

UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

Memorandum

TO : Mr. DeLoach

FROM : A. Rosen

SUBJECT: ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT
JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY
DALLAS, TEXAS, 11/22/63

DATE: June 2, 1966

- 1 - Mr. DeLoach
- 1 - Mr. Rosen
- 1 - Mr. Malley
- 1 - Mr. Shroder
- 1 - Mr. Raupach
- 1 - Mr. Wick
- 1 - Mr. Sullivan

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Mr. Tolson
Mr. DeLoach
Mr. Mohr
Mr. Bishop
Mr. Casper
Mr. Callahan
Mr. Conrad
Mr. Felt
Mr. Gale
Mr. Rosen
Mr. Sullivan
Mr. Tavel
Mr. Trotter
Tele. Room
Miss Holmes
Miss Gandy

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SYNOPSIS

An article appeared in the "Washington Post," 5/29/66, under byline of Richard Harwood, in which questions are raised about the findings of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy. Questions are based on material in two new books on the assassination, "Whitewash," by Harold Weisberg and "Inquest," by Edward J. Epstein. The article relates that the greatest source of controversy and doubt over the integrity of the Commission's report in the minds of Weisberg and Epstein was the unpublished FBI document dated 12/9/63, that contains "a finding" which would almost certainly have led to the conclusion Oswald had an accomplice. Our 12/9/63 and 1/13/64 reports sent to the Commission are now located in the National Archives and are available to the public.

The article points out that our 12/9/63, report states the bullet which wounded President Kennedy in the shoulder did not exit from his body and our supplemental report of 1/13/64, indicated medical examination of the President's body indicated the bullet which entered the President's back had penetrated to a distance less than a finger length. The article contended these statements are in direct conflict with the official autopsy report made by doctors at the Bethesda, Maryland, Naval Hospital, who stated that the bullet which struck the President in the lower neck passed through his body and came out through his throat. The article infers, based upon Weisberg's and Epstein's books, that the discrepancy between the FBI reports and the autopsy report is crucial for the Commission's conclusion that Oswald acted alone is right only if the autopsy report is right, and wrong if the FBI report is right. The authors conclude that if the bullet did not pass through President Kennedy's neck causing Governor Connally's wound, a second assassin must have been involved, since the time sequence would have prevented Oswald from getting off a second shot in two seconds.

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Re: ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT
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There are no discrepancies in the Bureau's reporting of this matter. On 11/22/63, doctors at the Bethesda Naval Hospital conducted an autopsy on President Kennedy's body. Information set forth in our 12/9/63, and 1/13/64, reports was based upon oral information furnished on 11/22/63, by the doctor performing the autopsy. Initially, the doctors were of the opinion the bullet which entered his back had not exited from the front. The doctors determined subsequently their initial findings were influenced by the fact that the doctors at Parkland Hospital in Dallas had made an incision near the President's throat in order to perform a tracheotomy. This incision was made at the exit point of the bullet, thereby eliminating any visible evidence of the exit hole made by the bullet. In addition, the examining physicians subsequently determined the bullet, after entering the President's back, actually passed between two large muscles (thus resulting in the initial determination that the wound was less than a finger length in depth). Thereafter, the bullet bruised a portion of the right lung and ripped the windpipe in its path through the President's neck.

A copy of the official autopsy report was furnished to the Bureau on 12/23/63, by Secret Service; however, no dissemination was made of the findings because of the request by the President's family to keep the autopsy report confidential. Results of the autopsy were therefore not made public until the Commission submitted its report on 9/24/64.

The article further alleges that the Agents attending the autopsy obtained their information based on hearsay and that the Agents left the autopsy before the doctors had completed their examination. Both statements are false. Our Agents obtained their information from the head pathologist and remained in the autopsy room until the physical examination was completed.

The article further states that the basic error (the bullet did not exit the President's body) was repeated in our 1/13/64, report, "which unaccountably acknowledges there was an exit wound in the President's throat." This again is inaccurate. Our 1/13/64, report sets forth examination of the President's clothing indicating there was a small hole in the back of his coat and shirt and that there was a slit in the front of his shirt which had the characteristics of an exit hole for a bullet. Report also indicated there was a nick on the left side of the tie knot, which was possibly caused by the same projectile

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as it passed through the shirt. It would appear the statement concerning the medical examination of the President's body indicating the bullet had penetrated to a distance of less than a finger length was incorporated in this report in order to point out the apparent conflict between the information originally furnished by medical authorities on 11/22/63, and the results of our Laboratory's examination of the President's clothing, which indicated a bullet had exited his body. It is noted the Warren Commission report subsequently concluded a bullet had exited the President's body as reflected in the official autopsy report and as incorporated in the Commission's report.

