

27 October 1971

Harold: (C.C. Roffman)

I am finally able to get around to answering your recent letters. Sorry for the delay. I wanted to wait for a time when I could sit and write continuously from beginning to end, and not write at intervals. Even now, though, I may have to cut this session short and finish tomorrow or Friday.

As expected, The NRA rejected my monograph. I did not expect, however, that they would offer no explanation-- none whatever. American Rifleman editor Halsey says that Harrison (top technical expert) and others read the monograph, "and the consensus is that it must be returned." He sent an offprint dealing with a peripheral matter that he thought might bear on the monograph (it doesn't), and let it go at that. Far from being discouraged, I am thrilled; if there were anything seriously wrong with the ~~paper~~ paper (or even not seriously wrong) they could have come down on me like (to borrow from Dean Andrews) a thousand ~~gun~~ pound canary. They didn't even try to wing me, which I interpret favorably.

Jerry Policoff wrote and asked me for ~~anything~~ anything that might be helpful in an article dealing with N.Y. Times coverage of assassination matters. I have a few things to send, but not much that will be of help, I'm afraid. In any case, I'm glad finally to be in touch with him.

I just looked, and find that I have misplaced your recent mail (probably they are in a briefcase that I left at home today). Please excuse if I refer to contents incorrectly. Besides that, some of the things that you said were confusing to me, and that may cause me to misrepresent what you said.

I am not in touch with Wecht, so your news that he is going after a view of the pix and X-rays is all that I have.

Since for the most part it is we who have encouraged Wecht to keep up an interest in the assassination, and have in fact on several occasions prevailed on him to give us help, which he never refused, I see no reason for suspecting that he might be "ego-tripping." We asked Wecht to become involved; to the degree that he was able, he became involved. It now seems a natural and expectable consequence that he should wish to pursue information in the very area where he is especially competent. In fact, it would have greatly surprised me to learn that he did not plan to have a look at the pictures. This much is certain: when the moratorium is over, somebody is going to see those pictures. Some of those somebodies are going to be their guys; Apart from Nichols, Wecht is the nearest thing that we can have to our guy. He is not the best guy that we could have, for he is not an expert on the assassination, but nevertheless he is a very good guy, and I think that we are lucky as hell to have him. Suppose that we had only Nichols!

There is not the least chance that any non-medical person without an impressive established reputation will get to see the

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medical material. Right from the start, so as not to waste our energies in useless efforts (no matter how right they may be), we have to put out of our minds the possibility that any WC critic except Wecht is going to be allowed to see the pix. Not without a court fight-- and even that, I think, would suit the desires of those who control the pix, for it might provide a pretext for withholding the pix from any private scrutiny for Christ knows how long.

So much by way of describing how I welcome Wecht's efforts to see the pix. Now let me say what worries me.

Wecht does not know the assassination well. That's not bad, really, for he can be of great value to us simply as an observer, though perhaps less as an interpreter. Because he is deficient in his knowledge of all that pertains to the shooting, he will see many things out of context. That's all right, for when he tells what he sees, we, the experts on the assassination, can and will provide the context. Didn't we do this with the Panel Report? We took their descriptions of what they saw as being accurate accounts of what they saw, but we discounted their ~~conclusions~~ conclusions-- justifiably, since in light of their ~~observations~~ observations the conclusions were in some cases irresponsibly, in other cases patently wrong. We did the same, in fact, with the official autopsy report and related statements. In the past, no matter what information we have gotten, and no matter in what form, we have always benefited-- even when they were deliberately trying to ~~keep~~ keep things from us, even when they tried to confuse things for us-- even, in fact, when they lied to us. Of Wecht we can expect that he will not deliberately withhold things from us, that he will not seek to confuse us, and that he will not lie to us. How can we loose? There are, however, problems, and we should seek to ameliorate them. But I think we should approach them in light of the sure knowledge that if any of our guys is going to see the pix-- ever-- it is going to be Wecht. And should be Wecht. WE've got to work with him if he wants us (as yet I can see no reason why he should not want us), and we've got to work on him. Even if we had reason to believe that he were not trustworthy (I know of none right now), we would still be obliged to trust him, and to be open with him so that he will trust us. He has to know, too, if he does not already know, that those who are going to serve up the pix to him are not trustworthy, that they will deceive him in every way possible in order to keep him from learning what those wounds tell. If he is not cautious almost to the point of paranoia, he will be their guy, whether he likes it or not.

