

The Answerable Question

It is our opinion, as previously stated, that nothing would be gained by reopening a formal investigation into the assassination of President Kennedy; that the findings of the Warren Commission are an adequate interpretation of the available facts.

There are, however, two qualifications that should be added to this general conclusion. First, should new evidence at any time be discovered, the investigation should of course be reopened officially. Second, there is one major point of contention concerning the commission's findings that can and should be clarified without delay.

Much of the responsible criticism of the commission's case centers on the so-called "single bullet theory." That hypothesis, accepted by the majority of the commission members, holds that the first bullet from Oswald's rifle passed through Kennedy's neck, through Governor Connally's chest, through his left wrist, finally lodging in his left thigh.

The critics were quick to point out a number of questionable factors in this thesis. The FBI agents, present during the autopsy, reported that the doctors were unable to trace the path of the bullet through Kennedy's body. And a preliminary sketch made by one of the autopsy doctors showed the location of the wound in the President's back as being in the shoulder, not in the neck as required to uphold the single bullet theory.

Adding to the controversy was the testimony by Governor Connally. The governor was certain, and remains convinced, that he and the President

were wounded by two separate shots.

The commission answered the charges by pointing out that the FBI report was based on preliminary findings of the autopsy; that the doctors later did in fact trace the path of the bullet through Kennedy's neck. The sketch of the wound location was, according to a belated explanation by the doctor who drew it, merely a rough approximation never intended to be accurate. And Governor Connally's testimony was, from the outset, discounted by the commission as the distorted recollection of a split second of confusion and trauma.

There is no need for this kind of argument to continue, for the concrete evidence needed to settle it is available. The quickest and surest way to remove most of the doubts would be an examination of the photographs and X-rays made during the autopsy. The pictures, which would readily show the location of the wound, were never seen by the members of the commission, who relied instead on the verbal reports of the autopsy doctors.

Representative Hale Boggs, a member of the commission, has recently suggested that a panel of doctors should be named by the attorney general to examine the pictorial evidence. It might also, it seems to us, be advisable to include on such a panel at least one of the major critics of the Warren Commission:

In that way—assuming that the pictorial evidence supports the single bullet theory—many of the reasonable questions that have arisen will be finally and satisfactorily answered.