
22 November 1963

A BRIEF GUIDE TO THE JFK ASSASSINATION

(SAMPLE CHAPTERS)

Jeremy Bojczuk

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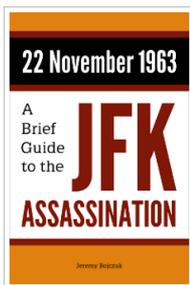
Author's Note

You are reading a selection of sample chapters from the book, *22 November 1963: A Brief Guide to the JFK Assassination*. The page numbering is identical to that in the paperback version.

Almost all of the official documents cited in this book are available online. The ebook version contains clickable links to these documents.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used:

ARRB Assassination Records and Review Board

CD Warren Commission Document (items not published in the 26 *WCHE* volumes but instead placed in the National Archives)

CE Warren Commission Exhibit (official exhibits included in the 26 volumes and, in a few cases, the *Warren Report*)

Church Committee Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities (chaired by Senator Frank Church)

DRE *Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil* (Revolutionary Student Directorate, also known as the Cuban Student Directorate)

FPCC Fair Play for Cuba Committee

HSCA House Select Committee on Assassinations

HSCA Appendix *Investigation of the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy: Appendix to Hearings Before the Select Committee on Assassinations*, US Government Printing Office, 1979 (the 12 volumes of hearings, exhibits and staff reports relating to the JFK assassination; a further 12 volumes deal with the Martin Luther King assassination)

HSCA Report *Final Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations*, US Government Printing Office, 1979

Lopez Report *Oswald, the CIA and Mexico City* (HSCA staff report, withheld from the HSCA *Appendix* volumes and partially declassified by the ARRB in the 1990s)

NAA Neutron Activation Analysis

NARA National Archives and Records Administration

NSAM National Security Action Memorandum

RIF Record Identification Form (for documents at NARA)

Schweiker–Hart Report *Final Report of the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, Book V: The Investigation of the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy: Performance of Intelligence Agencies*, US Government Printing Office, 1976

TSBD Texas School Book Depository

Warren Commission The President's Commission on the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy

Warren Commission Hearings and Exhibits or WCHE *Hearings before the President's Commission on the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy*, US Government Printing Office, 1964 (in 26 volumes)

Warren Report or WR *Report of the President's Commission on the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy*, US Government Printing Office, 1964

1 Who Killed President Kennedy?

This short book is not going to give you the answer, but it will try to illustrate the best way to think about the question.

Much of the evidence in the JFK assassination is inconclusive and open to a variety of interpretations. There are, however, some basic, indisputable, uncontroversial facts. These facts suggest only two realistic solutions, both of which revolve around the role of Lee Harvey Oswald: either Oswald killed Kennedy, with or without associates, or he was set up in advance to take the blame.

On 22 November 1963, President John F. Kennedy was a passenger in a motorcade through the centre of Dallas, Texas. At about 12:30pm, the motorcade was in Dealey Plaza, just outside the downtown area, when several gunshots were fired.¹ Altogether, three people were injured. President Kennedy was wounded in the back and the throat, and, fatally, in the head.² The governor of Texas, John Connally, who was sitting directly in front of Kennedy, sustained three wounds: one bullet hit him in the back, destroyed four inches of one rib, punctured his right lung, and came out of the right side of his chest; his right wrist was shattered; and a fragment of a bullet was embedded in his left thigh.³ James Tague, a spectator standing on Commerce Street, close to the railway bridge

1. The basic, uncontested facts of the JFK assassination can be found in the *Warren Report*, pp.1–5.

2. Lack of agreement about the exact location and nature of the president's wounds is the main reason why the assassination remains controversial. President Kennedy's autopsy was carried out poorly: his back and throat wounds were not dissected, and none of his wounds was measured or photographed with adequate precision; see Appendix A, The Medical Evidence, p.105 below.

3. For Governor Connally's chest wound, see *WCHE*, vol.4, p.104. For his wrist wound, see *ibid.*, pp.118–120.

known as the Triple Underpass, received a slight cut on the cheek from the impact of a bullet to the concrete curb near his feet.⁴

At the time of the shooting, the presidential limousine was heading west on Elm Street, and had just passed the Texas School Book Depository, which contained publishers' offices and a book warehouse. A window was half open at the eastern end of the sixth floor of the building.⁵ Three empty bullet shells were discovered just inside this window. Elsewhere on the sixth floor, a rifle was discovered. Tests showed that those bullet shells had been fired from that rifle.⁶

The rifle had been purchased several months earlier by mail order. The name on the mail order coupon was a pseudonym known to have been used elsewhere by a man named Lee Harvey Oswald. The handwriting on the coupon matched Oswald's. The supplier had sent the rifle to a post office box rented by Oswald, who worked in the Texas School Book Depository and had legitimate access to the sixth floor. Oswald claimed to have been elsewhere at the time of the shooting, but there were no eye-witnesses to support his alibi.⁷

On the face of it, this is an open-and-shut case: Oswald did it. The only realistic alternative is that Oswald had been carefully framed in advance. The other, purely theoretical, solution, that another lone nut stumbled across Oswald's rifle and decided to take a few pot shots at the president, is too unlikely to be worth considering. Either Oswald did it, or he was set up.

4. James Tague's wound: *WR*, p.116.

5. This is the American definition of 'sixth floor'; in the UK it would be the fifth floor. All such references will use the American definition.

6. For the discovery of the bullet shells and the rifle, see e.g. *WCHE*, vol.6, pp.300–301. The bullet shells were matched to the rifle by Robert Frazier of the FBI: *WCHE*, vol.3, pp.421–428.

7. A photograph of the envelope and mail order coupon for the rifle: *WCHE*, vol.19, p.275. Identification of the handwriting as Oswald's: CE 2145, p.1 (*WCHE*, vol.24, p.759). For Oswald's use of post office boxes, see *WCHE*, vol.20, p.177. For Oswald's use of 'A. Hidell' as an alias, see p.76 below. For Oswald's alibi, see p.25 below. The man now universally known as Lee Harvey Oswald rarely used his middle name except in official documents; he usually called himself either Lee Oswald or, in the American fashion, Lee H. Oswald.

2 Investigating the Crime

The rifle and bullet shells found at the scene of the crime suggested very strongly that Lee Harvey Oswald had fired three shots at President Kennedy. Other evidence quickly emerged which indicated that he had not been the only gunman.

The Texas School Book Depository was behind Kennedy at the time of the shooting, but many of the closest eye-witnesses described one or more shots coming from the opposite direction. The earliest newspaper accounts mentioned several witnesses who claimed that shots originated from the western end of Dealey Plaza. Charles Brehm, who was standing very close to President Kennedy, “seemed to think the shots came from in front of or beside the President,” according to the *Dallas Times Herald* on the evening of 22 November. The *Dallas Morning News* on 23 November reported that Ochus Campbell, the vice-president of the Texas School Book Depository Company, “says he ran toward a grassy knoll to the west of the building, where he thought the sniper had hidden.” Mary Woodward, a journalist on the *Dallas Morning News*, was standing on the north side of Elm Street, about halfway between the TSBD and the knoll. She wrote in the next day’s edition that “suddenly there was a horrible, ear-shattering noise coming from behind us and a little to the right.” Altogether, around forty witnesses claimed to have heard shots from the general direction of the grassy knoll.¹

The medical staff who gave emergency treatment to Kennedy considered his throat wound to be one of entrance, not exit, and described a substantial exit wound extending to the back of his

1. See Appendix C, Grassy Knoll Witnesses, p.127 below.

head. In a press conference given shortly after the president's death, Dr Malcolm Perry stated that "the wound appeared to be an entrance wound in the front of the throat; yes, that is correct."² The rear head wound is described in several of the accounts made by the medical staff immediately after the treatment. For example, Dr William Kemp Clark, professor of neurosurgery and the most senior doctor present, described "a large wound in the right occipital-parietal region." The parietal bones are on the sides of the skull; the occipital bone is at the back of the skull.³

This evidence of gunfire from the front was reported by newspapers, radio and television very soon after the assassination. Although governmental and media opinion settled on Lee Harvey Oswald as the only assassin, the early news reports caused a great deal of public scepticism of the lone-gunman explanation, both in the USA and abroad. Suspicion increased when Oswald was himself murdered two days later, while in police custody, by another lone gunman, a man with connections to organised crime.⁴

Public scepticism of the lone-gunman account was expressed as public distrust of the governmental and media institutions which promoted that account. A letter to J. Edgar Hoover, the director of the FBI, typified the response of many upstanding citizens to the two assassinations:

Like most of the people in the nation, my mother and I are shocked, appalled, angered and hurt by the assassination of President Kennedy. After seeing the television presentation of the killing of his suspected murderer, we are convinced more than ever that President Kennedy was the victim of a horrible conspiracy.... May we suggest that you start with the Dallas police force who seem to have been extraordinarily lax in their protection of Oswald, who might eventually have talked. The presence of Rubenstein [Jack Ruby] and his apparent role of 'fall guy' appear too pat to go unnoticed.⁵

2. ARRB Medical Document 41, p.6.

3. CE 392 (*WCHE*, vol.17, pp.1-22). Dr Clark's comment is on p.3.

4. Jack Ruby's links to organised crime were glossed over by the Warren Commission but acknowledged by the House Select Committee on Assassinations in a 1000-page report: *HSCA Appendix*, vol.9, pp.125-1117.

