

Personal

7 October 1965

Mr William Sloane
Rutgers University Press
New Brunswick N J 08903

Dear Mr Sloane,

Let me join you in being culpably prompt, by thanking you for your provocative letter of 4 October, on which I have a great deal to say. First, however, I should mention that I have been offered a contract for publication of the index, which I believe I will accept. The self-congratulation which infects a novice author on such an occasion no doubt will be discernible in the remainder of this letter, so please bear in mind these mitigating circumstances.

Your comments on the unreliability of memory are entirely valid—but I didn't refer to discrepancies in the testimony of individual witnesses, nor to conspiracy. A communist conspiracy is just about the last that I would postulate; nor do I suspect the present President of this particular crime. In fact, I have no desire whatever to substitute any specific solution for the solution which emanated from the Warren Commission. I only say that the Commission's conclusions are not trustworthy because its Report is not trustworthy.

It may be that Oswald was narrow, warped, and malicious. That is not my conception of him but I will not argue so subjective a judgment. But it is immaterial whether Oswald was good or evil, naive or diabolical, healthy or corrupt, if he did not commit the assassination. I am all but convinced that he did not, because much of the physical and circumstantial evidence which has been paraded before us in the Warren Report is dubious, unsupported, or false, and I see no reason to assume that the remainder is unimpeachable. In saying that it is dubious, unsupported, or false, I base myself exclusively on the official transcripts and documents in the Hearings and Exhibits. If the Commission found it necessary to distort, omit, and misrepresent the information it had collected, on some crucial aspects of the investigation, one must wonder if the charges against Oswald can be sustained at all. That was my reasoning when I began writing a comparative analysis of the Warren Report versus the Hearings and Exhibits. I had already written about 75,000 words when, just the other day, I received unexpected corroboration of my suspicions.

A young man who is doing his doctoral thesis on the Warren Commission's procedures was able to obtain almost unlimited access to the members and counsel of the Commission, and to a storehouse of its files, records, payrolls, etc. He told me that week after week during their travail the lawyers would wring hands and say to each other, "We have no case, we can't go on, we might as well give up, there is no evidence against Oswald;" and then one of their number, apparently charged with that responsibility, would patch and smooth and rewrite—and the foundering ship finally made it to shore, thanks to his ingenuity.

This un hoped-for glimpse behind the scenes (which for the moment should be considered confidential but which probably will become public if the doctoral thesis is published) reassures me that my impression that the Report is spurious is well-founded. Here are some explicit conflicts which contribute to that impression.

The Report asserts that the ammunition used in the assassination was recently manufactured and is currently produced. That is a falsehood, and has been acknowledged to be "inaccurate" by one of the Commission's lawyers with whom I had the privilege of speaking on the telephone. The ammunition is of World War II vintage and the Western Cartridge Company, which manufactured it, told me in a letter that it was not possible to vouch for the reliability of any remaining supplies.

In addition to this "inaccuracy" the Report omits mention of the fact that no ammunition was found on Oswald's person or among his possessions; and that a canvass of shops to establish his purchase of ammunition was completely unsuccessful. In fact, it proved impossible to establish any purchase, possession, or use in target practice of this or any other ammunition by Oswald. Consequently, we have a so-called assassin who has only the four bullets (three that were shot at the President and the Governor and one live round in the chamber of the rifle) he is said to have used, although the rifle equipped with a clip or charger holds seven bullets and although bullets are not sold individually, like candy bars, but in boxes of at least 20 and as much as 130. What is more, three of the cartridge cases had multiple sets of markings (one had three sets and two had two sets) —some of which markings could not be identified as having been made by the Carcano rifle—from which the Commission, straying dangerously near absurdity, reasons that these were the bullets Oswald had used in "dry runs" operating the rifle bolt, some six or seven months before the assassination! We must then postulate an assassin who was too parsimonious to buy a decent rifle or a supply of ammunition for the cheap rifle (a dealer told the FBI that he could have bought as many Carcanos of this type as he wished for \$3.00 each wholesale), but begged borrowed or stole four bullets, which he proceeded to use for practice on the porch and half a year later to assassinate the President. All this, with a rifle completely unfamiliar to him, with which he never familiarized himself by target practice, and despite the decrepitude of the weapon which is scarcely reflected in the Report but is detailed in the testimony.

The ammunition clip was indispensable to the crime. No one claims that Oswald, or the world's champion rifleman, could have shot that rifle three times in 5.5 to 8 seconds without using such a clip. The Report informs us that the rifle found in the Depository contained a clip, with citations to a page of testimony from Fritz and a page from Day. There is no mention of any clip on either of those pages. Moreover, there is nothing anywhere in the 26 volumes which substantiates the assertion that there was a clip in the rifle. And there is no contemporaneous reference to such a clip, nor any mention of one in press stories or from any other source prior to the publication of the Warren Report.

The Report states that Marina Oswald copied the license number on FBI agent Hosty's car and gave it to Oswald, who wrote it down in his pocket notebook. The testimony shows that lawyer Jenner conducted an experiment to see if the number could have been copied under the circumstances which applied. "You cannot see the license plate, much less the number," said he. Yet, without further inquiry or resolution of the problem, the Report blandly says that something happened which was demonstrated not to have been possible. I have asked Jenner, most respectfully, to clarify the Commission's reasoning; but he has not answered my several letters, the first of which was sent four months ago. I imagine that he cannot answer.

Let me finish with a word about the bullet wounds. There is a gap of some three to five inches between the so-called entrance wound in the President's back and the corresponding holes in his coat and his shirt. Eyewitness testimony from four Secret Service agents places that wound at a point indisputably lower than the so-called exit wound at the Adam's apple. The Report is completely silent about that crucial discrepancy; perhaps the authors were reluctant to invite the inevitable question—How could a shot fired into a man's back from a sixth-floor window behind him enter his body at a point which is lower than the wound made by the exit of the same bullet???

Perhaps none of these objections impress you. I agree that one picture would be worth a thousand words; and I have such a picture, showing men at another location than the Depository, with the motorcade passing their location carrying the mortally wounded President, and with a puff of smoke clearly visible right near one of those assassins. The photograph is not conclusive, of course, but it can hardly be ignored in the face of the other shocking anomalies found in the grandiose Report. You are welcome to see it, if you find yourself near West 12th Street.

I was glad to see in your letter the phrase, "if it was Oswald." I hope it does imply a margin of scepticism. I have no doubt at all that it was not, at least not in the sense of the Commission's findings, and I will be glad to defend my conclusions in greater detail, if you are interested—something which cannot be said of the Warren Commission or its lawyers.

With best wishes, always due to the author of a classic mystery however much we may differ on this real one,

Sincerely yours,

Sylvia Meagher

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