

JFK's Pre-Autopsy Autopsy

A few years ago I decided to look into the JFK assassination. It had been decades since I had given it much thought. Back then, there were two bitterly opposed groups: those who believed the Warren Commission report, and those who didn't. My hope was that in the intervening decades, the two sides had slugged it out, leaving one side standing, and all I needed to do now was read a couple of books that would lay it all out for me. Then I could move on to my next project. I didn't care which side won, I just wanted to know what really happened. If Oswald did it on his own, fine.

Since then, I have read around 50 books on the JFK murder, most of them recently published, so they should reflect the latest evidence and best thinking. There are still a huge number of contradictions, inconsistencies, peculiarities, controversies, and unanswered questions. That alone seems to be pretty solid evidence that the Warren Commission version of events has failed miserably to solve the murder. Because if it were that simple, surely the evidence would have established that fact rather conclusively rather quickly.

It should have been a straightforward process. An autopsy is performed. Forensic pathologists examine the body, document the wounds, determine which are entry and which are exit wounds, remove any bullets in the body, follow the bullet trajectories, take pictures and x-rays, and tell us what happened. But nothing about the JFK autopsy was normal or routine. (That, too, strongly suggests that there were people involved who didn't want the simple truth to become known.)

Here's part of what I have found out. And most of this is not a matter of interpretation or opinion. This is well documented fact. There are three versions of evidence available. 1- The eyewitnesses at Dealey Plaza and the doctors and medical professionals at Parkland Hospital overwhelmingly point to a fatal gunshot to the head that originated from JFK's front right. The grassy knoll, in other words. 2- The doctors and medical technicians who performed the autopsy at Bethesda Naval Hospital overwhelmingly point to a fatal gunshot wound that originated from behind and above JFK. From the sniper's nest on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository, in other words. 3- The available autopsy pictures and X-rays, stored at the National Archives, are dramatically different from either of the other two versions. They show JFK's head largely intact.

Three diametrically opposed and mutually exclusive sets of medical evidence. All three point to a different conclusion about the murder because they present radically different versions of the evidence. How can that be? Were all those people in Dallas dishonest or grossly incompetent? The evidence doesn't support that. Were all those medical professionals and military officials at Bethesda telling boldface lies? Were they so incompetent that they don't know what they saw? The evidence doesn't support that. Are those photos and X-rays at the National Archives phonies? Were they doctored or photoshopped? Are they images of a body other than JFK's? The evidence doesn't support that. They have all been examined by a number of qualified people, and there is no disagreement. They are all images of JFK's body, and none of them have been tampered with.

So, what's going on here? How does any of this make sense? Three very different views of apparently the same evidence. For a number of years, there were two camps. Those who believed the Warren Commission report pointed to the Bethesda view for their proof. They tended to dismiss the Dallas evidence as mistaken somehow. The Bethesda autopsy report was what they considered "best evidence" because the Bethesda doctors are more reliable and authoritative. Critics of the Warren report pointed to the Dallas evidence as their proof. Those eyewitnesses who had seen or heard evidence of shots fired from the grassy knoll couldn't possibly all be mistaken or lying. The Parkland doctors couldn't possibly all have been mistaken or lying. All that evidence couldn't simply be dismissed or ignored.

The "critics", as they are known, demanded to see the Bethesda autopsy photos and X-rays. That should clear everything up, they said. But those photos and X-rays were not available, they were told. Why not? Where were they? Apparently, they had been turned over to Bobby Kennedy and they were still in the care and custody of the Kennedy family. For some reason, the Kennedys weren't inclined to share. Apparently, the photos were just too gruesome and shocking to be seen by the public. They didn't want JFK to be remembered that way. Okay, that's understandable. But this was the crime of the century. This was the President of the United States. Surely the people's right to know what happened trumped the Kennedy wishes. Surely, matters of law and national security took precedence over the personal desires of the Kennedys. Continuing to withhold such vital evidence only fueled the general distrust of our federal government and helped spawn more conspiracy theories.