5. FBI HQ JFK Assassination File, 62-109060-15.

Within hours of Oswald's murder, Hoover identified the need to restore public confidence in the institutions of law and order and government, and discussed a possible solution:

The thing I am concerned about, and so is Mr Katzenbach [the deputy Attorney General], is having something issued so that we can convince the public that Oswald is the real assassin. Mr Katzenbach thinks that the President might appoint a Presidential Commission of three outstanding citizens to make a determination.⁶

In a memo written later that day, Nicholas Katzenbach made the case for establishing what became the Warren Commission:

The public must be satisfied that Oswald was the assassin; that he did not have confederates who are still at large; and that the evidence was such that he would have been convicted at trial. Speculation about Oswald's motivation ought to be cut off, and we should have some basis for rebutting thought that this was a Communist conspiracy or (as the Iron Curtain press is saying) a right-wing conspiracy to blame it on the Communists. Unfortunately the facts on Oswald seem about too pat — too obvious (Marxist, Cuba, Russian wife, etc.). The Dallas police have put out statements on the Communist conspiracy theory, and it was they who were in charge when he was shot and thus silenced.⁷

Discussions had been held with other Washington insiders. Joe Alsop, a newspaper columnist, telephoned President Johnson on the morning of President Kennedy's funeral and mentioned that he had recently spoken about this subject with several influential people, including: Katzenbach; Dean Acheson, the former Secretary of State; Fred Friendly, the president of CBS; and Bill Moyers, an assistant to Johnson. Alsop encouraged Johnson to establish

6. *HSCA Appendix*, vol.3, p.472. For more about the political necessity of the lone-gunman explanation and the creation of the Warren Commission, see Chapter 7, "A Little Incident in Mexico City", p.57 below.

7. FBI HQ JFK Assassination File, 62-109060-18.

a commission, pointing out that “what I’m really honestly giving you is public relation[s] advice.”⁸

One week after the assassination, President Johnson created the Warren Commission, which had the explicit purpose of convincing the general public that Oswald alone had killed President Kennedy. The Commission’s report endorsed and expanded an earlier FBI report, and presented more evidence against Oswald to add to the bullet shells and rifle found in the Texas School Book Depository. Photographs were discovered of Oswald holding what appeared to be the same rifle. His wife admitted that he had owned the rifle, and that he had planned to kill the former vice-president, Richard Nixon. In addition to the shooting in Dealey Plaza, Oswald was held to have shot dead a policeman in a suburb of Dallas about forty minutes later, and to have attempted to assassinate a retired general in Dallas several months earlier.⁹

The *Warren Report* was issued in one volume in September 1964, and was immediately and widely praised in the print and broadcast media. More informed and disinterested voices, however, found it less convincing. The philosopher, Bertrand Russell, pointed out a fundamental problem with the Commission’s approach:

At the outset the Commission appointed six panels through which it would conduct its enquiry. They considered: What did Oswald do on November 22, 1963? What was Oswald’s background? What did Oswald do in the U.S. Marine Corps, and in the Soviet Union? How did Ruby kill Oswald? What is Ruby’s background? What efforts were taken to protect the President on November 22? This raises my fourth question: Why did the Warren Commission not establish a panel to deal with the question of who killed President Kennedy?¹⁰

8. Joe Alsop to Lyndon Johnson, White House Telephone Transcripts, 25 November 1963, 10:40am, LBJ Library, Austin, Texas.

9. Photographs of Oswald with a rifle: *WR*, p.126. Marina Oswald described the weapon found on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository as “the fateful rifle of Lee Oswald”: *WCHE*, vol.1, p.119. Oswald’s intention to kill Richard Nixon: *WR*, pp.187–189. The killing of J.D. Tippit: *WR*, pp.156–175. The attempted assassination of General Edwin Walker: *WR*, pp.183–188.

10. Bertrand Russell, ‘16 Questions on the Assassination,’ *Minority of One*, 6 September 1964, pp.6–8.

Two months later, once the reviews had appeared, the report's twenty-six volumes of hearings and exhibits were published. Although hundreds of thousands of copies of the *Warren Report* were issued in paperback to coincide with the publication of the official edition, public access to the documentary evidence was carefully rationed. Only 5000 copies of the complete supplementary volumes were printed, all in expensive hardback format. Much of the background material was not published at all, but placed in the National Archives. Other material was deemed to be dangerous to national security, and was ordered to be kept secret for 75 years. A series of law suits under the Freedom of Information Act enabled some of this material, such as the transcripts of the Commission's executive sessions, to be made public.

A number of citizens took the trouble to examine the supplementary volumes. They discovered that not only were most of the *Report's* conclusions not strongly supported by the evidence it cited, but that in several instances its conclusions were actively contradicted by the evidence it cited. Although the earliest critical books were not widely or sympathetically reviewed in the press, they influenced the general public's growing scepticism of the lone-assassin explanation.¹¹

Also unconvinced about the *Warren Report's* conclusions were three of the seven Commissioners. The most vociferous objector, Senator Richard Russell, called a special meeting of the Commission just as the *Warren Report* was about to be sent to the printers. He set out his objections to the central part of the case against Oswald, and supplied two written statements to be added to the record. The need for the appearance of unanimity among the Commissioners ensured that Russell's objections were mentioned only obliquely in the final version of the *Warren Report*: "Governor Connally's testimony and certain other factors have given rise to some difference of opinion . . . but there is no question in the mind of any member of the Commission that all the shots which caused the President's and Governor Connally's wounds were fired from the

11. The most influential of the early works criticising the *Warren Report* were: Harold Weisberg, *Whitewash: the Report on the Warren Report*, Weisberg, 1965; Sylvia Meagher, *Accessories After the Fact: the Warren Commission, the Authorities, and the Report*, Bobbs-Merrill, 1967; and Josiah Thompson, *Six Seconds in Dallas: A Micro-Study of the Kennedy Assassination*, Bernard Geis Associates, 1967.

sixth floor window of the Texas School Book Depository.”¹² Later that day, Russell explained to President Johnson that “I couldn’t sign it. And I said that Governor Connally testified directly to the contrary, and I’m not going to approve of that. . . . I tried my best to get in a dissent, but they’d come round and trade me out of it.”¹³ Senator Russell was displeased when a researcher informed him several years later that no record of his objections had been preserved; the official minutes of the Warren Commission’s final meeting, at which a stenographer was present, contained neither the usual *verbatim* transcript nor Russell’s two written statements.¹⁴

Over time, as more research was undertaken, and as more and more previously classified documents became available to researchers, public trust in the Warren Commission’s conclusions and objectivity diminished even further. In response to the increasing number of critical books and films, an internal CIA memo of 1967 pointed out that “46% of the American public did not think that Oswald acted alone,” and regretted that “this trend of opinion is a matter of concern to the US government, including our organization. . . . Efforts to impugn [the Warren Commissioners’] rectitude and wisdom tend to cast doubt on the whole leadership of American society.” The document went on to propose that the CIA ought to “discuss the publicity problem with liaison and friendly elite contact (especially politicians and editors) . . . employ propaganda assets to . . . refute the attacks of the critics. Book reviews and feature articles are particularly appropriate for this purpose.”¹⁵ If there was a deliberate attempt to change or control public opinion, it has not been entirely successful. Although the public continues to tolerate established political institutions, only a small minority has been convinced by the news media’s promotion of the lone-assassin hypothesis. Since the 1970s, polls have consistently claimed that around three-quarters of the US population suspect that the JFK assassination was the result of a conspiracy of one

12. WR, p.19.

13. Lyndon Johnson to Richard Russell, White House Telephone Transcripts, 18 September 1964, LBJ Library, Austin, Texas.

14. Minutes of Warren Commission Executive Session, 18 September 1964. For a full treatment of Richard Russell’s objections, see Gerald D. McKnight, *Breach of Trust: How the Warren Commission Failed the Nation and Why*, University Press of Kansas, 2005, pp.282–297.

15. CIA document 1035–960: NARA RIF no. 104–10009–10022.

sort or another. The figure has rarely gone below 70%, and in 1976 and 2001 no fewer than 81% of those surveyed rejected the Warren Commission's verdict.¹⁶

Altogether, nine official bodies have looked into various aspects of the JFK assassination. Two of these investigations coincided with the activities of the Warren Commission. Shortly after the formation of the Commission, the FBI produced a lengthy but very superficial report, which failed to mention all of the wounds and spent only one page on the details of the assassination. On 25 November, the attorney general of Texas had set up a court of inquiry. Activity behind the scenes in Washington ensured that the Texan inquiry was in effect closed down and absorbed into the Warren Commission. The court of inquiry produced a token 20-page report in October 1964 which repeated the Commission's conclusions.

Four years later, the Attorney General, Ramsey Clark, assembled a group of four doctors to deal with some of the troublesome aspects of the medical evidence, such as the observation by the pathologists at the autopsy that President Kennedy's skull contained an entry wound that was too low to have been the result of a shot fired from the sixth floor of the TSBD. The Clark Panel, none of whose members had examined the corpse, moved the entrance wound up by four inches or ten centimetres, thereby allowing a hypothetical lone gunman to have fired the fatal shot from the sixth floor. At around the same time, a criminal investigation was begun into a New Orleans businessman, Clay Shaw, who was accused of participation in the assassination. He stood trial in 1969, and was rapidly acquitted.

The Rockefeller Commission, which was set up in 1975 to investigate the activities of the CIA within the US, touched on the assassination. The television broadcast that year of the Zapruder film had forced the Rockefeller Commission to make the first official acknowledgement that Kennedy's head had moved sharply backwards as a result of the fatal shot, a fact which the *Warren*

16. Sheldon Appleton, 'The Mystery of the Kennedy Assassination: What the American Public Believes,' *The Public Perspective*, October/November 1998, pp.13-17, available at <http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/public-perspective/ppscan/96/96013.pdf> (PDF: 7.2 MB). For the 2001 opinion poll, see Darren K. Carlson, 'Most Americans Believe Oswald Conspired With Others to Kill JFK,' at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1813/most-americans-believe-oswald-conspired-others-kill-jfk.aspx>.

Report had for some reason neglected to mention. The following year, the Church Committee reported on the illegal gathering of information by the CIA and the FBI, and was very critical of the role of both agencies in withholding information from the Warren Commission.

