DRAFT

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Dear Professor Scott:

Let me begin by thanking you for the material you've sent to the Review Board. While we often receive letters and suggestions from researchers, the input that generally proves to be most helpful arises from careful research and documentation, especially if it points to the possible existence of assassination-related records that have not previously found their way into the public domain. The ARRB's principal purpose, after all, is to locate such records and see that they are placed in the National Archives.

I recently corresponded with Paul Hoch concerning various subjects of interest to him, and in my letter I included an overview of some of the peculiar challenges facing the ARRB's military team. I think it would be useful to give you the same information inasmuch as the abstract of your COPA remarks reflects some idiosyncratic views about the search for military records.

I should explain at the outset that I have seen no evidence within any military service or Department of Defense agency to support the assertion in your abstract that "officials in many agencies are still trying to maintain the public myth of Oswald as loner, a myth that requires [continued] concealment and lying . . . ." I do not perceive that anyone from any DOD entity has in any way dealt with us in bad faith. ARRB staff members have been given essentially unlimited, firsthand access to any records or records repositories we have asked to see. No one has tried to "steer" us in any direction. No one has tried to influence our search for records, denied us access to anything, or otherwise placed obstacles in our way. Other than for the legitimate reasons allowed by the JFK Records Collection Act, DOD officials (a large number of whom are so young that they weren't even born when the assassination occurred) evince no interest in maintaining the secrecy of assassination-era records. (In fact, most of the DOD records we have encountered have been unilaterally declassified in full by the originating DOD service or agency without any additional prompting by the Review Board.) Neither has any DOD official or employee ever pressed any particular interpretation of assassination events on me or any other member of the ARRB staff.

This is not to say that the search for military records is easy. Rather, the opposite is often true, but for reasons that did not appear in your COPA abstract. Let me explain.

First, when we talk about DOD and "military records" it is important to keep in mind that we're not talking about a single entity with a single set of archival holdings.

Rather, we're actually talking about several distinct services, offices, agencies and field commands, *each of which ordinarily manages its own archival records independently of all the others*. A partial listing of DOD entities includes: the Office of the Secretary of Defense (Washington Headquarters Services), which handles the records not only of the Secretary of Defense, but of all the many sub-offices (e.g. Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, etc.) that make up the Pentagon's "civilian" chain; the four military services; the Joint Staff (which manages not only Joint Staff records but, more importantly, those of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Chairman, JCS); the Defense Intelligence Agency; the National Security Agency; and the various unified and specified military commands (e.g. Strategic Air Command).

The problem here is that military records are "horizontally" dispersed among many different entities and that the records are not physically housed at any single site. An equally inconvenient (and frustrating) dimension is that each DOD entity commonly sets its own regulatory guidelines and procedures governing the disposition of its own records—what types of records should be retained, how long they should be retained, and when records should be destroyed. Only a very small fraction of DOD records qualify as "permanent" records that are routinely catalogued and set aside for eventual deposit in the National Archives; all other DOD records are kept only for a limited period of time (which varies by category of record), after which they go into the waste basket (or, if classified, into the incinerator or shredder). Most Pentagon records are therefore destroyed as soon as their designated retention period expires. This destruction is done in accordance with routine destruction schedules prepared by the National Archives to prevent records managers (and records repositories) from being buried under a paper avalanche.

Let me give you a specific example. In conjunction with the Joint Staff records managers, we arranged a careful search of records from the National Military Command Center (the Pentagon's "war room") for any operations journal, telephone logs, or other records made by the NMCC duty officer or watch team on November 22, 1963, and surrounding dates. Unfortunately, those records no longer exist: such files are only retained for 30 days and before they are routinely destroyed.

An additional factor contributing to the loss of records—and one of particular relevance to the JFK assassination—was the wholesale destruction in the early 1970's of many of the military intelligence files produced by domestic surveillance operations in the 1950's and 1960's. In response to congressional criticism that such domestic surveillance had exceeded lawful bounds, DOD undertook a general program to eliminate all its files on non-DOD-affiliated personnel or activities. This purge may well have been what

caused the pre-assassination file assembled by the Army's 112th Intelligence Corps Group on Lee Harvey Oswald to be fed into an incinerator.

