

Autopsy Findings on John F. Kennedy

where there was a great feeling of empathy for the late President.

No official mechanism for further investigation of these questions now exists, and the restrictions on viewing the autopsy evidence naturally added some impetus to the doubts of people who were impressed by the intensity of some of the criticism and the lack of rebuttal, plus the lack of information about some portions of the autopsy findings.

Doubts About the Warren Commission

Some of the criticisms and doubts about the Warren Commission allegations dealt with questions of fact, such as "Were the rifle and ammunition competent to do what was alleged, or not?" Such questions were still open to experimentation by uninvolved investigators, although no governmental or other funds were available to re-check these or any other points.

The author had been surprised to hear it stated so many times that it was an "impossible shot" for Oswald to have accomplished, whereas it did not seem that difficult to him, once the author had visited Dallas and sat in the actual window used by Oswald. The author and his two young sons thereafter undertook a series of lengthy, unhurried, careful experiments to determine whether the shooting was indeed feasible, as alleged by the Warren Commission. These experiments have been reported in detail elsewhere,^{10, 11} and indicated that it should have been quite easy to accomplish.

While none of these experiments turned up any discrepancies on the particular points of fact which were investigated concerning the contentions of the Warren Commission Report, there were still certain questions in the mind of the author, such as, "Why the lack of sufficient downward angulation in the official Warren Commission diagram of the neck wounds?" (if Oswald had been the shooter), "Exactly what

was their direction," and was there any evidence at all of another missile in the body, which might have entered either from the back or from any other direction? Furthermore, the magnitude of the head wound, as shown in the diagram, did not match the expectations of the author as to the severity to be anticipated, if Oswald had been the shooter. The differences between the diagrams in the Warren Commission Report (Figs. 1 and 6) and the descriptions of the wounds in the testimony⁶ before the Commission and in the 1968 "panel" report⁹ seemed to require clarification. The author therefore applied for permission to study the autopsy x-rays and photographs in 1966 and again in 1968, this time under the mistaken assumption that the five-year restriction ran from the date of President Kennedy's death in 1963, rather than from 1966, when they were turned over to the National Archives. He was instructed to re-apply in 1971, which he did, submitting as references, reprints of his ballistic and other experiments, as published in the scientific literature, relevant to President Kennedy's assassination and also several of his publications on Lincoln's death.^{4, 10, 11, 27, 28}

He received a letter from Dr. James B. Rhoads, Archivist of the United States, dated 4 January 1972, stating that he had been granted permission to examine the autopsy photographs and x-rays, by Mr. Burke Marshall, Deputy Dean of the Yale Law School, who had been designated by the Kennedy family to decide which applicants would be granted permission to study the evidence. Dr. Rhoads invited him to make an appointment for the examination of these materials, and he conducted this examination throughout the entire day of 7 January 1972 under security conditions, at the National Archives. The only restriction imposed was that he should not trace or photograph any of the items.

Students of the Warren Commission Report have repeatedly raised certain questions, so that some of the queries in the author's mind as he approached this material were:

• Was the evidence actually persuasive, for or against the thesis that the wounds in the back and the front of the neck were indeed connected, as from a "through-and-through" bullet wound?

• Was there indeed evidence visible on the photographs or x-rays, to indicate which wounds might be "wounds of entry" or "exit," and possibly which direction the bullet was traveling, in each case?

• Was the downward angle of the alleged bullet track through the neck (which the Warren Commission contended was from "back-to-front") steep enough to be compatible with Oswald's high perch, or was it more "parallel-with-the-ground," as shown in the official schematic diagram¹³ in the Warren Commission Report? (Fig. 1)

• Was it possible that the above neck wounds could have been inflicted from in front, or from either side?

• Were the positions of the bullet holes in the back of the body and in the back of the coat (and shirt) so far apart as to be irreconcilable?

• Was there any evidence, such as wounds, deformations or tracks of metal fragments running in any direction other than "back to front" in President Kennedy's head or body, such as from either side, or from the front, to indicate that a third bullet might have struck him? If so, might it have come from the "grassy knoll" on his right, from the infield of Dealey Plaza on the left, or from the railroad overpass to his front?

• Were the extent and character of the scalp and skull "wounds-of-exit" severe enough to be compatible with those expected to be

caused by a high-powered military rifle bullet, as described in the testimony of Dr. Humes? Or were they relatively moderate, as depicted in the official diagrams¹² in the Warren Commission Report? (Fig. 5)

• Were there any findings relevant to the question: "In what direction did President Kennedy's head move after it was struck?"

The Restricted Materials

The restricted materials viewed at this examination consisted of large color prints, plus black and white prints, and color transparencies thereof, as follows:

- (a) The head viewed from above (10 prints).
- (b) The head viewed from the right and above to include part of the face, neck, shoulder and upper chest (9 prints).
- (c) The head and neck viewed from the left side (7 prints).
- (d) The head viewed from behind (4 prints).
- (e) The cranial cavity with brain removed (4 prints).
- (f) The back of the body including neck (4 prints).
- (g) The brain viewed from below after its removal (4 transparencies). The brain from above, three views. Black and white negatives of these same views of the brain were also present.

The quality of almost all of these photographs was good, and in the very few instances where one photograph was slightly out of focus, a similar view usually was in focus. The 4 x 5 color transparencies were the sharpest of all, and provided the clue as to the proper orientation of the photos of the empty brain case, which were otherwise confusing. There was also a roll of "120" film which had been spoiled by unrolling it in the light and a nota-