The House Select Committee on Assassinations in 1977–78 also criticised the CIA and the FBI, as well as the Secret Service and the Warren Commission itself, and concluded that “President John F. Kennedy was probably killed as a result of a conspiracy.”¹⁷

The Assassination Records Review Board, which operated between 1992 and 1998, did not investigate the facts of the assassination, but did interview several interested parties. It was set up to enable the release to the public of the huge numbers of secret records relating to the assassination, including those on which the HSCA’s conclusions were based. Perhaps the ARRB’s most important achievements were the belated publication of the HSCA’s *Lopez Report*, which dealt with the activities of Lee Oswald in Mexico City a few weeks before the assassination, and the revelation that George Joannides, the CIA officer who acted as a liaison between the Agency and the HSCA, had been personally involved in 1963 with a CIA-funded anti-Castro organisation that had interacted with Oswald in New Orleans and had helped him to create a political persona that would be used against him after the assassination.

Three other official investigations were proposed but did not come into existence. Shortly after the assassination, members of each House suggested setting up their own investigations. Both groups were persuaded that the Warren Commission’s investigation would be more authoritative if it had no competitors. In 1967, Theodore Kupferman, a Republican Congressman, responded to the increasing public criticisms of the Warren Commission by proposing that a committee should review the work of the Commission. His proposal too was unsuccessful.¹⁸

The most prominent of these later investigations was that of the House Select Committee on Assassinations, although neither the public nor the media, for differing reasons, fully accepted its

17. *HSCA Report*, p.3.

18. For Rep. Kupferman’s official correspondence regarding his proposal, see Thompson, *op. cit.*, pp.285–291.

interpretation of the assassination: that Oswald had been the assassin, and that an unidentified person had also fired a shot, which missed. A recording had come to light of a police radio broadcast that appeared to contain evidence of a fourth gunshot. Acoustic tests indicated that the evidence was credible and that the fourth shot was fired from the infamous grassy knoll at the north-west corner of Dealey Plaza. The HSCA was unable to dispose of this evidence before its report was due to be published, and so was obliged to suggest the existence of a third, albeit unsuccessful, lone nut in addition to Oswald and Ruby. The acoustical evidence is technical, and its interpretation is disputed. In what may count as a tenth official inquiry into aspects of the assassination, the Department of Justice sponsored the National Research Council to produce a report questioning the HSCA's interpretation of the acoustical evidence.¹⁹

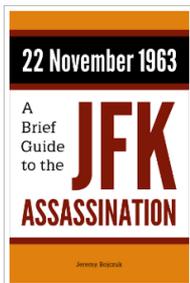
The HSCA's case against Oswald largely followed that of the Warren Commission. Although the Commission had successfully refuted one or two of the earliest and more improbable conspiracy theories, neither it nor the Select Committee was able to provide a convincing account of exactly how Lee Harvey Oswald killed President Kennedy.

19. National Research Council, *Report of the Committee on Ballistic Acoustics*, report no. PB83-218461, 1982; available at http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=10264 (PDF: 3.1 MB). The HSCA's treatment of the acoustical evidence is in *HSCA Appendix*, vol.8. For the case in favour of a shot from the grassy knoll, see D.B. Thomas, 'Echo Correlation Analysis and the Acoustic Evidence in the Kennedy Assassination Revisited,' *Science & Justice*, vol.41 no.1 (January 2001), pp.21-32. For the case against, see R. Linsker, R.L. Garwin, H. Chernoff, P. Horowitz, and N.F. Ramsey, 'Synchronization of the Acoustic Evidence in the Assassination of President Kennedy,' *Science & Justice*, vol.45 no.4 (October 2005), pp.207-226. For a detailed account, see Donald B. Thomas, *Hear No Evil: Social Constructivism and the Forensic Evidence in the Kennedy Assassination*, Mary Ferrell Foundation Press, 2010, pp.559-690; Thomas found acoustical evidence for five shots. For a readable overview, see G. Paul Chambers, *Head Shot: The Science Behind the JFK Assassination*, Prometheus Books, 2010, pp.116-144.

3 The Case Against Oswald

For more about the book, which is available as a paperback and an ebook, see <http://22november1963.org.uk/a-brief-guide-to-the-jfk-assassination>. To buy the book, go to:

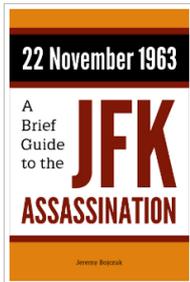
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4 The Single–Bullet Theory

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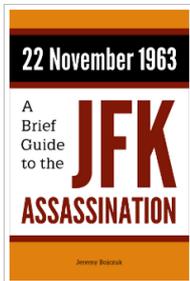
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5 The Rifle, the Paraffin Tests, and the Magic Bullet

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6 Lee Harvey Oswald's Motive

Only a small part of the *Warren Report* dealt with the facts of the JFK assassination. The majority of the 900-page *Report* was devoted to a biography of Oswald, in an effort to show that he was capable of doing what he was supposed to have done. Despite this effort, the Commission was unable to find any evidence of a political or ideological motive.

All the evidence in fact pointed the other way. Oswald had repeatedly expressed his admiration for President Kennedy both as an individual and as a politician. Michael Paine, who took Oswald to a meeting of the American Civil Liberties Union, claimed that Oswald "thought President Kennedy was doing quite a good job in civil rights, which was high praise coming from Lee."¹ Lillian Murret, Oswald's aunt, reported Oswald's opinion of Kennedy: "he said he liked him."² Samuel Ballen, who interviewed Oswald for a job, stated that "I just can't see his having any venom towards President Kennedy . . . this is an individual who felt warmly towards President Kennedy."³ Paul Gregory, a speaker of Russian who knew the Oswald family in Dallas, said that Oswald "expressed admiration of Kennedy. . . . I never heard him say anything derogatory about Kennedy. He seemed to admire the man . . . he always expressed what I would interpret as admiration for Kennedy . . . I remember in their apartment that we did look at this picture of Kennedy, and Marina said, 'He looks like a nice young man,' and

1. Michael Paine: *WCHE*, vol.2, p.399.

2. Lillian Murret: *WCHE*, vol.8, p.153; Marilyn Murret, Lillian's daughter and Oswald's cousin, did not think that Oswald had the capability or motivation to kill Kennedy: *WCHE*, vol.8, pp.176-177.

3. Samuel Ballen: *WCHE*, vol.9, p.48.

Lee said something, yes, he is a good leader, or something, as I remember, [it] was a positive remark about Kennedy."⁴ George de Mohrenschildt, who befriended the Oswalds, claimed that Oswald "was an admirer of President Kennedy. . . . I mentioned to him that . . . I thought that Kennedy was doing a very good job. . . . And he also agreed with me: 'Yes, yes, yes; I think [he] is an excellent President, young, full of energy, full of good ideas."⁵

The *Warren Report* offered a vague psychological explanation:

Clues to Oswald's motives can be found in his family history, his education or lack of it, his acts, his writings, and the recollections of those who had close contacts with him throughout his life. . . .

The Commission could not make any definitive determination of Oswald's motives. It has endeavored to isolate factors which contributed to his character and which might have influenced his decision to assassinate President Kennedy. These factors were:

1. His deep-rooted resentment of all authority which was expressed in a hostility toward every society in which he lived;
2. His inability to enter into meaningful relationships with people, and a continuous pattern of rejecting his environment in favor of new surroundings;
3. His urge to try to find a place in history and despair at times over failures in his various undertakings;
4. His capacity for violence as evidenced by his attempt to kill General Walker;
5. His avowed commitment to Marxism and communism, as he understood the terms and developed his own interpretation of them; this was expressed by his antagonism toward the United States, by his

4. Paul Gregory: *WCHE*, vol.9, p.148.

5. George de Mohrenschildt: *WCHE*, vol.9, p.255. For more about de Mohrenschildt and the Oswalds, see George de Mohrenschildt, ed. Michael Rinella, *Lee Harvey Oswald As I Knew Him*, University Press of Kansas, 2014.

defection to the Soviet Union, by his failure to be reconciled with life in the United States even after his disenchantment with the Soviet Union, and by his efforts, though frustrated, to go to Cuba.

Each of these contributed to his capacity to risk all in cruel and irresponsible actions.⁶

A closer look at the *Warren Report's* five factors which "might have influenced his decision" to kill Kennedy shows that most of them are contradicted by the evidence.

The first claim is that Oswald had a "deep-rooted resentment of all authority which was expressed in a hostility toward every society in which he lived." Oswald seems to have had no more than an occasional vague distrust of authority. He had been a relatively obedient member of the Marines for several years. His well-documented behaviour in New Orleans in the summer of 1963, together with other aspects of his interesting career, shows little evidence of anti-authoritarian impulses.⁷

The second claim, that Oswald had an "inability to enter into meaningful relationships with people," was based partly on Oswald's lack of effort to get to know his fellow employees during the five weeks he spent at the Texas School Book Depository. The fact that Oswald was married with two young children shows clearly that he did not have an "inability to enter into meaningful relationships with people."

The third claim involved Oswald's "urge to try to find a place in history and despair at times over failures in his various undertakings." This seems to be the motive that the Warren Commissioners themselves found the most persuasive. After the final meeting of the Commission, one of its members, Senator Richard Russell, was asked by President Johnson about Oswald's motive. Russell replied that "he was a general misanthropic fellow . . . he had a desire to get his name in history and all."⁸ Newspaper and television commentators in the decades since the assassination have consistently favoured this interpretation. There is, however, no evidence

6. *WR*, pp.22-23.