The key points in all this—ones that, to speak candidly, I think many assassination researchers too often do not realize—are that military records are horizontally dispersed among dozens of different agencies and offices; that far fewer military records are kept as permanent files than many people imagine; that the "permanent" records from the early-1960's era that have survived routine destruction often are limited to major policy/planning documents and the papers of senior officials; and consequently that many (perhaps even most) of the nitty-gritty records assassination researchers wish to examine (e.g. intelligence files from the Dallas or New Orleans regional offices of the 112th INTC Group) often no longer exist.

Returning to the challenges facing the ARRB's military team, a second problem area has to do with what might be called "vertical" records dispersal within large DOD organizations, particularly the individual armed services. In an initial effort to achieve the goals of the JFK Records Collection Act, each service headquarters canvassed subordinate commands and offices for relevant records. In most cases, those commands sent back negative responses. The problem for us now is to gauge how extensively (and, in some cases, how conscientiously) the various subordinate commands actually carried out their searches.

As I explained above, we have received good cooperation from all DOD entities. The difficulty arises over a somewhat arcane point: for most large DOD agencies and services, their older records are not physically in their possession. Instead, records earmarked for long-term or permanent retention are commonly moved to federal records repositories for storage until such time as the records are eventually destroyed or transferred to the National Archives and Records Administration. These repositories (such as the one in Suitland, Maryland, housing many Pentagon records) are operated by NARA even though much of the material stored therein remains the property of the originating agency. Thus, a researcher desiring to review Army records in Suitland, for example, must arrange with both NARA (which has physical custody of the records) and the Army (which retains technical ownership).

For our purposes, the problem with this system is that in complying with the JFK Act most DOD agencies searched only the records in their possession; they did not, as a rule, conduct a thorough search of their records either deposited in federal records repositories or previously transferred to the National Archives. The bottom line here is that we are not yet confident that the searches earlier carried out by DOD agencies in accordance with the JFK Act checked all relevant records collections, especially those in

archival limbo at federal records repositories. One important feature of the ARRB's work at present is to correct these uncertainties, not just with DOD entities but with all federal agencies.

A third major problem area in the search for military records has to do with finding assassination-relevant materials within large records collections. Unlike the FBI and the Secret Service, the Department of Defense and the military services did not play a principal role in investigating the assassination. Consequently, while those other agencies often have records holdings clearly marked "JFK Assassination" or "Assassination Investigation" or whatever, DOD entities do not. Instead, individual DOD documents referring to the assassination are generally to be found (if at all) buried in collections dealing primarily with other topics. A full search through literally millions of records, document by document, page by page, in the hopes of finding everything that even remotely touches on the assassination is beyond the resources of either the ARRB or the Department of Defense.

To do the best job we can under the circumstances, both we and those working with us within DOD have tried to use available records catalogs, inventories, accession receipts and other finding aids to identify those records holdings that seem most likely to contain relevant materials. This is no easy task, since detailed subject headings for old file collections are frequently so vague (hundreds of boxes marked "General Office Files, 1963") as to be useless. Further exacerbating this problem is the difficulty in specifying what broad topics or records groups should be searched in detail in the hopes of uncovering collateral information that might have had some bearing on the assassination. For example, records dealing with such subjects as military support of anti-Castro Cuban groups, the movement of Army units from Europe to the U.S. as part of Operation Big Lift at the time of the assassination, and domestic surveillance activities by military intelligence units are clearly important to researchers interested in the Kennedy assassination. This connection was not necessarily apparent, however, to the people who did the initial search of DOD records: they were not themselves experts on the assassination and tended, therefore, to narrow their search to documents directly related to the president's assassination in Dallas on November 22, 1963. An important component of the ARRB's work with DOD now is to broaden the search for files to other related topics to see if they will yield information that will broaden our understanding of the assassination and its historical context.

