

JFK Experts Support Single-Bullet Theory

Washington

Displaying President Kennedy's bullet-riddled clothing to help make their point, medical experts yesterday supported the Warren Commission's controversial finding that a single bullet wounded both Kennedy and Texas Governor John Connally moments before the President was killed 15 years ago.

The spokesman for the panel of medial experts, New York City's chief medical examiner Michael M. Baden, told the House Assassinations Committee that the fatal shot that then tore through the president's head clearly came from behind.

Dismissing the conspiracist notion that the real assassin might have fired the final shot from another direction, Baden said the nine pathologists in the panel found "no evidence to support any but a single gunshot wound of entrance in the back of the President's head."

The only dissenting note came from coroner Cyril H. Wecht of Allegheny county, Pa. But Wecht agreed that all the shots that struck the two men in the presidential limousine came from behind them, in the direction of the Texas School Book Depository where Lee Harvey Oswald had gotten a job a few weeks earlier.

The "single-bullet" theory is crucial to the Warren Commission's findings because no one gunman could have wounded both Kennedy and Connally with separate shots in the chaotic, split-second interval when they were hit.

The findings have always been clouded, however, by the hurry-up nature of autopsy performed on the president and the "near-pristine" nature of the bullet that is supposed to have wounded the twomen simultaneously. It was found on Connally's stretcher at Parkland

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Hospital in Dallas after the shootings.

In understated tones, Baden reported that the panel of forensic pathologists, who have collectively conducted more than 100,000 autopsies, had found a number of deficiencies in the manner in which the autopsy was done at Bethesda Naval Hospital the night of Nov. 22, 1963.

The experts, the committee was told, took exception to the hurried removal of Kennedy's corpse from Dallas, which had a qualified medical examiner; the inexperience of the military physicians who performed the autopsy; the lack of communication between them and physicians in Dallas who initially treated the president; and the fact that the autopsy physicians never even looked at the clothing Kennedy had been wearing.

Echoing his own chagrin at the pressures he felt in conducting the autopsy, his first ever, retired Navy Captain James J. Humes told the committee yesterday afternoon that he never even saw the autopsy photographs or X-rays taken that night until nearly two years later.

The Warren Commission concluded that Oswald, acting alone, fired three shots at the presidential limousine in Dallas, one missing completely, another hitting both Kennedy and Connally and the jump seat ahead, and the final shot tearing into the president's skull.

Baden said careful examina-

tion of all the autopsy photographs and X-rays and other available evidence backed up the conclusions about how the two men were shot. A clothes-dummy wearing Kennedy's tori, bloodstained suit jacket, shirt and tie, and another containing Connally's garb, were brought out as supporting exhibits.

Baden said Kennedy's jacket and shirt showed a perforation corresponding directly with an entrance wound in the president's back, this one "a bit lower, perhaps two inches lower" than where the autopsy doctors had depicted it.

This shot, the committee was told, came out through the president's neck where the pathologists found clear signs of an "exit perforation" at the bottom of a surgical incision the Parkland Hospital doctors had made in the hopes of reviving the president.

From there, Baden said, the bullet tore in Connally's back, broke a rib, came out his chest, hit his wrist and lodged in his thigh, almost completely spent. The pathologists found no significant metallic fragments in Connally's thigh bone.

Critics, including Wecht, have argued that the bullet recovered from Connally's stretcher was too intact to have done all the damage, but the other pathologists on the panel disagreed.

Taking issue with those who like to describe the bullet as "nearly pristine," Baden said it was a copper-jacketed model that could be expected to stay largely intact except when hitting hard bone, such as a man's skull.

"Pristine," he scoffed at one point. "It's a media term — like being a little bit pregnant. It (the bullet) is significantly flattened. It'd be hard to take a hammer and flatten it as much as it's been flattened."

Testifying later in the day, Wecht took sharp exception to those remarks. He challenged the committee to try to duplicate the body wounds that Kennedy and Connally suffered by ordering marksmanship tests on cadavers or goat skins. He maintained that any such bullet would show far more wear and tear than the one found at Parkland Hospital.

"Without the single-bullet theory, there cannot be a single assassin, whether Oswald or anyone else," Wecht said.

Sandwiched in between all this testimony was that of Humes who emphasized his difficulties in conducting the autopsy in a room crammed with FBI agents, Secret Service agents and military brass, all pressing for a quick report.



Dr. Michael Baden displayed the suit worn by President Kennedy on the day he was killed

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