7. See Chapter 9, The Career of Lee Harvey Oswald, p.71 below.

8. Lyndon Johnson to Richard Russell, White House Telephone Transcripts, 18 September 1964, LBJ Library, Austin, Texas.

to support it. Oswald himself never expressed a "desire to get his name in history and all." Nor did he ever boast of killing President Kennedy or Officer Tippit. On the contrary, throughout the two days he spent in police custody Oswald consistently denied any involvement in the murders, famously claiming that "I'm just a patsy."⁹ Even in his last conscious moments, he refused to take credit for the assassination. A policeman, B.H. Combest, attempted to obtain a confession after Oswald had been shot by Jack Ruby:

I laid him down on the floor and removed the handcuffs that he had on him. . . . I told him was there anything that he wanted me to tell anybody or was there anything he wanted to say right now before it was too late . . . trying to let him know if he was ever going to say anything he was going to have to say it then. . . . [Oswald] just shook his head and I said, "Do you have anything you want to tell us now," and he shook his head. . . . I kept talking to him as long as I thought he would try to answer me, hoping that he would give a dying declaration on the shooting.¹⁰

The fourth claim noted Oswald's "capacity for violence as evidenced by his attempt to kill General Walker." Oswald was almost certainly not one of the two men who attempted to shoot General Edwin Walker in April 1963. The only witness claimed that neither of the two men resembled Oswald, and that the men drove away in separate cars. Oswald could not drive.¹¹ The strongest evidence against Oswald was provided by his widow, Marina, who claimed that he had admitted to her that he had shot at Walker and that on the evening of the shooting he had left a handwritten note explaining what she should do if he were arrested.¹² Lee Oswald's note does not in fact link him to the Walker shooting: it is not dated, not signed, and does not mention Walker.¹³ Marina Oswald's statement was obtained under duress, while she was being interrogated

9. The notebook of a reporter, Seth Kantor: *WCHE*, vol.20, p.366.

10. B.H. Combest: *WCHE*, vol.12, p.185.

11. For the Warren Commission's case that Oswald shot at Walker, see *WR*, pp.183–187. Walter Kirk Coleman: CE 2001 (*WCHE*, vol.24, pp.40–41) and CE 2958 (*WCHE*, vol.26, pp.437–441). For Oswald's driving, see p.69 below.

12. Marina Oswald's account: *WR*, pp.405–406.

13. Oswald's note: CE 1 (*WCHE*, vol.16, pp.1–2).

by the Secret Service and the FBI and threatened with deportation back to the Soviet Union.¹⁴ She also felt obliged to incriminate her late husband in other areas. In her earliest statements to the FBI and the Secret Service, she claimed that Oswald had not practised firing a rifle, but she later changed her mind and told her interrogators what they wanted to hear: "I said before I had never seen it before. But I think you understand. I want to help you, and that is why there is no reason for concealing anything. I will not be charged with anything."¹⁵ She then told the FBI that Oswald had practised with his rifle in January 1963. On learning that Oswald had not in fact bought the rifle until two months later, she admitted that "she had been mistaken" and that she only "deduced that he might have been practicing with the rifle."¹⁶

The Warren Commission relied on Marina Oswald's statements despite being aware that they were contradictory and unreliable. One of the Commission's attorneys, Norman Redlich, wrote in a memo to J. Lee Rankin that "neither you nor I have any desire to smear the reputation of any individual. We cannot ignore, however, that Marina Oswald has repeatedly lied to the [Secret] Service, the FBI, and this Commission on matters which are of vital concern to the people of this country and the world."¹⁷ Redlich expanded on this when testifying before the HSCA: "She may not have told the truth in connection with the attempted killing of General Walker. . . . I gave to Mr Rankin a lengthy document. . . . I indicated the testimony that she had given, the instances where it was in conflict."¹⁸

General Walker himself pointed out that the bullet which had almost killed him was not the same type as the bullets fired in the JFK assassination, and thus cannot have been fired from the only rifle which could be attributed to Oswald. Walker also claimed that the bullet which the Warren Commission entered into evidence was not the bullet he had handled at the time of the shoot-

14. Marina Oswald's treatment: *WCHE*, vol.1, p.410.

15. Oswald had not practised firing a rifle: CE 1401 (*WCHE*, vol.22, p.763) and CE 1403 (*WCHE*, vol.22, p.778). "I want to help you": *WCHE*, vol.1, pp.14-15.

16. Practising in January 1963: CE 1156 (*WCHE*, vol.22, p.197). "She had been mistaken": CE 1404 (*WCHE*, p.785). The rifle had been purchased by 'A. Hidell' in March 1963: *WR*, p.119.

17. Redlich's memo: *HSCA Appendix*, vol.11, p.126.

18. Redlich's testimony: *ibid.*, p.127.

ing.¹⁹ The Dallas police had claimed in April 1963 that the attempt on Walker involved one steel-jacketed 30.06-calibre bullet, fired from a high-powered rifle. General Walker, who had examined the surviving bullet fragment, agreed. The only rifle and bullets associated with Oswald were of a different type and size. Tests showed that the fragment was made of a lead alloy different from that in the bullet fragments found in President Kennedy's car.²⁰ These tests were later contradicted by neutron activation analysis done for the House Select Committee on Assassinations, but that evidence in turn has been contradicted by later research, which demonstrates that neutron activation analysis is incapable of determining the origin of bullet fragments.²¹

The fifth claim involved Oswald's "avowed commitment to Marxism and communism," a commitment difficult to reconcile with his surviving notes for a speech that he gave to a college in Alabama in the summer of 1963.²² In the notes, Oswald has little good to say about communism or communists, whom he describes as "a pitiful bunch." He criticises both the Soviet system and western capitalism, but those criticisms are not much different from the opinions of most reasonable people, and do not illustrate any "deep-rooted resentment."

The Warren Commission went out of its way to conclude that Oswald's motives were purely psychological, and that even though he possessed an "avowed commitment to Marxism and communism," the alleged assassin was not part of a communist conspiracy. Indeed, the Commission was set up precisely to defuse rumours of a communist conspiracy, rumours which were based in part on a visit which Lee Harvey Oswald appears to have made to Mexico City a few weeks before the assassination.

19. Photograph of the bullet: CE 573 (*WCHE*, vol.7, p.390). See Justice Department Criminal Division File 62-117290-1473 for Walker's correspondence with the Justice Department on this matter.

20. Bullet tests: FBI HQ Oswald File, 62-109060-22.

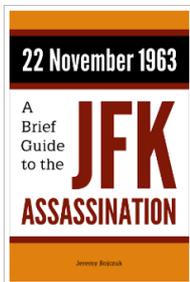
21. *HSCA Appendix*, vol.1, p.502. See Appendix B, Neutron Activation Analysis, p.117 below.

22. Notes for a speech: CE 102 (*WCHE*, vol.16, pp.441-442). A summary of Oswald's speech, as it was recalled by Robert Fitzpatrick and other members of the audience: CE 2649, pp.10-17 (*WCHE*, vol.25, pp.924-928).

7 “A Little Incident in Mexico City”

For more about the book, which is available as a paperback and an ebook, see <http://22november1963.org.uk/a-brief-guide-to-the-jfk-assassination>. To buy the book, go to:

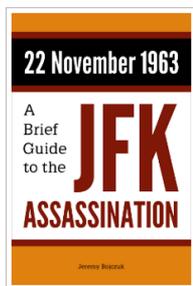
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8 Silvia Odio and León Oswald

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9 The Career of Lee Harvey Oswald

One of the first matters to be considered by the Warren Commission was also one of the most sensitive: an allegation that Lee Harvey Oswald, the only official suspect in the assassination of President Kennedy, had been a paid undercover agent of the FBI or the CIA. J. Lee Rankin, the Warren Commission's General Counsel, was told in January 1964 by a reliable source that it was common knowledge among journalists in Texas that Oswald had regularly received \$200 per month from the FBI.

Stories had already emerged that Soviet officials had met Oswald in Mexico City a few weeks before the assassination. These stories had generated competing conspiracy theories that blamed either the Soviets or the US security system for the killing. The Warren Commission was established specifically to counteract these conspiracy theories. If it became widely believed that Oswald had been secretly employed by a federal agency, the Commission would of course have found it almost impossible to make a convincing case that the alleged assassin had acted alone. Rankin and Earl Warren were determined to silence the rumours. The matter was discussed at an emergency meeting of the Commission on 22 January 1964. Two days later, Rankin and Warren met officials from Texas, who repeated the FBI rumour and mentioned other rumours about a connection between Oswald and the CIA. According to FBI interviews with one of the officials, Rankin swore them to secrecy. At the next meeting of the Warren Commission, on 27 January, Rankin discussed the FBI rumour but did not mention Oswald's alleged connection with the CIA. Secrecy was extended to

the records of the various meetings. Part of the 22 January meeting took place off the record, and the stenographer's notes of the remainder of the meeting were destroyed. A tape recording survived only by chance. No stenographer was present at the 24 January meeting; the only record was a memo by Rankin.¹ These documents only came to light many years later, as the result of litigation under the Freedom of Information Act.

Some of the details of these rumours were almost certainly false. The FBI numbers attributed to Oswald, S172 or S179, did not follow the normal pattern for paid informants, which was: an abbreviation for the agent's local office (e.g. DL for Dallas, or NO for New Orleans) followed by an arbitrary four-digit number, and finally 'S' if the informant provided information on security-related matters, as Oswald was alleged to have done. Alonso Hudkins, the journalist at the centre of the affair, later claimed that he had invented the numbers. The CIA number, 110669, did follow that agency's normal pattern.² Some corroboration for the rumours appeared during the HSCA investigation in the late 1970s. William Walter, a member of the FBI's office in New Orleans, claimed that he had seen an FBI teletype which showed that Oswald had been an informant for that office. James Wilcott, a former CIA payroll officer, claimed that it was widely assumed among his CIA colleagues that Oswald had been a full-time employee of the Agency, although the HSCA was unable to find any support for this and "concluded that Wilcott's allegation was not worthy of belief."³

The rumours about Oswald's possible connections to the FBI and CIA were largely kept out of public view for many years. Other information became available soon after Oswald's arrest and murder which showed that he was not just an order-filler at a book warehouse. The more information that came to light, the more unusual his career appeared to be: he was a former Marine who had defected to the Soviet Union; he had been involved in both pro-

1. J. Lee Rankin's memo: CIA document 487-195A, Record Copy 201-0289248.

2. Secret Service interview with Hudkins: Secret Service Report 767, part of CD 320. FBI interviews with Hudkins and the Texas officials: FBI HQ Oswald File 105-82555-100. For a full discussion of this episode, see Gerald D. McKnight, *Breach of Trust: How the Warren Commission Failed the Nation and Why*, University Press of Kansas, 2005, pp.128-147.