O.K. The first thing that I would suggest is that he try to take along a competent photo expert who can tell, without special equipment (for I don't think any would be allowed) whether any of the pix has been doctored. You know why, so I need not elaborate.

Next-- very important: Wecht should insist on seeing all of the pix that were made, bar none, and howl like hell if they withhold any for any reason. They will, I suppose, offer to show him some of the pix that the Panel saw. No good. If Wecht really worries they, they will offer to show all of the pix that the Panel saw. No good. They will then say ~~XXXXXXXX~~ "Screw you!", and Wecht and you and I and everybody will know that what we all want to know is on the pix that the Panel was not allowed to see (as though we didn't know that already). If Wecht sees only what they want him to see, they will have him by the balls, they will control him, velit nolit (whoops!--"whether he likes it or not"). He has to see them on his terms, not on theirs, or he can easily be made a dupe-- as I believe Fisher duped the Panel (I think Morgan was suckered-- the other two maybe, but less likely.) The pix the Panel saw were screened beforehand-- they had to have been, and Wecht ought not to suffer such prior screening.

He ought, then, to be given a list of all the X-rays and photos that were taken, and with it as description of the contents of each picture, as far as we can know there contents.

Next-- also important: He ought to have a knowledgeable assassination researcher near him before and after he sees the pix, to provide a context, to help Wecht understand things that might confuse him (such things occur even in the best sets of evidence), so that he can answer as many of the questions as possible, if not all of them. There is a limit to how much information the pix can provide, but with good observations is a proper context, we can come close to that limit.

There are other things, too, that come into consideration, but these are enough for now.

I don't know quite what you mean by the political context. If matters of politics enter into this-- as I think they should and inevitably will-- it ought not to be Wecht who raises them. We and others will all see the political context in a different light, rightly and wrongly, but I think it essential to gather material for which to provide a political context.

You know that I consider all the essential problems of the case already solved; in this regard I do not think Wecht's viewing of the pix is important. The pix can't contradict what we already know, and what we already know is sufficient to answer questions about conspiracy and the government's role in covering it up and such things. The main problem is one of publicity, of winning the press, of getting attention. I don't know whether at this point it is possible to regenerate interest, but if it is, I think Wecht can and should do it. There is no possibility for any of us to do it-- not at least in the next few months, but Wecht can, and in a very few months.

If you have more to say about Wecht going after the pix, be more specific than you have been. It is clear that they prospect troubles you, and in many respects I can well understand why, but I am not sure whether the things that trouble you are the same as those that might (but do not now) trouble me.

I am willing to be convinced to change my confident view, but at this point I have to be convinced. Until I am, I urge you to give Wecht whatever help you can unless you are reasonably sure that what he says will ~~not~~ be damaging to you personally or ~~it~~ will ~~not~~ hinder our progress or set us back.

Your distressing experiences with others in matters that have worked to your detriment-- even in instances where that was the last thing intended-- might cause you to extrapolate to Wecht. You have good reason to be cautious even of your friends, me included, but you have to be equally cautious not to cause Wecht to suffer your disdain for what others have done to you. He can be our greatest hope, and I think that he should be treated like that until he proves himself otherwise. If in fact he has shown you good reason for alarm, then much of what I say here is irrelevant. But in understanding me and the attitude that I express here, understand that I have to speak on the basis only of what I know, and what I know so far indicates that Wecht is straight, that he'll be helpful to us in ways that no one else can. We can't afford to lose him, especially not at this critical time.

I have tried to write a 20-line summary of my monograph for you, but am having trouble. Please be patient. It proved harder than I thought it would.

Stay well--

Still,

Dick