Finally, the photos and X-rays were turned over to the National Archives. But the number released didn't match up with the military records. In fact, there were more photos and X-rays turned over to the National Archives than were taken and documented during the autopsy! More unexplained inconsistencies, unanswered questions. There was a catch, though. For the first five years, only representatives of the federal government would be granted access to the photos and X-rays. After that, anyone who wanted to see them would have to get permission. At first, it was very difficult for any "critic" to get such permission. However, enough time has passed that enough people have seen the evidence, and they are said to be authentic. They just happen to show something very different than what was described by the Bethesda or Parkland doctors. Why? How could that be? How could anyone hope to ever make sense of all that?

Well, somebody did. More than one somebody. The evidence was discovered and developed by David S Lifton. He spells it all out for us in his bestselling book, *Best Evidence*. Then, Douglas P Horne built on Lifton's research, adding to it and refining it as part of his work for the Assassination Records Review Board (ARRB). His job there was Chief Analyst for Military Records. His work was hampered significantly by the fact that ARRB was not authorized to undertake any new investigation into the JFK murder. So, anything that even hinted of investigation had to be disguised as necessary for the ARRB's assigned task, which was to identify all government records that related to the JFK murder, and to get those documents turned over to the National Archives so they could be viewed by the public. Horne was constantly in a position of trying to convince his boss that what he wanted to do was within the scope and jurisdiction of ARRB. It

wasn't easy, because Horne was driven to get to the truth of the JFK murder, and that passion for truth was not shared by anyone else at ARRB.

The Board had been established because a majority of Americans had lost faith in their federal government. They just didn't believe federal officials could be trusted to tell them the truth, especially about the JFK murder. So, ARRB was intended to show that the feds were acting in good faith. It was supposed to prove to the public that the feds were doing everything in their power to come clean, to be honest, and to act in good faith. They, for the most part, firmly believed that Lee Oswald was the lone assassin, just as the Warren report said. Getting all those documents declassified and placed into the National Archives would appease the masses, and hopefully finally put an end to the conspiracy theories. They weren't the least bit worried that the Board would stumble across a smoking gun, because they were sure there was no smoking gun to be found.

Douglas Horne thought there was more to the story, and he was determined to take full advantage of this golden opportunity to get to the truth, even if it did mean doing some real investigative work, which he was not authorized to do. What he found is all spelled out in his 5-volume work: *Inside the Assassination Records Review Board*. It isn't fun reading. It isn't easy reading. Horne ventures deep into the weeds. Unfortunately, that's where the answers lie that can help reconcile the conflicting medical evidence.

The answer is so astonishing that it sounds more like fiction than fact. If you weren't aware of the bewildering dilemma of the three sets of conflicting medical evidence, it would be pretty much impossible to take the Lifton/Horne evidence seriously. But the reality of the conflicting evidence itself is

hard to believe. Once you understand the dilemma, you are already deep into the weeds, so venturing a bit further isn't such a mind-numbing experience. So, what did they find that sounds so incredible?

The short version is this: Only the Parkland doctors viewed the body of JFK as it was originally, following the shooting. Since they performed no surgery* there, what the autopsy doctors saw at Bethesda should have been what the Parkland doctors saw. But, by the time the body reached the Bethesda morgue and the official autopsy began, JFK's body had been altered by post-mortem surgery. It is often referred to as the *pre-autopsy autopsy*. I know, it sounds too wacky to even seriously consider. Who would do such a thing? Why would they do such a thing? How could they possibly pull it off without anyone noticing? When did it happen? Where did it happen? All such questions demand an answer, and it must be somehow not only remotely possible, but plausible. That doesn't seem possible. But it is. It doesn't seem possible that there are three different sets of medical evidence. Yet there are. That doesn't sound plausible, either. Yet it's true. It doesn't seem plausible that a sniper's bullet exploded JFK's head in Dallas on November 23, 1962. Yet it's true. Not really. I was just seeing if you are paying attention. He was shot on November 22, 1963.