3. William Walter: NARA RIF no. 180-10076-10413. James Wilcott: HSCA Interview of James B. Wilcott, 22 March 1978 and *HSCA Report*, pp.199-200.

and anti-Castro activity in New Orleans; and he had a strong interest in purchasing weapons by mail order.

Oswald was one of a series of former US military types who defected to the Soviet Union between 1958 and 1960. Some of this group of military defectors appear to have been compromised by the Soviets; others appear to have been working for US intelligence.⁴ Oswald was armed with a very good knowledge of Russian, at least some of which he seems to have acquired at a specialist military language school, the Defense Language Institute in California. The Warren Commission appears to have heard, from sources not yet publicly identified, that Oswald had received instruction from the Defense Language Institute: "We are trying to run that down to find out what he studied at the Monterey School of the Army in the way of languages."⁵ He had spent about three months at a Marine base not far from Monterey. According to the portion of his Marine Corps record that has been made public, Oswald had been tested in the Russian language while in the Marines, which implies that he had been taught Russian while in the Marines. Needless to say, foreign language tuition and testing were not normally part of Marine Corps life. Oswald had no significant knowledge of any other foreign language.⁶

Oswald's return to the USA in 1962 appeared to be actively condoned by the US authorities. Despite having promised to hand over state secrets to the Soviet regime, Oswald was not prosecuted. The State Department had assisted his return, by lending him the fare for the trans-Atlantic ocean crossing.⁷ Oswald and his Russian wife settled in the Dallas area, where they were befriended by George de Mohrenschildt, a petroleum geologist with connections to US intelligence. They mixed socially with the strongly anti-Soviet Russian *émigré* community in Dallas.⁸

4. For military defectors, see John Newman, *Oswald and the CIA*, Carroll and Graf, 1995, pp.169–173 and 182–190. For an example of a US undercover agent in the Soviet Union, see NARA RIF no. 104–10066–10201, p.6.

5. Warren Commission Executive Session, 27 January 1964, p.192. For Oswald's knowledge of Russian in 1959, see CE 2015, p.8 (WCHE, vol.24, p.430) and Edward Epstein, *Inquest: the Warren Commission and the Establishment of Truth*, Viking Press, 1966, p.87.

6. Near Monterey: CD 113. Oswald's Marine Corps record: WCHE, vol.19, pp.656–768.

7. The loan from the State Department: WR, p.770.

8. George de Mohrenschildt's connections to the world of intelligence were origi-

Oswald applied for a new passport in June 1963, stating on the application form that he was planning to travel to the Soviet Union. The passport was granted the next day, an instance of bureaucratic efficiency that was noted during a meeting of the Warren Commission: "one of the strange things that happened, and it may have no bearing on this [the rumour that Oswald was an informer] at all, is the fact that this man who is a defector . . . could walk about the Immigration Office in New Orleans one day and come out the next day with a passport that permitted him to go to Russia. From my observations of the case[s] that have come to us, such passports are not passed out with that ease."⁹ An FBI memo made Oswald's status clear: "With Oswald's background we should have had a stop on his passport, particularly since we did not definitely know whether or not he had any intelligence assignments at that time."¹⁰ Any intelligence assignments that justified the granting of a US passport must, of course, have been on behalf of US intelligence.

Lee Oswald moved to New Orleans in April 1963, ostensibly to find work. He made contact with several Cuban anti-Castro activists, including Carlos Bringuier, who was in charge of public relations for two organisations: the Cuban Revolutionary Council and the *Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil*.¹¹ Oswald surprised Bringuier by offering to assist with a paramilitary training camp operated partly by the DRE. Bringuier declined the offer; he assumed that Oswald was an infiltrator working for either the pro-Castro movement or a US agency such as the FBI.¹² Bringuier's suspicions seemed to be justified when he encountered Oswald a few days later, distributing 'Hands Off Cuba!' leaflets on behalf

nally denied, but have since become better known. For his background, see *HSCA Appendix*, vol.12, pp.53–55.

9. Details of Oswald's passport application are summarised in this FBI report: CE 1062 (*WCHE*, vol.22, p.12). "Strange things": Warren Commission Executive Session, 22 January 1964, pp.7–8.

10. *HSCA Appendix*, vol.3, p.541.

11. For Oswald's links to anti-Castro Cubans in New Orleans, see Peter Dale Scott, *Deep Politics and the Death of JFK*, University of California Press, 1993, pp.80–92. The HSCA's assertion (*HSCA Appendix*, vol.10, p.62) that Bringuier was unconnected to the Cuban Revolutionary Council is false; see Scott, *op. cit.*, p.327 n.21.

12. Carlos Bringuier: *WCHE*, vol.10, p.35. For US intelligence activity in relation to both pro- and anti-Castro Cubans, see the *Schweiker-Hart Report*, pp.10–21. Although both the FBI as an agency and its senior officers as individuals were sympathetic to the anti-Castro movement, the Bureau also had to respond to pressure to limit the public's access to weapons.

of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, a pro-Castro organisation specifically targetted by the DRE. The two men got into an argument, the police were called, and Oswald spent the night in jail. Oswald's release from jail was covered by the local news media.

Two more publicity stunts helped to identify him further with the pro-Castro cause. He hired assistants for a brief session of handing out FPCC leaflets. The session was covered on television; according to one of Oswald's assistants, the leafletting took no longer than 15 minutes, which suggests that the television station had been alerted in advance.¹³ After being interviewed on a local radio station, Oswald was invited to take part in a radio debate on the Cuban question, in which he claimed that he was a Marxist and a member of the FPCC.¹⁴ At one point in the debate, Oswald hinted that his communist sympathies may not have been genuine: "I worked in Russia. I was under the protection of the, that is to say, I was not under the protection of the American government."¹⁵

There were two main consequences of Oswald's activity. When applying for a Cuban visa in Mexico City a few weeks later, he made use of the pro-Castro credentials he had acquired in New Orleans. Within hours of the assassination, members of the DRE contacted several news organisations, supplying the evidence of the radio debate and pointing out the loyalty to the Castro regime of the apparent FPCC member and alleged assassin.¹⁶ As a result, the FPCC was obliged to disband in December 1963. The FPCC had been a long-standing target of the FBI; according to an FBI memo from the time of Oswald's activities in New Orleans, "CIA is also giving some thought to planting deceptive information which might embarrass the [Fair Play for Cuba] Committee."¹⁷

13. Charles Steele, Jr: *WCHE*, vol.10, p.66.

14. A transcript of the interview: *WCHE*, vol.21, pp.621-632. A transcript of the debate: *ibid.*, pp.633-641. Recordings survive of the interview and the debate: http://www.maryferrell.org/wiki/index.php/Audio_-_Other.

15. Oswald's umming and ahing has been omitted from this transcript. His apparent admission begins at about 15 minutes 45 seconds into the 23-minute programme. The official transcript incorrectly reads: "I worked in Russia. I was not under the protection of the — that is to say I was not under the protection of the American government." See *WCHE*, vol.21, p.639.

16. The DRE and the radio debate: *HSCA Appendix*, vol.10, pp.85-86.

17. The FBI and CIA against the FPCC: *Schweiker-Hart Report*, p.65; and Newman, *op. cit.*, pp.236-244.

A CIA document from several years later stated that the DRE was “an anti-Castro organization conceived, created, and funded by the CIA.”¹⁸ The DRE received \$51,000 per month from the CIA through a propaganda operation directed by George Joannides. As the historian Gerald McKnight points out, “The unappreciated irony in this whole business was that the first JFK assassination conspiracy theory to find its way into print was paid for by George E. Joannides, a CIA psychological warfare specialist.”¹⁹ In his later role as the liaison officer between the CIA and the House Select Committee on Assassinations, Joannides ensured that the HSCA remained unaware of the Agency’s financial and operational links to the DRE.²⁰

Oswald’s pro-Castro activity was not, however, what it seemed. Despite his left-wing media persona, Oswald had no known left-wing associates. The New Orleans branch of the FPCC consisted only of Oswald and one A.J. Hidell, which was presumed to be an alias for Oswald himself. Whether or not it actually was an alias, the name ‘Hidell’ functioned as an alias for Oswald. Both Oswald and Hidell were linked to the post office box to which the sixth-floor rifle was sent.²¹ Oswald himself ensured that official records associated his name with Hidell and with sympathy for the Castro regime. In jail on the morning after the scuffle with Bringuier, Oswald requested, and was granted, an interview with an FBI agent, in which he produced a membership card which linked his and Hidell’s names with the FPCC.²² This information was duly relayed to the 112th Army Military Intelligence Group and the Office of Naval Intelligence, whose files surfaced immediately after the assassination.²³

Some of Oswald’s FPCC leaflets were stamped with an address, 544 Camp Street, which had no connection to the organisation. On

18. NARA RIF no. 104-10170-10156.

19. McKnight, *op. cit.*, p.350.

20. For more about the publication of Oswald’s radio debate, and the relationship between the DRE and the CIA, see Jefferson Morley, ‘What Jane Roman Said, part 6,’ at http://www.history-matters.com/essays/frameup/WhatJaneRomanSaid/WhatJaneRomanSaid_6.htm.

