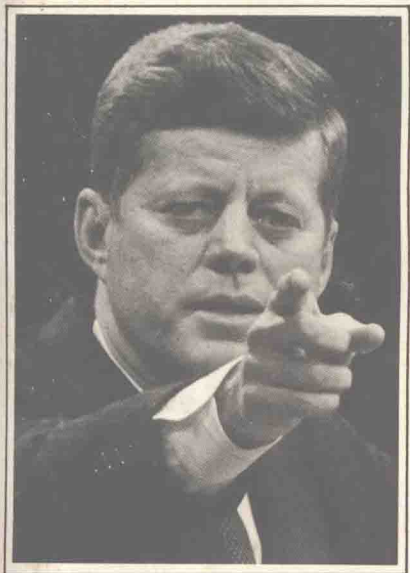


THIS NATIONAL
BESTSELLER CONTAINS
STARTLING NEW EVIDENCE



David S.

Lifton

BEST

EVIDENCE

DISGUISE AND DECEPTION
IN THE ASSASSINATION OF
JOHN F. KENNEDY

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David S. Lifton

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

IN THE WEE HOURS of the morning of October 23, 1966, I made a discovery in the Warren Commission's evidence which changed the course of my life. It led to a fifteen-year odyssey, and this book. During that period, I was fortunate enough to have some good and close friends who assisted me with the work.

For eight years, between 1966 and 1974, *Best Evidence* was essentially a research project. At that time I was living in Los Angeles, where I was given invaluable encouragement and support by Bernard Kenton, who served as a sounding board for a developing hypothesis; by Patricia Lambert, who assisted in my documentary research, scouring the Warren Commission's records for data; and by Paul Hoch, who shared his storehouse of files and insights. Steve Bailey was a good friend and helped with technical matters, particularly those relating to the autopsy photographs and X-rays. I owe deep thanks to Al Schweitzer for many valuable discussions and much technical assistance; to William Corrigan and Judith Schmidt for their encouragement and support and for often lending a hand with the research; and to Bruce J. Turner and June Ayling for their friendship.

Beginning in 1975, I produced a draft of this manuscript with assistance from Bernard Kenton, who typed the manuscript and assisted with the technical chapters; and major editorial assistance from Patricia Lambert. Thanks also to Victoria Pasternack, for editorial assistance, and to Linda Valentino for her encouragement and support.

In October 1976, I had the extraordinary good fortune to be introduced to New York literary agent Peter Shepherd, who read that manuscript and agreed to represent me. I came to New York City for what I thought was a brief visit, believing I had a saleable book. We soon learned

otherwise. Peter then urged me to recast that manuscript—an abstract evidentiary analysis—into a personal narrative, and offered to assist me in that task. Originally we thought the project would take several months, but it extended nearly four years and involved hundreds of meetings, during which the story of what I had been doing and experiencing became just as much a part of the book as the evidence I had found and the theory I was propounding. Besides convincing me to write the story as a personal narrative and guiding me in that endeavor, Peter also expertly edited the chapters. Without Peter Shepherd, *Best Evidence* would not exist.

During this period, I often felt I had a professional staff at my disposal. I received inestimable help from Bernard Kenton, with whom I was in constant touch, and who made many valuable suggestions, typed several thousand pages of manuscript, and also managed a complex filing system located on the West Coast, while I was in New York City working with Peter Shepherd. Patricia Lambert lent invaluable support, made detailed comments and suggestions, and rendered major editorial assistance in rewriting and cutting the text. Arnon Mishkin offered extremely helpful suggestions during the drafting process, and then reviewed the entire manuscript when it was finished. Throughout, Paul Hoch provided valuable research assistance and insights, and he too reviewed the finished manuscript and made cogent comments and suggestions.

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Thanks to George Barnum, for permission to publish part of a personal memorandum written on November 29, 1963; and to journalist Gil Dulaney, for giving me access to notes of his interview with Dr. Ebersole. Thanks also to Josiah Thompson, for his generosity in putting at my disposal material originally accumulated during the research for his own book, *Six Seconds in Dallas*, published in 1967.

For the past fifteen years, the subject matter of this book was highly confidential. That made life difficult, and friendship counted for a lot. For their encouragement and support, I want to thank: Barbara Kenton, William Lambert, Ellen Starr Schwab, Bea Lebson, Robert Sam Anson, Pat Valentino, Carole Chazin, Robert Blair Kaiser, Caroline Isaacs, Robert Ansell, Francine Klagsbrun, Sam Klagsbrun, Isadore Ziferstein, and the late John Clemente.

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I am indebted to the following researchers for making material available to me: Richard Sprague, Gary Shaw, Jack White, Mary Ferrell, Stewart Galanor, Barbara Bridges, Penn Jones, Earl Golz, Jim Kostman, Harold Weisberg, Tom Stamm, and Ray Marcus.