Based on the above, it is evident the assumptions made by Weisberg and Epstein are inconclusive and erroneous, since they have extracted only those items from the President's Commission report that bolster their own theories and hypotheses leading to their conclusions.

ACTION:

This is submitted for information.

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DETAILS

An article appeared in "The Washington Post," on 5/29/66, Sunday Edition, under the byline of Richard Harwood, captioned "An Inquest: Skeptical Postscript to Warren Group's Report on Assassination." The article relates the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy Report is now under attack by scholars and writers who believe the Commission's findings are marred by conjecture and by inconsistencies which the Commission was unable to resolve.

The article relates to grave doubts about the competence of the Commission's work which are raised in two new books on the assassination - "Whitewash" by Harold Weisberg and "Inquest" by Edward J. Epstein. The article revealed perhaps the greatest source of controversy and doubt over the integrity of the report in the minds of Weisberg and Epstein, was the unpublished FBI document which was a five-volume report from the FBI dated 12/9/63, that contains "a finding" which would almost certainly have led to the conclusion that Oswald had an accomplice in the assassination. This report was located in the National Archives. The controversy arises in connection with the report that the bullet which wounded President Kennedy in the shoulder did not exit from his body and the supplemental report of the FBI on 1/13/64, indicated medical examination of the President's body indicated the bullet which entered the President's back had penetrated to a distance of less than a finger's length. Further, the article revealed that one of the bullets entered below the shoulder to the right of the spinal column at an angle of 45 to 60 degrees downward and that there was no point of exit and further the bullet was not in the body.

It was contended this statement is in direct contradiction to the official autopsy report from the Bethesda Naval Hospital written the last week in November, 1963, which indicated that the bullet which struck the President in the lower neck passed through his body and came out his throat. The article infers that the discrepancy between the FBI report and the autopsy report is crucial for the Commission's conclusion that Oswald acted alone is right only if the autopsy report is right and wrong if the FBI report is right.

The article continues, "If a bullet did not pass through President Kennedy's neck and cause Gov. Connally's wounds, a second assassin must have been involved.

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"This is so because films of the assassination proved conclusively that Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Connally were wounded within a period of one-half second, at the minimum, and less than two seconds at the maximum.

"It was physically impossible for a sniper to fire two rounds in that flash of time from a bolt-action rifle of the type Oswald used. Thus, either Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Connally were struck by the same bullet or two men fired two nearly simultaneous bullets."

There are no discrepancies in the Bureau's reporting of this matter. Initially, a five-volume report relating to the assassination of President Kennedy was furnished to Chief Justice Warren on 12/9/63, followed by a supplemental report dated 1/13/64. These are the two reports which are purported to be in contention with the official autopsy report concerning President Kennedy.

It is specifically pointed out the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy Report clearly states that "of principal importance was the five-volume report of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, submitted on December 9, 1963, which summarized the results of the investigation conducted by the Bureau immediately after the assassination."

The newspaper article indicated that our December, 1963 report revealed the bullet that wounded President Kennedy in the shoulder did not exit from his body. This, in substance, is true. Our 12/9/63, report states "Immediately after President Kennedy and Governor Connally were admitted to Parkland Memorial Hospital, a bullet was found on one of the stretchers (subsequently determined this bullet was found on Connally's stretcher). Medical examination of the President's body revealed that one of the bullets had entered just below his shoulder to the right of the spinal column at an angle of 45 to 60 degrees downward, that there was no point of exit, and that the bullet was not in the body. An examination of this bullet by the FBI Laboratory determined that it had been fired from the rifle owned by Oswald."

Our supplemental report dated 1/13/64, under "FBI Laboratory Examinations," concerned information relating to bullets used in the

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assassination of President Kennedy and the examination of the President's clothing concerning a small hole in the back of his coat and a slit appearing in the front of his shirt approximately 6 inches below the top of the collar and 2 inches to the right of the middle seam of the coat. Contained in this information was the comment "medical examination of the President's body had revealed that the bullet which entered his back had penetrated to a distance of less than a finger length."

The confusion appears to exist around this comment as our examination of the President's clothing indicated an entrance wound in his back and an exit wound in his shirt which had the characteristic of an exit hole for a projectile.