21. The post office box: *WR*, pp.119-120.

22. The FPCC membership card: *WCHE*, vol.10, p.54; *WCHE*, vol.4, p.434.

23. 112th Military Intelligence Group linked Oswald and Hidell: *HSCA Report*, p.222. See also Scott, *op. cit.*, pp.84, 258-260.

the contrary, the building was associated with strongly anti-Castro interests. In 1962 it had been used as a base by the Cuban Revolutionary Council, and in 1963 it housed the offices of a private detective agency run by W. Guy Banister, a former FBI agent who was working at arms' length for the FBI and other federal agencies on a number of projects, including anti-Castro activity.²⁴ Oswald was a frequent visitor to Banister's office, according to several people who worked there, including Banister's secretary.²⁵ Banister, who was very much opposed to the FPCC and the Castro regime, also associated with Oswald in public. William Gaudet, a CIA asset who was peripherally involved in Oswald's Mexico City adventure, told the HSCA that "on one occasion he [sic] observed Oswald speaking to Guy Bannister [sic] on a street corner."²⁶ The historian Michael Kurtz, who was a student in New Orleans in 1963, saw the supposedly left-wing Oswald in the company of the undoubtedly right-wing Banister on two occasions, one of which involved Banister speaking at length to a group of students: "Bannister [sic] took what can only be called an extremist right-wing position, vehemently advocating a return to racial segregation, criticizing the students for attending an integrated university, and insisting that the United States launch a full-scale military invasion of Cuba." Kurtz concluded that "Oswald's public image as a pro-Castro Marxist was a façade masking the anti-Castro and anti-Communist agitator beneath."²⁷

Guy Banister was not Lee Oswald's only curious associate in the summer of 1963. Antonio Veciana was the leader of Alpha 66,

24. For the Camp Street address on Oswald's literature, see CD 1495 and CE 3120 (WCHE, vol.26, p.783). For Banister's agency as a proxy or subcontractor for federal investigators, see *HSCA Appendix*, vol.10, p.130, and Scott, *op. cit.*, pp.86-90.

25. For Oswald's association with Banister and his anti-Castro activity, see: James DiEugenio, *Destiny Betrayed: JFK, Cuba and the Garrison Case*, 2nd edition, Skyhorse Publishing, 2012, pp.110-114; Anthony Summers, *Not In Your Lifetime: The Assassination of JFK*, Headline, 2013, pp.272-280; and Newman, *op. cit.*, pp.308-310.

26. For William Gaudet, see *HSCA Report*, pp.218-219 and Newman, *op. cit.*, pp.346-347. For Gaudet's Mexico City connection, see Scott, *op. cit.*, p.96 and notes 12-14 on pp.331-332.

27. Michael L. Kurtz, *Crime of the Century: The Kennedy Assassination from a Historian's Perspective*, 2nd edition, University of Tennessee Press, 1993, p.xxxix and p.204. See also Michael L. Kurtz, 'Lee Harvey Oswald in New Orleans: a Reappraisal,' *Louisiana History*, vol.21 no.1 (Winter 1980), pp.7-22, which discusses Oswald's involvement in Banister's pro-segregationist activity, although Kurtz often cites only "confidential interviews" as his sources.

one of the most aggressive groups of anti-Castro Cuban exiles. He claimed that on one occasion in late August or early September he turned up for an appointment with his CIA handler, who went under the assumed name of 'Maurice Bishop', and found 'Bishop' in the company of a young man whom Veciana recognised after the assassination as Lee Oswald. Veciana stated that "I am sure it was Oswald. If it wasn't Oswald, it was someone who looked exactly like him." Veciana later identified 'Maurice Bishop' as David Atlee Phillips, who in 1963 was based in Mexico City, where he ran the CIA's anti-Castro operations, including its subversion of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. Phillips was the main source of the false claim that all recordings and photographs of Oswald in Mexico City had been routinely destroyed before the assassination.²⁸

Oswald was very interested in purchasing weapons by mail order, both during the summer of 1963 in New Orleans and at the beginning of the year while living in Dallas. In addition to the rifle found on the sixth floor and the revolver found on Oswald when he was arrested, Dallas police discovered among his possessions several complete advertisements for weapons and at least five mail order coupons. One of these coupons, for a Mannlicher Carcano rifle from Klein's Sporting Goods of Chicago, was matched to a specific copy of the June 1963 issue of *American Rifleman* magazine which contained his thumb print.²⁹ This copy of the magazine was discovered by the FBI and the Secret Service on the day after the assassination, in a garage in New Orleans. In June 1963 Oswald had been working in a building next door to the garage. The proprietor of the garage claimed that Oswald had often spoken to him about guns, and in particular about how to obtain them by mail order.³⁰

28. For Veciana's encounter with 'Maurice Bishop' and Oswald, see Gaeton Fonzi, *The Last Investigation*, Thunder's Mouth Press, 1993, pp.140-144; and Summers, *op. cit.*, pp.302-304. Veciana repeated his claims at a conference to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of the *Warren Report*; see 'Skeptics gather 50 years after Warren Commission report about JFK assassination,' *Boston Globe*, 27 September 2014. For David Phillips and the FPCC, see Newman, *op. cit.*, p.241. For Phillips and the recordings, see Fonzi, *op. cit.*, p.285.

29. For Hidell's purchases, see WR, p.723, and Martha Moyer, 'Ordering the Rifle,' *Kennedy Assassination Chronicles*, vol.2 no.1 (March 1996), pp.23-31. For Oswald's thumb print, see CD 75, p.456, and Henry Hurt, *Reasonable Doubt: An Investigation into the Assassination of John F. Kennedy*, Henry Holt, 1985, p.298.

30. Oswald's conversations about guns: *WCHE*, vol.10, pp.220-227.

There seems to be no legitimate reason why Oswald should have wanted to order guns while in New Orleans. Several months earlier, a Mannlicher Carcano rifle of the same type as that found on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository had been ordered and received by 'A. Hidell' from Klein's Sporting Goods of Chicago, using a coupon in the February 1963 issue of *American Rifleman*. Likewise, 'A.J. Hidell' had bought Oswald's revolver by mail order in January 1963.³¹

The *Warren Report* argued that Oswald "no doubt . . . purchased his weapons under the name of Hidell in an attempt to prevent their ownership from being traced,"³² but failed to notice that the use of a pseudonym obscured his real identity only from the vendors. To those investigating the assassination, the name 'Hidell' was easily matched to Oswald through their use of the same post office box. The Commission also failed to notice that if Oswald had wished to obscure his identity fully, an almost foolproof method existed which he did not use. When the mysterious Mr Hidell had ordered the revolver and the rifle, Oswald was living in Dallas, Texas. The easiest way to obtain a weapon in Texas in 1963, and the only sensible way for an aspiring assassin, was to visit one of any number of shops which would sell one over the counter. No identification was needed, and no incriminating paper trail would exist. Identification was only required, and an incriminating paper trail created, when purchasing a weapon from a different state, by mail order.

In 1962 and 1963, the growing trade in mail-order weapons was being investigated by two official bodies: the Alcohol, Tobacco and Tax Division of the Internal Revenue Service, and a subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee, headed by Senator Thomas Dodd.³³ Among the organisations under investigation were: the American Nazi Party, whose officials' names and addresses featured in Oswald's address book;³⁴ Cuban exile organisations, including three with whom Oswald had attempted to make contact in New Orleans and Dallas; Klein's Sporting Goods, of Chicago,

31. For the history of the weapons associated with Oswald, see *WR*, pp.118–121.

32. *WR*, p.315.

33. For the Dodd Committee's activities, which included the use of undercover investigators who purchased guns, see Hurt, *op. cit.*, pp.300–302.

34. Oswald's address book: CE 18 (*WCHE*, vol.16, pp.37–70).

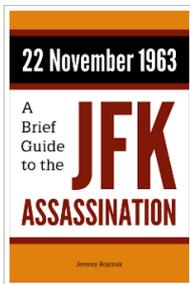
from whom 'A. Hidell' had purchased by mail order a 36-inch-long Mannlicher Carcano rifle, the same model as the 40-inch-long rifle that was discovered on the sixth floor of the TSBD; and Seaport Traders, of Los Angeles, from whom 'A.J. Hidell' had purchased by mail order the revolver which was found on Oswald when he was arrested on 22 November 1963.

There is no categorical proof that Lee Oswald was working for one or another agency of the US government, either directly or through a proxy, but the circumstantial evidence is overwhelming. It is unclear whether Oswald himself, using the Hidell alias, purchased the 40-inch-long rifle which would link him directly to the assassination. A more important issue is also unclear: how much of Oswald's activity in New Orleans, Mexico City and Dallas was directed by others specifically in order to incriminate him, and how much of it was genuine undercover work that was seized on at some stage in the planning of the assassination. Several aspects of the Mexico City episode, for example, can be interpreted as an attempt by the counter-intelligence branch of the CIA to expose Soviet moles within the US security system. Oswald need not have been, and probably was not, a straightforward employee of one agency.