At the National Archives, Marion Johnson was always helpful, and Les Waffan went out of his way to permit me to study, at length, audio tapes made the weekend of the assassination.

Similar kindness was shown to me by the staffs of the UCLA Research Library and the UCLA Biomedical Library, where much of my research was done.

There are no words that can express my gratitude to my parents Helen and Al Lifton. It was their encouragement and financial support that made this book possible.

DAVID S. LIFTON
Belle Harbor, New York

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Over fifteen years, my search for truth about the assassination of President John Kennedy has taken me down paths with surprising turns. In the pages that follow I have tried to convey to the reader a sense of my journey by relating it chronologically. All the facts that led me to form and discard hypotheses and opinions along the way, therefore, are set forth in the order in which I encountered them.

“MY GOD, DAVID, do you realize what you’ve found? You’ve found new evidence!”

The speaker: Prof. Wesley J. Liebeler, of the UCLA Law School, former Warren Commission attorney.

The date: October 24, 1966.

Liebeler and I had become sparring partners over the Warren Report. He accepted the Report—or at least said he did. I did not, and devoted months to studying the twenty-six volumes of Hearings and Exhibits—the published evidence of the investigation.

I was a graduate student in engineering at UCLA with a degree from Cornell in engineering physics. My primary interest was the physical evidence. My research culminated with a stint at *Ramparts* magazine in June 1966, where I wrote a thirty-thousand-word article analyzing the medical and ballistic evidence entitled “The Case for Three Assassins.”

Liebeler had a contract with a major New York publisher to write a book about the Warren Report, and had asked me to play a part in his project. He invited me to attend the UCLA Law School class he taught on the Warren Report to play devil’s advocate and to extend that role in a series of private meetings with him. Liebeler’s attitude was: Prove to me we were wrong, and I’ll say so in my book.

On October 23, 1966, I discovered a document that astonished and frightened me.

I arranged to meet Liebeler the following day.

I asserted, as I had many times before, that an assassin must have fired from the front. Liebeler made his customary reply, for which, previously, I had had no answer:

“If there’s another assassin, where’s the bullet?”

Now I responded, "That's simple, Jim." I walked around Liebelser and took up a position behind him, as if I were his barber. I took my right index finger, put it firmly atop his forehead, and drew it from front to back across his scalp, miming the motions of someone cutting into the top of the President's head. "They simply took the bullet out, before the autopsy."

I returned to my seat.

Liebelser stared at me incredulously.

"That is why," I said, "FBI agents Sibert and O'Neill reported that when the President's body arrived at the autopsy room at Bethesda Naval Hospital, there had been, quote, 'surgery of the head area, namely, in the top of the skull,' unquote."

Liebelser's reaction was instantaneous.

"Where does it say that?" he shouted at me.

"Right here," I yelled back, tossing the report across the desk.

As that unforgettable afternoon unfolded, I watched Liebelser follow the path I had traveled twenty-four hours earlier. Here was evidence that someone had altered the President's body prior to the autopsy; evidence that the autopsy report, the source of crucial information about the number and direction of shots, actually described a body no longer in the same condition as it had been immediately after the shooting. If this FBI report were true, the conclusions of the Warren Commission were erected on a foundation of sand.

The next week, Liebelser asked me to assist him in preparing a memorandum to Chief Justice Warren to set forth the questions that ought to be addressed to the autopsy X-rays and photographs which the Kennedy family had just donated to the National Archives. The Warren Commission had never examined the autopsy X-rays and photographs, having relied instead on artist's drawings prepared by the autopsy doctors.

The memorandum quoted the passage about head surgery in the FBI report. "It should be noted that no surgery was performed at Parkland Hospital in the area of the President's head," wrote Liebelser.

"In assessing the probable reaction to the statement concerning surgery in the President's head area, it should be noted that neither the Sibert and O'Neill report nor the comment about head surgery is set forth or discussed anywhere in the Report or 26 volumes of underlying evidence."

Liebelser also said:

Attention was first drawn to the above statement by Mr. David Lifton of Los Angeles. Mr. Lifton is quite familiar with the Report and the underlying evidence. He has agreed not to focus public attention on this matter until an attempt has been made to effect a responsible analysis of the autopsy photographs and X-rays to determine whether or not the Sibert and O'Neill report is accurate.

Prologue

Liebeler sent copies of his memorandum to all former Warren Commissioners, certain members of the staff, Assistant Attorney General Ramsey Clark, and Burke Marshall, the Kennedy family's attorney.

I thought then that Liebeler's memorandum would lead to a reopening of the inquiry, and mark the end of my own eighteen-month interest in the assassination.

