The fact is that in every national survey or poll that has been done we've seen around 75 to 80 percent-plus of the American people objecting to the Warren Commission report. The one that interestingly has lower figures was done by the Washington Post and even that one was 56 percent who rejected the Warren Commission's conclusion about Lee Harvey Oswald being the sole assassin and only 19 percent, I believe, who said they agreed with it. And the House [Select Committee on Assassination] itself concluded that with a high degree of probability there was a conspiracy, there were two people shooting.

Q: The movie alleges there was a huge conspiracy involving the CIA, the military-industrial complex, the Mafia and the media. If that were true, don't you think that in the 28 years after the assassination that someone

would have cracked or come forward?

A: I personally do not subscribe to such a massive conspiratorial plot with such a multitude of parties. I do not believe that all of those groups were involved.

I believe it's much more limited insofar as who knew everything. I think there were probably less than six people.

Specifically, it was a maverick element, a rogue element of the CIA, the only outfit that could have engineered this. Now I do believe that there came to be—in some instances consciously, in other instances unwittingly—a secondary conspiracy of a much greater magnitude in covering up things. But I don't believe that those people knew anything about what was going to happen. I don't think they were at all involved in orchestrating it.

Q: What about the historical accuracy of "JFK"?

A: I can think... of a dozen or so [movies]... in which I would strongly disagree and many historians would probably disagree with the way in which things were portrayed in movies... Remember the movie, "Mississippi Burning?" Remember the movie, "The Last Temptation of Christ?" Remember the movie, "Reds"? People have made movies that you and I might disagree with. I've seen movies that have bothered me greatly, as a Jew, that have attempted, in my opinion, to whitewash things that were done by Nazis

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—Dr. Cyril Wecht

and Nazi sympathizers in foreign countries going into and during World War II.

I really don't understand why Oliver Stone is being held to some set of criteria, some measuring yardstick that has not heretofore been applied for anybody else, including other movie makers.

Q: Let me ask you about the Select Committee report. You mentioned there was probably a second gunman, that there was probably a conspiracy. Yet of the 20 medical experts that reviewed the autopsy materials, 19 of them concluded that all of the shots came from behind, that indeed the single-bullet theory was correct. You were the lone dissenter. How do you account for that?

A: Number one, there were nine forensic pathologists on the panel. You and I have read the same articles and they use the number 20. I don't know where they get the number 20 from. What they've done is piled everyone on. There were nine pathologists on the panel.

My answer to that is don't judge me by my eight colleagues. Judge my eight colleagues by their answers. Judge my eight colleagues by an objective review of the single-bullet theory.

You are aware that they did an experiment in 1964 at Edgewood Army Arsenal in Maryland, shooting the same ammunition from another Mannlicher-Carcano weapon into cotton wadding and then through goat

carcasses to break one rib of a goat to simulate Connally's rib fracture and then through the wrist of human cadavers to simulate Connally's wrist fracture? Are you aware that all of those bullets were substantially deformed, several fragmented? And yet they concluded that the stretcher bullet, which had broken both a rib and wrist of Gov. Connally and emerged near pristine, could have done so.

Are you aware that that panel of forensic pathologists concluded that the bullet through Kennedy's neck had a slightly upward trajectory? You show me then how that bullet coming out of Kennedy's neck and moving over to the left and forward can then turn over to the right and hit Connally behind the right armpit, and then move downward at about a 27-degree angle through his chest and a 45-degree downward angle thereafter. And their answer was bullets do strange things.

Q: There were some neutron activation tests done on the fragments removed from Gov. Connally's wrist. Those fragments indicated that the bullet found on the stretcher was the same bullet those fragments came from.

A: Well, it's my understanding that the one fragment that was removed from his wrist was consistent, yes, with the metallic composition of the stretcher bullet. But not to the exclusion of other bullets of an identical composition—a 6.5 millimeter, lead copper jacket, lead core bullet. And

then, of course, we have all the other fragments that were not tested for.

Q. You've alluded to the single-bullet theory before. What is wrong with it?

A. Three things. Its weight, its condition and its trajectory.

The bullet, as found, their stretcher bullet, weighed 158.6 grains. That bullet, in its store-bought condition, is about 161 grains. So we have a weight loss of about 1.5 percent. Yet we have fragments of metal in Kennedy's chest, Connally's chest, Connally's wrist and Connally's thigh, as well as the very fine particles that would have been dispersed in midair, transverse from one part of the anatomy to another. Yet we're told all of these fragments together ... weighed no more than 1.5 percent of the original mass of the bullet. That's impossible.

