

DJ/CWA - 5/21/77 request - "for file"

Ms. Madelyn E. Johnson (Attn Ms. J. Kornblut)
Civil Division
Department of Justice
Washington, D.C. 20530

10/14/81

Dear Ms. Johnson,

Thanks you for your letter of the 13th pertaining to the Department's task force on the JFK assassination.

You say that you do not find a copy of the 1968 panel's report in Civil Division records. I do not know how you file, but that report most assuredly is a Civil Division record. I have personal knowledge. It was used by the Civil Division in court, in the case of Louisiana v. Shaw. Aside from Carl Hardley, of whom I have informed you, names on the court records included Joseph Hannon. I published the text of the report in facsimile in my book Post Mortem. Irving Jaffe also was involved.

Obviously, there must be other pertinent records, ranging from those essential to the selection of the panel to its working papers and related matters.

At one point a crew of Department lawyers made a trip to confer with Dr. Russell Fisher because the lawyers were not at all satisfied with what was before them. There should be records pertaining to this trip and to the cause of it and what resulted.

These are historically important records and should exist somewhere within the Department. For your information, the findings of this panel did not conform to those of the Warren Commission or the preconceptions/conclusions of the FBI. It is not an understatement to say that the report of the panel demolished that of the Warren Commission.

With it was a separate report of the doctors who performed the autopsy. In it they attest to what disproves their testimony before the Commission.

Of course all of this is phrased in a manner to suggest the opposite to the inept reader, including ranking Department officials.

The nature of the responsibilities of this task force leads me to believe, as I suggested to Mr. Shea, that its records will not be filed under anything like a task force. It was not a formal body. It had an almost clandestine purpose, to support the official conclusions of the Commission while seeming not to do so, while seeming to consider criticisms and complaints. I have read many of the latter, and they are for practical purposes form letters which entirely disregard the report of the panel. In no case did I find any really serious consideration given to incoming communications.

Responses were farmed out to various components, like Criminal and OLC.

With one exception, no task force records are included in what I have received from Criminal Division. (E. Ross Buckley.) I have seen no other reference to it.

While the panel's report was prepared for the Attorney General, as you say, it involved various components and it was used by Civil Division.

John P. Roche, who had been LBJ's intellectual in residence, took credit for the operation in one of his columns. Some leads should emerge from examination of the Roche file.

It is my recollection that I made a request for these records in about 1969. A request other than the one now being processed.

There undoubtedly is a question about where and how the records are filed but there can be no doubt that the records did exist and they should still exist, somewhere, and under some filing designation other than "task force."

Sincerely,
Harold Weisberg