

MEMORANDUM

To: File

From: Jeremy Gunn

Date: December 18, 1995

Subject: Interview with Dr. Paul Peters

On December 18, 1995, I interviewed Dr. Paul Peters at his office at Southwest Medical Center, which is affiliated with Parkland Memorial Hospital. Dr. Peters retired in August of 1995. Dr. Peters is a urologist. He was one of the physicians who attended President Kennedy at Parkland Hospital.

After explaining to Dr. Peters what the Assassination Records Review Board is, Dr. Peters spontaneously began to discuss some of the issues related to the assassination of President Kennedy. At the very beginning of our conversation he made it clear that he believed that President Kennedy was shot by one gunman from behind. He spontaneously raised the name of Dr. Lattimer, whose evidence and conclusions Dr. Peters finds to be compelling. Again, prior to my asking any questions, Dr. Peters observed that although President Kennedy was propelled backwards when he was shot, that is consistent with a shot from behind according to Dr. Lattimer's research.

Dr. Peters identified for me the location of the wound that he observed on President Kennedy. He raised his hand to the back of his own head, behind the ear, and described the wound as seven centimeters in circumference and touching the occipital parietal region. He stated that he himself did not see the entry wound, which he identified as being lower on the head near the hairline. Dr. Peters said that he believed that the wound was tangential, entering in the back and exiting a short distance from the exit wound, which was in the occipital parietal area. He said that the wound was "clearly in the back of the head." He stated that he saw the cerebellum which he believed to be in tact, but depressed. He subsequently said in our interview that the only mistake that he believes that he made in terms of his observation was believing that the cerebellum had extruded from the wound. He said that he was in error on that and the cerebellum was only depressed and had not extruded. I asked Dr. Peters how much scalp he believed was missing at the time that he saw President Kennedy. He said that he was unsure and was not certain whether any scalp was in fact missing. He observed that he simply did not know the answer. He did observe, however, that the scalp was torn.

I asked Dr. Peters approximately how much of the brain was missing at the time he saw President Kennedy. He said that the left side of the brain appeared to be intact and that he would estimate that

approximately 15 to 30 per cent of the right hemisphere of the brain had extruded or was missing. He again observed that all of the missing part of the brain was from behind the ear. I subsequently showed Dr. Peters the supplemental autopsy report that identified the brain as weighing 1500 grams. Dr. Peters observed that that was larger than he would have expected, but he reached no conclusion about the significance of the 1500-gram figure.

With respect to the neck wound, Dr. Peters said that he had at first believed that the neck wound was an entry wound. He said that because they did not remove the shirt of President Kennedy during the times they were making resuscitation efforts, the Dallas doctors had not seen the wound in what he called the neck. He said that because the doctors had seen the neck wound and the skull wound, they originally believed that the bullet had entered the neck, shattered part of the vertebrae, and that bullet exited through the back of the skull. He stated that he later revised this original guess based upon his having been given further information. He maintained throughout our discussion that President Kennedy's vertebrae had been hit and had been broken and he said that he had observed vertebrae chips on the x-ray.

I showed Dr. Peters the Fox photographs and asked him to comment on the photographs. It was very clear from his comments that he had no basis for believing that there had been any tampering with the photographs. He observed, for example, that the neck wound was roughly how he remembered it at Parkland (this neck wound, this is the front wound). He put his fingers on the photographs to identify the location of the wound that he observed. In every circumstance, where the back of the head was shown, he said that the wound was in the occipital parietal area. When I asked him why the wounds were not observable on the photographs, he responded that the scalp was pulled up to cover the wound. He made this observation with respect to every photograph that shows the back of the head intact. I asked Dr. Peters why an autopsy photographer would not show the wound as it appeared, but pull the scalp in such a way as to cover the wound and make the wound appear as if it isn't there. He said he had no explanation for this, and that he certainly would not have wanted photographs to be taken in that way. He stated that when he was shown photographs in conjunction with the NOVA special, questions were put to him to have him identify the entry wound near the cowlick area. Dr. Peters resisted those leading questions, observing that by the photographs he would have no basis for describing the cowlick mark as an entry wound or as any other kind of marking. He said that he would rely on the autopsy doctors rather than the photographs for such observations. I asked Dr. Peters whether he could reconcile the photographs of President Kennedy that show a large amount of brain tissue extruding from the midpoint to the back of the head with those photographs that show no brain tissue and the back of the head. He said that it would be his belief, although he did not know, that the brain tissue had either been pushed back into the head or had been removed prior to the taking of the photographs that show no brain tissue on the back of the head. He presumed that the hair had been cleaned prior to the photographs that show little or no brain tissue on the back. Dr. Peters further observed that the photographer should have taken pictures of the wound in the skull rather than having the scalp pulled over the wound in order to cover the wound. Dr. Peters was unable to orient with any degree of confidence the photograph that shows

