

August 9, 1976

Dear Mr. Trappell,

I was delighted to receive your letter this morning expressing willingness to talk with me.

I can think of no way to prove to you that I have never worked for any of the agencies you mentioned so you would have to rely on my word that that is the case. I have spent my entire professional career as a writer except for one year when I worked for a bank and another when I was assistant to the Secretary of Commerce.

I should, however, explain to you in greater detail what I am interested in doing and how it was that I happened on your name.

About two weeks ago, a friend of mine in Chestertown, Maryland mentioned to me that he had heard Bertus Vickers, whom I have since learned you know quite well, mention that you had told him sometime in the late summer of 1963 that you had learned of a plot that would interest him and others. Moreover, he said that the details you gave him corresponded roughly to what eventually transpired.

Last week, I went to Chestertown and talked to Mr. Vickers myself who confirmed this. His recollection of the conversation he had had with you was that you had said that some group (and he could not remember what it was, or even whether you had known exactly what it was) in either Louisiana or Cuba was planning an assassination and that it was probable that it would occur in Texas. Mr. Vickers said that then he had asked you to tell your story to the FBI and that you did so -- to two agents from the Dover office, a Mr. Peartree and another man whose name Vickers could not recall. That is all he told me, and therefore all that I know at the moment.

What interests me is the possibility that what you discovered might be more than is currently known by the public. As you may know, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence has recently completed extensive hearings on various aspects of the performance of this country's security agencies. One volume of the published report of those hearings (which were secret) deals specifically with the assassination and the subsequent investigation of the Warren Commission. I have not finished reading that volume, but so far I have found nothing

what you told me. I have talked briefly on the telephone with two members of the committee staff who profess never to have heard your name. This could mean that for some reason the information you gave was dismissed somewhere along the line as irrelevant, inaccurate or unreliable. But it could also mean that it has been suppressed or simply lost. I don't know, and that of course is one of the things I would like to find out.

My main problem at the moment is that, because I have never paid much attention to all of the rumors and theories that have surfaced over the years regarding the assassination, I am hard put to assess the news value of your story as Vickers related it to me. That problem is, of course, compounded by the fact that I have only Vicker's second hand and very sketchy account of what exactly that story was. And, this being the case, it is hard for me to know at this point what sort of book or magazine potential there might be in all this.

I took the liberty of calling my literary agent and my publisher the other day, and, without mentioning your name, asked their opinion on this point. Without having any idea what your sources were, it was difficult to discuss, but they said essentially this -- that if the information is unique, that is to say it is information that has not as yet surfaced on the public record, it should at the very least make a magazine piece; and that if it is unique and ~~xxxxxx~~ corroboratable, it could very well be the foundation of a book.

The big problem is going to the latter point -- corroborating what you say. A newspaper would probably go with your story without any backup evidence just on the theory that the fact that you claim to know something ~~xxx~~ news whether it was right or wrong. But a book publisher or a magazine contemplating a lengthy article is going to be much more fussy. They are very chary of hearsay accounts, and will want the protection of having corroboration from its other sources. I assume that the sorts of sources from which you must have got such information are not going to leap forward and volunteer themselves. And, to be honest, I am not sure that persuading them to do so isn't going to prove beyond the ability of anyone not equipped with thumb screws -- certainly beyond the ability of an investigative reporter. But you would be better able to assess that problem than I.

Now you know exactly where I stand. I plan to approach the FBI to see if they will let me look at the record of your conversation with them, but I doubt very much that they are going to be willing to cooperate with me. So everything really depends on what you can and are willing to tell me. As I said in my letter last week, I would be happy to come to Marion to talk with you. But I frankly cannot afford the time and the expense without having a much clearer idea of what exactly I am likely to find out.

If you could tell me a little more than others could about the substance of the information you have, and give me some estimate of how difficult it would be to get corroboration, it would be of great help.

If it would help you in determining whether your information was unique I could get and send you a copy of the Senate report I mentioned earlier.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours truly,

A large, dark, rectangular redaction mark covers the signature area of the letter.

P.S. -- What are the regulations there regarding interviews? Time? Tape recorders? etc.