It turned out, however, that I had only started a new chapter in a long struggle.

Foreword

In 1966, I was naive enough to believe that if evidence indicating conspiracy in the Kennedy assassination was brought to light, the government would act. The investigation would be reopened. Truth would win out.

It doesn't work that way—at least, not over the short run.

When I first became interested in this case, I was a UCLA graduate student. At this writing, I am 48, and less naive. It seems incredible to me that I was so excited about an idea that it governed and shaped my life for over fifteen years.

I'm still excited about what I discovered—but that excitement is tempered by the knowledge that truth takes a long time to emerge.

Best Evidence went to the printer on October 17, 1980, and almost immediately, I changed gears and embarked on a project to create a filmed record of the testimony of new witnesses I had discovered—the men in the autopsy room who had knowledge of the two caskets, of the body bag, and who had observed the body's arrival without a brain. About six weeks later, as I reviewed the footage back in New York, I was joined by Dan Rather's producer from *60 Minutes*. "Boy, Dan is going to love this!" he said. "Wait till you see the program we're going to do." My publisher began planning my tour assuming a *60 Minutes* kickoff.

As publication date approached, I felt as though I were sitting atop a rocket, moments before liftoff. Where would the journey lead? A close friend, equally ebullient, said: "What's life going to be like after *Best Evidence*?"

We were all excited that I had found so much new evidence. Rather's producer put it this way—the filmed interviews set up a conflict "between the inconceivable and the irrefutable."

My appearance on *60 Minutes*, however, was not to be. In early December, a composite of my filmed interviews was screened for executive producer Don Hewitt. When the lights went up, he barked, with evident hostility: "Did you pay these people?" "Yes," I responded, "A dollar for the release." Then, in the same tone, he asked, "Why did you make this film?" I replied that I wanted to interview the key witnesses on film before they had read the book, and before they realized the implications of their own accounts.

Hewitt eventually calmed down. He even warmed to the idea of doing a show, but at a subsequent screening, Dan Rather said he didn't understand why anybody would want to alter the body. "All you have here" he said, "are witnesses who remember things a bit differently."

Publication date arrived and with it my book tour began. I was on *Good Morning America*. Each day, I found myself in a different city, never having to look at the right-hand side of a menu. But certain things became apparent: first, the difference between the national and the local media.

In city after city, I was given splendid treatment and accorded great

respect. This is not to say that everybody agreed with everything I was saying, but I usually got a fair hearing on the local level.

The national media, however, were reluctant to deal with *Best Evidence* at all. This was true not only of the networks, but of the print media as well. (A notable exception was *Time*, which treated *Best Evidence* as a news story and gave it two full pages in the "National Affairs" section.) But the attitude of the majority was better illustrated by a meeting that writer/researcher Pat Lambert and I had with political reporter George Lardner of the *Washington Post* on the day *Best Evidence* was published. After viewing my film and questioning me about how the body was transported from Dallas to Bethesda, he said: "I don't think you'll ever make that palatable to the American public."

This reaction reflects what I have often thought: The difficulty with this material is not logical, but psychological. Truth, as the saying goes, is the daughter of time.

David Lifton
Los Angeles, California
July, 1988

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The Puzzle

Entering the Labyrinth

ON SEPTEMBER 20, 1964, during a recess of UCLA graduate school, I was visiting my parents in New York City. To celebrate my twenty-fifth birthday, they offered to take me out for an evening on the town. We were considering seeing the operetta *The Merry Widow* when I noticed a small advertisement in the *New York Times*: “Mark Lane on Who Killed Kennedy. Jan Hus Theatre. 351 E 74th. Seats \$2.00.” A friend had heard Lane argue that the official version of the assassination was false and she assured me it would be an interesting evening.

The Warren Commission had not yet issued its Report, but the “official” version was widely reported in the media: President Kennedy’s assassin was Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone. I told my friend that any person with common sense would know a conspiracy was out of the question. Too many people would have to be involved.

I watched Kennedy’s funeral on television, but the fact is that I paid scant attention to the assassination or its aftermath. After graduating from Cornell University’s School of Engineering Physics in 1962, I went directly to Los Angeles and a job as a computer engineer at the Space and Information Systems Division of North American Aviation, the prime contractor for the Apollo project, the United States program to put a man on the moon. My goal was to obtain an advanced degree in either physics or engineering. I worked at North American by night and attended UCLA by day, where I was taking three physics courses and one math course. I was isolated and preoccupied. To have a quiet place to study, I secluded myself in a hilltop apartment with neither a television nor a telephone. The first eight months of 1964 passed quickly.

The notion that a presidential assassination plot had escaped official detection seemed so absurd that I wanted to attend Mark Lane’s lecture