the cranium with a large gaping wound. He believed that it was the back of the head with the scalp pulled away, but was uncertain. When I asked him whether it might be showing the top of the head with the scalp pulled down over the forehead, he stated that that was indeed a possibility but he was not at all certain. Dr. Peters was very impressed by the x-rays that he saw in the National Archives. He said that he and the other doctors at Parkland had little conception of the size of the wound. He observed, when he first saw the x-rays, "My God." This seems to have been the single most impressive evidence that Dr. Peters remarked during his view of the original autopsy photos and x-rays. I asked Dr. Peters about whether he had any recollection of telephone calls being made between Dallas and Parkland. He stated that he was not at all certain about how many calls were made or when the calls were made, but it was his recollection that there were calls made between Dallas and Parkland during the time the autopsy was occurring. He seemed to be reluctant to make observations about the number and timing of the calls because he said that he simply was not certain himself. With these caveats, he nevertheless said, "When President Kennedy's body got up to Bethesda, the calls started going back and forth."

Dr. Peters said that he attended Oswald when the latter was brought in for emergency surgery. He says that he borrowed a camera from Carl Dockery (PH.) who was a radiologist in Lubbock, Texas. Dr. Peters said that after he had taken the photographs during Oswald's treatment, the photographs were seized by an official who did not identify himself. Dr. Peters presumes, although he does not know, that it was either a Secret Service or FBI agent who took the photos. He said that the photographs were never returned to him and he does not know what happened to them. Dr. Dockery, however, said that the camera had been returned to him, but without the photos.

Dr. Peters made the observation that during the time that the President's body was in Parkland Hospital, "admirals and generals were a dime a dozen." He said that they were all over the hospital during that time and that for the following days there were many agents and officials in Parkland Hospital.

Dr. Peters recounted an anecdote about a former patient of his named Bartwell Odum (PH.), who was an FBI agent. Mr. Odum told Dr. Peters that he had been assigned to conduct surveillance on Marina Oswald after the assassination. Odum reported that he ultimately became friends with Marina and one day Marina invited him over for coffee. While Odum was in Marina's home, she opened a book up and a piece of paper fell out that was written in Russian. Marina described the paper as containing instructions. Odum, jokingly, said, "Oh, you mean instructions on planning the assassination of President Kennedy?" Marina responded by saying, "No, they are instructions for killing General Walker." (As of now, I am not aware of this document and we should pursue the matter.)

Dr. Peters observed that Dr. Shaw, who treated Governor Connally, has always maintained that President Kennedy and Governor Connally were not shot by the same bullet. Dr. Peters used this example to illustrate how, in his mind, a very good and competent doctor could reach a conclusion

that he, Dr. Peters, believes was contradicted by the facts. Dr. Peters seemed not to be able to understand how Dr. Shaw could have reached that conclusion.

Dr. Peters observed, and in my opinion somewhat reluctantly, that Dr. McClelland believes at this time that President Kennedy was shot from the front. Dr. Peters gives the impression of believing that Dr. McClelland is simply mistaken.

Dr. Peters had no knowledge as to whether any of the Parkland doctors may have kept papers from the time of the assassination. He suspected that Dr. Bashour may have taken notes and may still have those records available. Dr. Peters said that he has no notes, but said that he has a very good recollection of the events.

It was my impression that Dr. Peters was being very candid in the observations that he was making. It was my impression that he firmly believed everything that he told me, including that the scalp had been pulled back to cover the exit wounds. There was no doubt in Dr. Peters mind that the photographs showing the back of Kennedy's head obscure the location of the wound, which he believes to have been an exit wound.