10 JFK Assassination Conspiracy Theories

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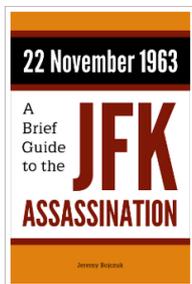
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Appendices

A The Medical Evidence

The medical evidence is the single most complex aspect of the JFK assassination, and is the source of many of the contradictions and ambiguities that have allowed the case to drag on for so long. Most of these contradictions and ambiguities are due to the nature of the autopsy, which appears at first sight to have been carried out to a scandalous level of incompetence. The most fundamental aspects of the medical evidence are the nature, size and location of President Kennedy's wounds, none of which were documented to a reasonable degree of precision.¹

The autopsy took place during the evening of 22 November 1963 at Bethesda Naval Hospital Center, a military teaching institution near Washington, DC. Although many well-qualified forensic pathologists were available within a short distance of Bethesda, the

1. For the problems with the autopsy, see *HSCA Appendix*, vol.7, p.177; and Cyril H. Wecht, 'A Critique of President Kennedy's Autopsy,' in Josiah Thompson, *Six Seconds in Dallas: A Micro-Study of the Kennedy Assassination*, Bernard Geis Associates, 1967, pp.278-284. The most comprehensive and readable overviews of the medical evidence can be found in two articles in James Fetzer, ed., *Murder in Dealey Plaza: What We Know Now That We Didn't Know Then About The Death of JFK*, Catfeet Press, 2000: Gary L. Aguilar, 'The Converging Medical Case for Conspiracy in the Death of JFK' (pp.175-217); and David W. Mantik, 'Paradoxes of the JFK Assassination: The Medical Evidence Decoded' (pp.219-297). Harold Weisberg, *Never Again*, Carroll and Graf, 1995, and Charles Wilber, *Medicolegal Investigation of the President John F. Kennedy Murder*, Charles C. Thomas, 1978, provide the most reliable book-length treatments, but were published before the ARRB released many relevant documents. For a detailed account of the conduct of President Kennedy's autopsy and its interpretation by the Warren Commission, see Gerald McKnight, *Breach of Trust: How the Warren Commission Failed the Nation and Why*, University Press of Kansas, 2005, pp.153-180. The most complete online resource is Gary Aguilar and Kathy Cunningham, 'How Five Investigations into JFK's Medical/Autopsy Evidence Got it Wrong,' at <http://www.history-matters.com/essays/jfkmed/How5Investigations/How5InvestigationsGotItWrong.htm>.

pathologists chosen to conduct the autopsy were middle-ranking military officers whose only practical experience of forensic autopsies was a one-week course taken by one of the pathologists ten years earlier.²

Not all of the problems with the medical evidence are due to the inexperience of the pathologists. The written records from the autopsy are incomplete, and perhaps corrupt. The original autopsy report no longer exists; it was deliberately destroyed by Dr James Humes, the senior pathologist, after the murder of Lee Oswald. The reason given for the destruction, that the documents were spattered with the president's blood, is clearly untrue: some of the surviving documents are blood-stained, and the original report was written the day after the autopsy and would not have been contaminated.³ The rewritten autopsy report includes measurements and other data that do not exist in the pathologists' surviving notes and diagrams.⁴

The photographs, or at least those that are publicly available, fail to provide clear and unambiguous views of any of Kennedy's wounds. In particular, they do not allow a definitive description of the wound or wounds to the head. The photographs do not match the recollections of the photographers and the pathologists. Both groups of participants remembered ordering or taking photographs that appear no longer to exist. The two photographers had been required to sign a receipt on the day of the autopsy and an inventory in 1966 stating that the photographic record was complete, but later testified that the documents were incorrect and that photographs were missing.⁵ Among the missing photographs are at least two of the interior of Kennedy's torso⁶ and one of his skull.⁷ The brain, which might be expected to reveal information

2. The pathologists' qualifications: *HSCA Appendix*, vol.7, p.182.

3. Humes's destruction of the original autopsy report: testimony to ARRB, 13 February 1996, pp.136–138.

4. Rewritten autopsy report: *WR*, pp.538–546. The surviving notes from the autopsy: CE 397 (*WCHE*, vol.17, pp.29–48).

5. John Stringer: testimony to ARRB, 16 July 1996, pp.214–216; ARRB Medical Document 19, p.11. Floyd Riebe: testimony to ARRB, 7 May 1997, pp.53–54. The receipt: ARRB Medical Document 78. The inventory: ARRB Medical Document 13.

6. Stringer: testimony to ARRB, 16 July 1996, p.213; Dr Humes: ARRB Medical Document 19, p.7; *WCHE*, vol.2, p.363; Dr J. Thornton Boswell: ARRB Medical Document 26, p.6.

7. Dr Pierre Finck: ARRB Medical Document 30, pp.89–90.

about the number and direction of the fatal shot or shots, had gone missing by the time the House Select Committee on Assassinations inspected the medical evidence.⁸

The photographic record is not the only element of the autopsy that has attracted suspicions of foul play. One of the pathologists, Dr Pierre Finck, admitted under oath that he and his colleagues were ordered not to perform a dissection of the back and throat wounds, an elementary procedure that would almost certainly have determined whether the president's non-fatal injuries had been caused by one or more bullets, and from which direction or directions the bullet or bullets had come.

The autopsy took place several hours after President Kennedy's assassination and Lee Oswald's arrest. It was widely known at the time of the autopsy that Oswald had been inside the Texas School Book Depository, almost directly behind the president, during the shooting. The broadcast media had already reported the claims of eye-witnesses that shots had come from more than one direction, as well as a press conference at Parkland Hospital, during which one of the doctors who had treated the president claimed that the throat wound had been caused by a shot from the front:

Questioner : What was the entrance wound?

Dr Perry : There was an entrance wound in the neck.
As regards the one in the head, I cannot say.

Questioner : Which way was the bullet coming on the neck wound? At him?

Dr Perry : It appeared to be coming at him.

Questioner : Doctor, describe the entrance wound. You think from the front in the throat?

Dr Perry : The wound appeared to be an entrance wound in the front of the throat; yes, that is correct.⁹

Those in charge of the autopsy would surely have been aware that President Kennedy's wounds may have been caused by more than one gunman, and that dissecting the wounds was likely to

8. *HSCA Appendix*, vol.7, p.177.

9. ARRB Medical Document 41, pp.5-6.

resolve the question one way or the other. Their refusal to allow the dissection can only reasonably be interpreted as a fear of discovering definitive evidence of conspiracy.

The two factors which forced the adoption of the lone-assassin explanation had not yet emerged. Evidence of Lee Oswald's impersonation in Mexico City, which implies that Oswald either had associates or was impersonated without his knowledge, did not reach Washington until several hours after the conclusion of the autopsy. Public suspicion of conspiracy, and the attendant public dissatisfaction with governmental institutions, was not yet widespread. Pierre Finck's testimony indicates that the high-ranking military officers who appeared to control the autopsy were already aware of the need to promote the lone-assassin explanation:

Mr Oser : How many other military personnel were present at the autopsy in the autopsy room?

Col. Finck : The autopsy room was quite crowded. It is a small autopsy room, and when you are called in circumstances like that to look at the wound of the President of the United States who is dead, you don't look around too much to ask people for their names and take notes on who they are and how many there are. I did not do so. The room was crowded with military and civilian personnel and federal agents, Secret Service agents, FBI agents, for part of the autopsy, but I cannot give you a precise breakdown as regards the attendance of the people in that autopsy room at Bethesda Naval Hospital.

Mr Oser : Colonel, did you feel that you had to take orders from the Army General that was there directing the autopsy?

Col. Finck : No, because there were others, there were Admirals.

Mr Oser : There were Admirals?

Col. Finck : Oh, yes, there were Admirals, and when you are a Lieutenant Colonel in the Army you just follow orders, and at the end of the autopsy we

were specifically told — as I recall it, it was by Admiral Kenney, the Surgeon General of the Navy — this is subject to verification — we were told not to discuss the case.

Mr Oser : You were told not to discuss the case?

Col. Finck : — to discuss the case without coordination with the Attorney General.¹⁰

...

Mr Oser : Doctor, speaking of the wound to the throat area of the President as you described it, after this bullet passed through the President's throat in the manner in which you described it, would the President have been able to talk?

Col. Finck : I don't know.

Mr Oser : Do you have an opinion?

Col. Finck : There are many factors influencing the ability to talk or not to talk after a shot.

Mr Oser : Did you have an occasion to dissect the track of that particular bullet in the victim as it lay on the autopsy table?

Col. Finck : I did not dissect the track in the neck.

Mr Oser : Why?

Col. Finck : This leads us into the disclosure of medical records.

Mr Oser : Your Honor, I would like an answer from the Colonel and I would ask The Court so to direct.

Judge : That is correct, you should answer, Doctor.

Col. Finck : We didn't remove the organs of the neck.

Mr Oser : Why not, Doctor?

Col. Finck : For the reason that we were told to examine the head wounds and that the —

10. *State of Louisiana vs. Clay L. Shaw*, Criminal District Court, Parish of Orleans, State of Louisiana, 198-059 1426(30) section C, transcript, pp.51-52.

Mr Oser : Are you saying someone told you not to dissect the track?

Judge : Let him finish his answer.

Col. Finck : I was told that the family wanted an examination of the head, as I recall, the head and the chest, but the prosecutors in this autopsy didn't remove the organs of the neck, to my recollection.

Mr Oser : You have said that they did not. I want to know why didn't you as an autopsy pathologist attempt to ascertain the track through the body which you had on the autopsy table in trying to ascertain the cause or causes of death? Why?

Col. Finck : I had the cause of death.

Mr Oser : Why did you not trace the track of the wound?

Col. Finck : As I recall I didn't remove these organs from the neck.

Mr Oser : I didn't hear you.

Col. Finck : I examined the wounds but I didn't remove the organs of the neck.

Mr Oser : You said you didn't do this; I am asking you why didn't [you] do this as a pathologist?

Col. Finck : From what I recall I looked at the trachea, there was a tracheotomy wound the best I can remember, but I didn't dissect or remove these organs.

Mr Oser : Your Honor, I would ask Your Honor to direct the witness to answer my question. I will ask you the question one more time: Why did you not dissect the track of the bullet wound that you have described today and you saw at the time of the autopsy at the time you examined the body? Why? I ask you to answer that question.

Col. Finck : As I recall I was told not to, but I don't remember by whom.

Mr Oser : You were told not to but you don't remember by whom?

Col. Finck : Right.

Mr Oser : Could it have been one of the Admirals or one of the Generals in the room?

Col. Finck : I don't recall.

Mr Oser : Do you have any particular reason why you cannot recall at this time?

Col. Finck : Because we were told to examine the head and the chest cavity, and that doesn't include the removal of the organs of the neck.

Mr Oser : You are one of the three autopsy specialists and pathologists at the time, and you saw what you described as an entrance wound in the neck area of the President of the United States who had just been assassinated, and you were only interested in the other wound but not interested in the track through his neck, is that what you are telling me?

Col. Finck : I was interested in the track and I had observed the conditions of bruising between the point of entry in the back of the neck and the point of exit at the front of the neck, which is entirely compatible with the bullet path.

Mr Oser : But you were told not to go into the area of the neck, is that your testimony?

