

JFK Case

Furor Is Blamed On Autopsy Error

DENVER (AP) — A leading medical expert says a four-inch mistake by a pathologist who examined the body of John F. Kennedy after he was shot to death in Dallas produced a series of false speculations about the assassination.

Dr. Russell H. Morgan said the bullet actually entered the president's skull some four inches higher than initially reported, but the Warren Commission's detailed report on the assassination failed to clarify that point.

Morgan, dean of the medical school at Johns Hopkins University, is the only radiologist to examine the X-ray photographs of the slain president's skull.

The matter became an issue of great interest in New Orleans between 1967 and 1969 when Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison was attempting to prove that the slaying of Kennedy was plotted here.

Garrison contended that Kennedy was shot from the front, rather than from behind as the Warren Report concluded, and that the X-rays would prove it. He made many legal attempts to gain access to the X-rays examined by Dr. Morgan, but failed.

The DA's probe died after Clay L. Shaw was acquitted March 1, 1969, of charges of conspiring to kill the president, though legal maneuvering continued long after that and only recently did the U.S. Supreme Court uphold an injunction prohibiting further prosecution of Shaw by Garrison.

IN AN ADDRESS to the 34th mid-summer conference of the Rocky Mountain Radiological Society here, he gave X-rays the credit for finally revealing the pathologist's error and disproving many of the more extreme speculations spawned by the mistake, which is included in the Warren Commission report.

Morgan's four-year investigation of the photographs and the Abraham Zapruder film of the assassination led him to several conclusions, he said.

The most important finding was that one of the pathologists who examined Kennedy's body in Washington the night of the assassination erred in saying the fatal bullet entered the "occipital protuberance," or the bulge at the lower section of the back of the skull.

THIS STATEMENT, which Morgan said later proved to be false, was included in the Warren report. Critics of the report immediately noted a major inconsistency between that alleged entry point and several features of the Zapruder film which showed a frame-by-frame sequence of the shooting. Critics said the film showed the president's head in a near vertical position when the bullet hit and also showed him lurching backward, leading to speculation the bullet came from the front.

The angle of the bullet became a controversial. Some contended it couldn't have been fired from Lee Harvey Oswald's rifle in the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository and entered the skull where the pathologist said it did.

Morgan said Friday the Warren Commission, which named Oswald as the assassin, made no effort to explain the contradiction, allowing it to provide controversy for several years.

WHEN HE WAS given two days to examine the X-ray photographs, Morgan found them of poor quality, severely over-exposed. Of the 14, he said, only three were of the head wound. He said one had pencil marks on the negative itself showing "where somebody thought the bullet had gone."

Dr. Morgan was a member of panel of four medical experts, appointed by Ramsey Clark, which secretly reviewed autopsy material. See this file 16 Jan 69.

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