The initial findings of the doctors performing the autopsy of the President on 11/22/63, at the Bethesda Naval Hospital, were verbally made to two of our Agents who observed the autopsy. The doctors' statement to our Agents appears in the report of SA Robert P. Gemberling dated 12/10/63, captioned "Lee Harvey Oswald, aka," commencing on page 281 (105-82555, Section 12, Part II). It was reported the body of President Kennedy was X-rayed and photographed, which revealed a path of a missile which appeared to enter the back of the skull and the path of disintegrated fragments could be observed along the right side of the skull. During the latter stages of this autopsy Commander James J. Humes, Chief Pathologist, Bethesda Naval Hospital, who conducted the autopsy, located an opening which appeared to be a bullet hole, which was below the shoulders and two inches to the right of the middle line of the spinal column. This opening was probed by Dr. Humes with the finger, at which time it was determined the trajectory of the missile entering at this point had entered at a downward position of "45 to 60 degrees." Further probing determined that the distance traveled by this missile was a short distance, inasmuch as the end of the opening could be felt with the finger by Dr. Humes. No bullet could be located in the back or any other area of the body as determined by total X-rays and inspection revealing there was no point of exit and the medical personnel performing the autopsy were at a loss to explain why they could find no bullets.

This information was telephonically furnished to the Bureau Laboratory, at which time a Laboratory Supervisor advised the Laboratory had received

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through Secret Service, information that a bullet had been found on a stretcher in the emergency room of the Parkland Hospital, Dallas, Texas. Immediately following the receipt of this information it was made available to Dr. Humes, who advised "that in his opinion this accounted for no bullet being located which had entered the back region and that since external cardiac massage had been performed at Parkland Hospital, it was entirely possible that through such movement the bullet had worked its way back out of the point of entry and had fallen on the stretcher."

Also during the latter stages of the autopsy a small piece of skull was furnished to Dr. Humes, who determined one corner of the section revealed minute metal particles. An inspection of this same area disclosed a chipping of the top portion of this piece, both of which indicated that this had been the point of exit of the bullet entering the skull.

On the basis of the developments, Dr. Humes at that time stated the pattern was clear that one bullet entered the President's back and had worked its way out during external cardiac massage and that a second high velocity bullet entered the rear of the skull and had fragmentized prior to exit through the top of the skull. He, therefore, attributed the death of the President to a gunshot wound in the head.

It is to be pointed out that information relating to the official autopsy report of the President was not made public until the Commission's report was released on 9/24/64. In a memorandum Mr. Rosen to Mr. Belmont, 12/24/63, (62-109090-68) it is pointed out that the President's family indicated a strong desire to keep the autopsy report as confidential as possible. It was recommended and approved that the copy of the autopsy report be maintained in Bureau files but that no further dissemination of it be made at that time.

The Commission specifically pointed out, when released, the autopsy examination further disclosed that the bullet after entering the President, passed between two large muscles. It bruised a portion of the right lung, ripped the windpipe (trachea) in its path through the President's neck. The surgeon concluded the wounds were caused by the bullet rather than the tracheotomy performed at Parkland Hospital. Further, doctors concluded the bullet exited from the front portion of the President's neck that had been cut away by the tracheotomy.

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Thereafter, when the conclusion was made the bullet passed through the President's neck, the doctors at Bethesda Naval Hospital rejected the theory the bullet lodged in the large muscle in the back of the President's neck and fell out through the point of entry when external heart massage was applied in the Parkland Hospital. The Commission clearly pointed out in the early stages of the autopsy the surgeons were unable to find a path into any large muscle in the back of the President's neck and at that time they did not know there had been a bullet hole in the front of the President's neck when he arrived at the Parkland Hospital because the tracheotomy insertion had completely eliminated that evidence.

When the surgeons learned of the location of the bullet this led to the speculation it might have penetrated a short distance and then dropped out as a result of external heart massage. Their further exploration during the autopsy disproved this theory. Dr. Humes, who believed the tracheotomy had been performed, based on his later observations, on the morning of 11/23/63, telephoned Dr. Malcolm O. Perry in Dallas, Texas, who was one of the attending physicians at Parkland Hospital, and learned that his assumption was correct that Dr. Perry had used the missile wound in the President's neck as the point to make the incision; therefore confirming Dr. Humes' conclusion that the bullet had exited from the front part of the President's neck.

Based on these professional findings the President's Commission arrived at its conclusion. It is obviously evident that the assumptions made by Weisberg and Epstein are inconclusive and erroneous, as they have extracted only those findings from the President's Commission that would bolster their own theories and hypotheses which led to their conclusions.

It is further pointed out that they have attributed results of investigation to the FBI as all-conclusive rather than the fact that we reported only that information which was furnished to us by authoritative physicians, which was for the specific use of Chief Justice Warren, members of the President's Commission and Attorney General Nicholas deB. Katzenbach, who at that time was the Deputy Attorney General.

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The article further alleges that the Agents attending the autopsy obtained their information based on hearsay and that the Agents left the autopsy before the doctors had completed their examination. Both statements are false. Our Agents obtained their information from the head pathologist and remained in the autopsy room until the physical examination was completed.