

Expert Describes JFK Autopsy as 'Tragic'

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Much of the criticism and doubt which stigmatized the Warren Commission Report on President Kennedy's assassination could have been avoided had the autopsy been performed by men trained in forensic medicine.

Such is the opinion of Dr. Milton Helpern, chief medical examiner of the city of New York and generally regarded as the foremost expert in his field.

Dr. Helpern stops just short of saying the autopsy was botched. He does say the Warren Commission "was a tragedy of missed opportunities."

NEW BOOK

"The Warren Commission had an opportunity to settle once and for all a great many of the confusing doubts, but because none of its members or its legal staff had any training or knowledge in forensic medicine, those opportunities fell by the wayside. It is tragic!"

Dr. Helpern's observations, expected to elicit renewed speculation on the commission's report, are contained in the book, "Where Death Delights," by Marshall Houts, being published Wednesday by Coward-McCann.

Helpern alludes to the three autopsy surgeons as "hospital pathologists," doing the best they could without forensic or "medico-legal" experience.

Lack of a definitive interpretation of whether the

neck wound was a wound of entrance or a wound of exit lent "an aura of confusion" which led to adverse speculation that more than one assassin was involved, Helpern contends.

On the matter of the controversial schematic drawings depicting the location of the bullet wound at the back of the President's neck, the author cites direct testimony that the drawings were made from second hand verbal descriptions rather than from photographs.

STUDIED LATE

"The fact of the matter is that . . . security regulations imposed were so stringent that the real investigative purpose of taking the photographs and the X-rays was completely obscured . . . so that they were not studied until after the autopsy was completed and the President's body prepared for burial," he states.

"The major problem in any gunshot case is to determine which is the wound of entry and the wound of exit. This is basic.

"All the so-called critics of the Warren Commission Report would be left dangling in mid-air with their mouths the front of the President's throat was a wound of entrance.

"Deprive them of this opportunity for speculation and you pull the rug out from under them. Give it to them, and they now have it, and they can bring in all kinds of unreliable eyewitness reports of shots coming from the bridge across the underpass,

Lacked Men Trained in Forensic Medicine

or from behind the screen of trees in Dealy Plaza, and puffs of smoke that remained suspended in the air with police officers scrambling up the bank to investigate these illusory puffs of smoke. Smoke from gunshots just doesn't behave like that."

In the same vein, with regard to the autopsy surgeons, Helpern is quoted:

" . . . In the first place, their lack of experience deprived them of the knowledge of what should have been done.

"Secondly, it appears from every facet of the evidence now available, that at the time they finished their autopsy . . . they labored under the illusion that the hole in the back of the neck was both a wound of entrance and a wound of exit. They thought the throat wound was nothing more than a

surgical wound, so there was no need to pay it any more special attention."

Helpern is satisfied there were three shots fired and that they all came from a single source.

" . . . I would certainly feel more comfortable about the Warren Commission's findings if a group of experienced men, who have had a great deal of work in bullet wound cases, could take a look at the X-rays and pictures.

Noting the primary evidence is gone, Helpern concludes by saying these pictures and X-rays, studied by such experts, "might, and I emphasize might, settle the questions raised by the critics once and for all.

"The tragic thing is that a greatly loved President was not given the same type of expert medical attention in death that he received in life . . ."