Instead of thinking of it as some huge conspiracy, think of it as a covert operation. Because that's exactly what it was. A successful covert operation commits the act, then covers it up, then covers up the coverup. The operatives deflected blame away from themselves by setting up LHO as the lone-nut assassin. That also avoided a lot of suspected messy international involvement. But for that to work, the public had to be convinced that all shots came from behind and above JFK. That was a problem, because he was shot from the

front, and the body clearly revealed that to the Parkland doctors. So, they had to get access to the body before the Bethesda official autopsy. In the pre-autopsy autopsy they were able to reverse the direction of the shots to the satisfaction of the autopsy doctors. But that was hurried and rather sloppy, and that would have been obvious in the autopsy photos and X-rays. So the photos and X-rays now in the National Archive are of a reconstructed head, largely intact, not at all consistent with the condition of the JFK head as seen in Dallas or Bethesda. That still leaves some loose ends, but officials simply point to the photos and X-rays as the "best evidence", and it supports the Warren version of events. There are always loose ends, they say, shrugging and moving along.

Of course, those photos and X-rays are not the "best evidence". They are arguably the best available evidence, but the best evidence was JFK's body. The pre-autopsy autopsy destroyed that best evidence. Some people want to exhume JFK's body. I've heard some rumblings that the real body is not where it's supposed to be. I don't know of any credible evidence of that, but it doesn't matter. The body will never be exhumed. And even if it were, it would no longer yield any conclusive forensic evidence leading to the truth of what happened. We could probably get some answers by examining the brain, though.

So, where is JFK's brain? It is standard procedure to closely examine the brain as part of any autopsy involving a gunshot to the head. The brain is removed from the head, dissected, and preserved as evidence. In this case, the brain was turned over to the Kennedy family. They say they don't know where it is or what happened to it. Another unsolvable mystery. Evidence lost forever. Another successful part of the covert operation.

I won't try to explain here exactly how the operatives managed to pull all this off. I can tell you that Lifton and Horne have different opinions about some of the details. But they are on the same page regarding the overall pre-autopsy autopsy scenario. If you really want details, you'll just have to read their books, which I recommend you do anyway.

There are still a lot of unanswered questions, but I think I have a pretty clear picture of what happened, who the players were, why they did it, and how they did it. There is plenty of evidence that LBJ played a role in the murder plot, then a much bigger role in the coverup. CIA had the starring role in this covert operation, which makes sense, because they are the experts at that sort of thing. They had support from mafia principles and Cuban refugee groups. J Edgar Hoover's role in the murder plot consisted of doing nothing. He was aware of what was happening, but he did nothing to stop it. He didn't participate in it, either, because he didn't need to. But he and LBJ played the starring roles in the coverup. Sound impossible? Improbable? Implausible? It certainly does, until you start taking a look at the evidence. There's hardly any aspect of the JFK murder that seems reasonable, likely, or believable. Yet, there it is.

* The Parkland doctors did perform one bit of what would be considered *surgery*. They made a small cut in JFK's throat to insert a breathing tube, as they were still trying to save the President's life. As it turned out, this led to an enormous amount of confusion at Bethesda. What they didn't know at the official autopsy at first was that the small incision for the tracheotomy was also a bullet hole. It just happened that that bullet wound was exactly where the Parkland doctors needed to insert the tube.

The Bethesda doctors were going nuts because they had a head wound, which they believed was an entry wound, but they didn't see any corresponding exit wound, nor could they find any bullets still inside JFK's body. Finally, a call to Parkland revealed that the point of incision in the throat was also a bullet wound. Prior to the insertion of the breathing tube, the bullet hole was small and round, typical of an entry wound, not an exit wound, which is usually larger and more jagged. By the time the official autopsy began, that small entry wound had become a much larger hole, more like an exit wound. That allowed the Bethesda doctors to conclude (falsely) that the throat wound must be an exit wound, even though virtually everyone at Parkland had seen it as an entry wound.