Reason number two — I've already told you about it — is its condition. And the only experiment the government ever did totally torpedoed their own single-bullet theory.

The experiment was repeated by one person. That's a John Nichols, a professor of pathology at the University of Kansas School of Medicine. John's experiment completely duplicated the Edgewood Army Arsenal [the government's experiment]. Those bullets that went through human cadaver wrists, some of them fragmented, all of the others were significantly deformed. The bullet that broke a rib of an animal carcass had significant deformity [but] not as much as the one that struck the human cadaver wrist. So here we have the proof. This isn't speculation on my part. I'm taking the government's own evidence and saying it's impossible.

Reason number three is its trajectory. You don't have to be a forensic pathologist. Just take the official diagram of the car, take the photos, not only from the Zapruder film, other photos, and they show the positions of Kennedy and Connally in that car. It's my colleagues who are speculating and conjecturing, not I, as to well, what if [Kennedy and Connally] sat like this and what if they sat like that. Yeah sure, and what if pigs could whistle or fly? We don't have any what-ifs. We know how they were sitting. We know where the jump seat in that car was in relation to the rear seat. We know that Connally was directly in front of Kennedy. And so

you draw a straight line. The bullet struck no bone or cartilage in Kennedy's upper back, lower neck. And it moved then from back to front, from right to left.

The bullet emerges from the front of Kennedy's neck. It has to then stop and turn in midair and hit Connally ... behind the right armpit. It then proceeds downward and leftward and then goes into the wrist at a different downward angle and then over to the left thigh. The trajectory absolutely is impossible.

There's no question that you cannot get a bullet emerging from Kennedy's neck, moving leftward, downward and forward, to hit into Connally's right armpit area. Impossible.

The single-bullet theory is sheer unadulterated nonsense.

Without the single-bullet theory you cannot have a sole assassin ...

You've got to have two people shooting and that to me means conspiracy.

Q: How do you think the shots occurred, what was the sequence and where did they come from?

A: Well, it's hard for me to arrive at a precise scenario because, again, I've been deprived of materials and now there are some serious questions raised about whether some of the autopsy photos and X-rays have been altered.

But I'll tell you what I do feel is definite. There were definitely two shooters — one from the grassy knoll area and one from the Texas School Book Depository Building, not the southeast corner but a position fur-

ther to the west, further down toward the grassy knoll area. I think there's a very strong likelihood there was a third shooter from the rear, probably the Dal-Tex Building — triangulation fire, which would be classical.

The sequence of shots? It's not possible to give you the exact sequence, except that we know Kennedy was struck first. There's a strong likelihood now that that shot in the neck was a wound of entrance. We know that Connally was not struck by the same bullet.

Q: You believe that it was a rogue element of the CIA that did the shooting. If that were the case, what motivation would the government have to cover it up?

A: Well, the motivation to cover it up was that it was a fait accompli. You could not bring back the president. An awful lot of damage would be done to the government psychologically in every way. Who knows what that might lead to? A lot of people who were in the positions of authority were not particularly unhappy that Kennedy was out of the way. The important thing was to assuage the anxiety, put it to rest and move ahead with the business of the day. The second big reason was that there were a lot of reputations that were at stake.

And these were powerful, powerful organizations. The FBI and CIA today are not Mickey Mouse organizations [but] in 1963, the early '60s, the CIA and FBI, they were really unrestrained, totally, totally uncontrolled agencies. They pretty much did whatever they wanted to.

Q: This rogue element in the CIA that you believe assassinated Kennedy, what was its motivation?

A: Its motivation was to eliminate John Kennedy, whom they could not eliminate in any other way and also to pretty much eliminate the likelihood of Bobby Kennedy, or, to put it another way, 13 more years of the Kennedys — five more because Kennedy would have been re-elected ... and eight years of [Bobby Kennedy].

They were looking at a totally different approach, from civil rights to Cuba to Russia to the Vietnam War and so on. They could not touch these guys. These guys had charisma. They could go on television any time. Jack Kennedy could go on television and make Americans believe, if he wanted to, that night was day and up was down. So the power, the magnetism, the strength, the personal family wealth. There's no other way to deal with this. You couldn't sit back and say let democracy run its course.