Col. Finck : From what I recall, yes, but I don't remember by whom.¹¹

Another of the pathologists, J. Thornton Boswell, revealed three decades later that the Justice Department was greatly concerned by Finck's testimony. Carl Eardley, a Deputy Assistant Attorney General, got in touch with Boswell:

He was really upset. He says, "J, we got to get somebody in New Orleans quick. Pierre is testifying, and he's really lousing everything up." . . . They showed me

11. *Ibid.*, pp.114–118.

the transcript of Pierre's testimony for the past couple of days, and I spent all night reviewing that testimony. And it was this bit about the general. Jim [Humes, the chief pathologist] said, "Who's in charge here?" And when they asked Pierre in court who supervised and ran the autopsy, he says, "Some Army general."¹²

The two official interpretations of the medical evidence differ in crucial ways.¹³ Because of the inadequate conduct of the autopsy and the poor preservation of the medical evidence, a plausible case can be made that President Kennedy's head wounds resulted from: one shot from behind, hitting him low down, near the external occipital protuberance, as the autopsy pathologists concluded; one shot from behind, hitting him four inches or ten centimetres higher, as the Clark Panel and the HSCA concluded; one shot from in front, hitting him above his right ear, as the Zapruder film and some of the X-rays indicate; and even two or more shots, from behind and from in front. Medical evidence can be cited to support all four contradictory statements.

One of the medical paradoxes is the apparent contrast between the accounts of the doctors in Dallas and those at the autopsy, concerning the damage to the head. The House Select Committee on Assassinations stated that, of the 26 witnesses at the autopsy who had given evidence, none agreed with the Dallas consensus of a large wound situated toward the back of President Kennedy's head, which implied a shot from the front, and that "it seems more probable that the observations of the Parkland doctors are incorrect."¹⁴ This discrepancy gave rise to one of the very few pro-conspiracy books to have benefitted from generous and largely uncritical coverage in the media: David Lifton's *Best Evidence*.¹⁵ Lifton interviewed many of the participants at the autopsy, and his book contains some useful information. His over-imaginative solution

12. J. Thornton Boswell: testimony to ARRB, 26 February 1996, pp.208–210.

13. *WR*, pp.86–91, and *HSCA Appendix*, vol.7, pp.80–134.

14. *HSCA Appendix*, vol.7, p.37.

15. David Lifton, *Best Evidence: Disguise and Deception in the Assassination of John F. Kennedy*, Macmillan, 1980. Page references that follow are from the Signet edition of 1992. For Lifton's other main contribution to the case, see James DiEugenio, *Destiny Betrayed: JFK, Cuba and the Garrison Case*, 2nd edition, Skyhorse Publishing, 2012, pp.188–189.

to the mystery is that at some point between its departure from Parkland Hospital in Dallas and its arrival at Bethesda Naval Hospital Center, Maryland, for the autopsy, the president's body had been surgically altered to hide evidence of shots from the front.

Lifton was inspired by a passage in the Sibert and O'Neill Report, the account by the two FBI agents who attended the autopsy. The agents reported that:

The President's body was removed from the casket in which it had been transported and was placed on the autopsy table, at which time the complete body was wrapped in a sheet and the head area contained an additional wrapping which was saturated with blood. Following the removal of the wrapping, it was ascertained that the President's clothing had been removed and it was also apparent that a tracheotomy had been performed, as well as surgery of the head area, namely, in the top of the skull.¹⁶

Lifton described his reaction:

I knew exactly what that meant — *this* was the missing piece of the puzzle.

The Dallas doctors had operated only on the throat. No one had touched the President's head — certainly not with a surgical instrument.

Yet those words, if true, meant that some time after the President was pronounced dead in Dallas, but before the coffin arrived in the Bethesda autopsy room, somebody had performed "surgery" on President Kennedy's corpse.

I was exhilarated, terrified. I wanted to vomit.¹⁷

In an affidavit submitted to the House Select Committee on Assassinations in 1978, however, James Sibert explained that as the autopsy progressed, the pathologists revised their initial suspicions of "surgery of the head area":

16. ARRB Medical Document 44, p.3.

17. Lifton, *op. cit.*, p.201; emphasis in the original.

When the body was first observed on the autopsy table, it was thought by the doctors that surgery had possibly been performed in the head area and such was reflected in my notes made at the time. However, this was determined not to be correct following detailed inspection and when the piece of bone found in the limousine was brought to the autopsy room during the latter stages of the autopsy.¹⁸

An unpublished but widely circulated manuscript by the late Roger Feinman, *Between the Signal and the Noise*, made a strong case against Lifton's notion of forgery to the president's corpse. The document includes useful background information about the world of the early JFK assassination researchers, as well as a rather petty, he-said-she-said account of a squabble between Feinman and Lifton. Feinman raised objections to four main aspects of Lifton's theory. Firstly, the apparent discrepancies between the medical witnesses at Parkland and at Bethesda can be explained without having to assume foul play. Secondly, Lifton proposed that all the shots were fired from the front: "to be able to shoot the President, retrieve the bullets, and insure that afterward it appeared the shots came from behind, the real bullets had to be fired from the front."¹⁹ The only wound that was caused by a bullet whose trajectory is beyond dispute was the wound to Governor Connally's torso: a bullet entered his back and came out of his chest. Lifton fails to deal with this fundamental contradiction, as others have pointed out: "Lifton makes no attempt to explain Connally's wounds within the terms of his theory. He does not seem to notice the problem at all."²⁰ Thirdly, the body was supposedly altered in order to fool the pathologists into believing that all the shots came from behind, but the pathologists may already have been aware that Kennedy's throat wound was the result of a shot from in front. Feinman argues that Dr George Burkley, the only medically qualified person to have been present both at Parkland Hospital and the autopsy, had been in the emergency room while a

18. James Sibert, Affidavit to HSCA, 24 October 1978, p.4.

19. Lifton, *op. cit.*, p.400.

20. Thomas Powers and Alan Rich, 'Robbing the Grave,' *New York Magazine*, 23 February 1981, p.46, cited in Roger Feinman, *Between the Signal and the Noise*, chapter 5. The wound to Connally's torso: CE 392 (*WCHE*, vol.17, p.16).

tracheotomy had been performed over the wound.²¹ Fourthly, the wound in Kennedy's back was supposedly constructed to implicate Oswald, but its location exonerates him: it is too low to make the single-bullet theory credible.

Feinman took Lifton's notion that the alteration of the body was an integral part of the plot, and pointed out the enormous extra complexity and potential for disaster that the notion entails. Rather than hiring snipers to shoot President Kennedy only from in front, and hiring surgeons to construct wounds in his back and head to mimic shots from behind, and hiring teams to kidnap the corpse and transport it to and from some unnamed location, all of which Lifton proposed, why not simply hire a sniper to shoot him from behind in the first place?

Lifton was not the first or the last writer to suggest that Kennedy's body had been tampered with.²² Feinman pointed out that this type of thinking causes more harm than good. The invention of implausible and unnecessary conspiracies to resolve conflicts in the evidence does not bring an explanation for the assassination any closer. Propagandists for the lone-nut hypothesis can point to the relative credibility of their beliefs when compared to the notion that an unspecified number of unidentified conspirators using an unexplained method whisked the president's body away from under the noses of all the people on Air Force One as well as the ground crew and the journalists and sightseers who were watching the plane: "If my analysis was correct, the President's body was inside the Dallas casket when it was put aboard Air Force One at 2:18, but was no longer inside the casket at 2:47, as the plane rolled down the runway."²³ The real problem with *Best Evidence* is not the believability or otherwise of its thesis but rather the media's decision to promote this particular book as a representative of the many critical works written about the assassination.²⁴

21. Feinman, *op. cit.*, chapter 8.

22. The earliest published account seems to be Fred T. Newcomb and Perry Adams, 'Did Someone Alter the Medical Evidence?', *Skeptic*, Special Issue no.9 (September–October 1975), pp.24–27.

23. Lifton, *op. cit.*, p.790. Against Lifton, see Joel Grant, 'Body Snatchers at Love Field?' at http://mccadams.posc.mu.edu/b_snatch.htm.

24. For more criticism of the body-alteration theory, see David Wrone, *The Zapruder Film: Reframing JFK's Assassination*, University Press of Kansas, 2003, pp.134–137; and Harold Weisberg's unpublished manuscript, *Autopsy of a JFK Assassination Best*

The autopsy witnesses' testimony had been classified by the HSCA in 1978. When the evidence was finally released to the public, 30 years after the assassination, it turned out that rather than 26 autopsy witnesses testifying against the wound at the rear of the head, the HSCA had taken evidence from only 12. Those 12 witnesses at the autopsy had actually agreed with the earliest, incorrupt evidence of the witnesses in Dallas: the wound extended into the back of the head. The HSCA had simply lied, and the theory of bodily alteration was unnecessary.²⁵

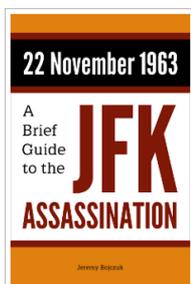
Seller: Best Evidence as Bad Evidence, available at the Harold Weisberg Archive at Hood College, Frederick, Maryland, and online at <http://jfk.hood.edu/>.

25. For the HSCA's treatment of the witnesses, see Gary L. Aguilar, *op. cit.*, pp.197–200.

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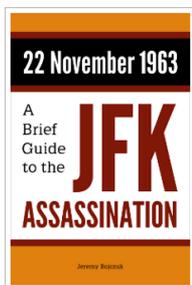
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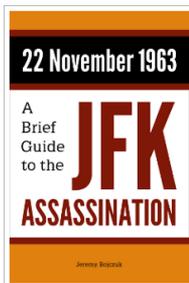
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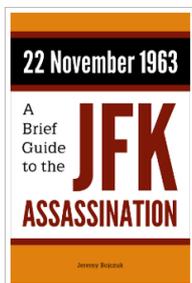
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