What does all this mean? For one thing, it means that the ARRB military team has tasks and problems that are vastly different from those facing my colleagues who work with the FBI or the Secret Service. In the case of those other agencies, a significant portion of the ARRB's work revolves around processing, declassifying, and assuring the transfer

to the Archives of documents from discrete, already-identified assassination records collections within those agencies. For the reasons stated above, the work of the ARRB's military team is more of the needle-in-the-haystack variety as we (in cooperation with DOD records managers) try to pinpoint which additional files within the vast DOD records holdings may actually contain assassination-relevant documents. One should recall as well that DOD's records collectively are several orders of magnitude larger than those of the FBI, the Secret Service and the CIA put together.

Fortunately, we have made substantial progress on all fronts and have good news to report. One of our most important findings (in the federal repository in Suitland) was an Army microfilm archive from the Pentagon Telecommunications Center. At the time of the assassination, the PTC sent and received all normal message traffic that either originated from an Army office within the Pentagon or was addressed to one of them—*and all these incoming and outgoing cables were photographed on microfilm.* (In practice, this meant that messages from other agencies such as the Navy, Air Force, OSD, Joint Staff, even CIA and the State Department, were also recorded whenever one of their messages was sent to any Army addressee, even if "for information only.") This collection, which ranges from unclassified to Top Secret, consists of 400-500 rolls of microfilm per year, with each roll containing several hundred documents. The ARRB arranged to remove from the repository the film records for the years 1963 and 1964 so that they could be reviewed in detail. From these we have reproduced more than 300 individual documents related to events surrounding the assassination or its aftermath. These will be added to the JFK Collection at the National Archives shortly. (One batch that may be of particular interest to assassination researchers contains messages reporting domestic surveillance activities by the Army's 112th INTC Group in the months prior to the assassination. While these unfortunately include no reference to Lee Harvey Oswald—most of the reports deal with information regarding civil rights demonstrations or disturbances—they nevertheless provide new background information about the extent of the 112th INTC Group's cooperation and liaison with such agencies as the Dallas Police Department and the FBI.) Another area in which we have had considerable success is in interviewing former military personnel (Rudolph Reich, James K. Powell, and Edward J. Coyle of the 112th INTC Group, just to name three) about their recollections. Transcripts of these interviews will eventually be placed in the Archives' JFK Collection.

With respect to items that might be of particular interest to you, we currently have in our possession, and will soon transfer to the Archives, the original paper copies of Lee Harvey Oswald's Marine personnel and medical records. (As you know, the so-called ONI file is already in the Archives.) We are also searching for any previously-undisclosed Navy or Marine intelligence files on Oswald, and trying to locate people

who may be able to clarify some of the custodial issues you raised in your writings.

As I said above, I will be pleased to hear any input that you think might be helpful to us. Please understand, however, that the circumstantial case you build in *Oswald, Marine Corps Intelligence, and the Assault on the State Department* (that heretofore released records generated by Marine G-2 are "presumably a tiny fraction of the whole" and that this suggests "the existence of a second system for classified [Oswald] records") is not in itself conclusive either that such files ever existed or, if they did, that they still survive today. To be most helpful to us, I suggest that you boil any future input to us down to the barest utilitarian essentials, to wit:

-- What specifically should we be looking for? Why is it relevant to the assassination?

-- What specific headquarters or agency originated the document or record in question, and to whom was it addressed? (Assassination researchers are sometimes prone to throw around terms like "military intelligence" and "Marine G-2" without much regard for the fact that these could refer to any of several different intelligence units or activities.)

-- Where has the document previously been located, if known? What files did it come from? Who might have received copies of it? For example, a copy of the message concerning oOwald sent by 4th Army in San Antonio to Strike Command on the evening of the assassination was uncovered in an ONI file. (We found the same message, by the way, in the PTC microfilm files.)

-- Is the document in question part of a permanent record collection that is still even known to exist? And, if so, WHERE?

I look forward to receiving your thoughts and ideas.

Sincerely yours,

Timothy A. Wray
Chief Analyst for Military Records

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