

26 March 71

Dear Sylvia¹

I have your letter of 23 March with the Conlon mail enclosed. Thanks.

With this letter I am returning the Conlon mail and your article on Givens-- the article was splendid.

I have made some adjustments in my monograph and have reduced it considerably in size, so that it is now in fairly good publishable form. I have relegated much material to appendices which can be omitted without damage to the basic argument. I shall not be sending out drafts until after I get the pictures that I want. Sources from whom I hoped to get pictures did not come through, so I shall have to do my own shooting. I am fairly well equipped for it, but do not now have much time.

I read Harold's first version of his new book, but not the published version, which I understand is better, since he had some very good editorial help affecting the style. The first version was verbose-- research tended to be swamped by rhetoric. It was a magnificent piece, but it required more attention than a non-expert in the matter might be willing, or able, to give. I can hardly wait to get my eyes on the revised version.

Conlon letter: I have made easily-erased pencil notes in the margin to remind myself what to say here. "OK" indicates merely that the information is correct, not that it has important bearing on anything, for most of what he says is irrelevant.

I think it wise to emphasize that the condition of the rifle has little to ~~do~~ do with the most important questions, which can be answered without reference to the M-C rifle. What I mean is that it does not matter if the rifle were a Remington 40 XB so finely tuned that it could shoot out the eye of a grasshopper at 200 paces and get off 10 accurate shots in 3 seconds. The question whether Oswald was shooting at the President can--and should-- be answered without reference to the type of rifle used. The question whether JFK was fired upon from more than one direction can--and should--be answered without reference to the type of rifle. I think that by focusing almost exclusively on the type of rifle ~~we play the game~~ causes people like Conlon (and sometimes people like us) to play this game according to the scoundrels' rules. By those rules we can't win, for there is always a way out (Conlon found it, didn't he, when he cited "dumb luck"?). The situation as a whole is such that we can soundly refute the dumb-luck principle. But by focusing on the rifle, we allow them that principle, and they don't deserve it. Attention on the rifle is valuable only ~~in that~~ for what it discloses about the investigators and the investigation. I think it can tell us nothing whatever about the assassination itself.

I'll mention a few matters that drew my attention in Conlon's letter, either because I can elaborate meaningfully, or because he is wrong.

Bottom of p.2: re "humanitarian rifle". I too believe that I have seen this expression in print with reference to the M-C rifle (~~xxx~~ i.e., in a gun book), but I can't remember where. Possibly in another edition of W.H.B. Smith's Small Arms of the World than the one Conlon refers to. Maybe in the same author's The Book of Rifles. If I get time, I'll search for this and send it to you.

P. 2: *re "return to battery": the question here ~~is~~ does not have to do with whether a rifle can be re-sighted after a shot (for all rifles can), but how long it takes. The matter, as I indicated above, is really irrelevant, for it does not matter how fast or how accurately the M-C rifle could shoot. For information, though, the M-C is very slow in rapid fire-- mainly for two reasons: (a) the bolt sticks on the up-turn and requires excessive force in closing-- not only the M-C that came into evidence, but all of the four or five M-C's that I have tried; ~~this feature is mentioned~~ moreover, this fault is ~~mentioned~~ mentioned in something that I read about ~~the~~ M-C rifles*. It's the rare one that does not stick. (b) the bolt handle is located about two inches forward of the trigger (most rifles have it directly over the trigger), so that in order to eject and reload you have to first reach forward for the bolt handle, throw the bolt, and then reach back again for the trigger.

* i.e. it is an endemic fault of M-C rifles.

p.2: scope alignment: Enclosed is a copy of my memo on the misaligned scope.† If the gun was fired on Dealey Plaza with the same sighting arrangement as when FBI agent Frazier first fired it, it was not ~~far~~ hitting merely "high and right", but nearly 30 inches high and 5 inches to the right. There is not a shooter in the world who would not find that "hard to correct for". I suppose there are some, however, who would say that even "dumb luck" could account for a good hit under those conditions. More than that, the scope was loosely attached when it came into Frazier's hands. How's that for "returning to battery"? With a loose scope, the sight could never be expected to aim the same place on any two ~~occasions~~.

† you can read this to Conlon

p.3 re shims: The point about the shims is this: the gun could not under any circumstances be aligned on target without the shims. It was physically impossible to align bore and sight without shims. The M-C when found did not have shims. The shims had to be machined, especially to fit that gun.
by the FBI

p.5 machine guns: there are no machine guns-- not any self-loaders--that fire the 6.5 M-C.

p.5 "dumb luck": pure crap. There is nothing more to be said about this notion.

p.6 "Since the autopsies were probably confused by the tracheotomy, etc..."-- more crap, but Conlon here does not have the information necessary to know that it is crap. About the front-neck wound, certain things are provable-- some beyond ~~the~~ ~~reasonable~~ reasonable doubt, some beyond any doubt: (a) the front-neck wound was a wound of entrance--beyond any doubt, (b) the wound (as distinct from the tracheotomy incision) was clearly visible after the tracheotomy was ~~done~~ done-- the

wound was visible ~~in~~ at Parkland Hospital in Dallas after all the instruments were detached from the corpse, and it was clearly visible at Bethesda when the corpse was lying on the autopsy table-- beyond any doubt, ~~and (c) the autopsy~~ (c) the autopsy doctors knew about the wound (as distinct from the incision) while the body was in front of them-- beyond reasonable doubt, and (d) the autopsy doctors actually saw the wound (as distinct from the incision)-- beyond reasonable doubt. By all of this I imply that Humes's calls to Dr. Perry were nothing but a charade designed to make it appear that Humes did not know about the wound. I am certain that he did know about it, did see it, did know that it was a wound of entrance. I can substantiate all of this very soundly, and will do so if requested.

p.6 re fragmentation: all of this is very nice and very true, but none of it bears any relation whatever ~~either~~ to the alleged conditions of the single bullet theory, and has even less than nothing to do with the condition of CE 399.

p. 6 "anything (sic) is possible": My God! I thought that the dumb-luck principle was the limit-- I guess I was wrong. For those unsatisfied with dumb-luck (there must be a few, anyway), try them on anything-is-possible. This brings us to metaphysics, which is not my bag, so I let this argument pass.

I have no objection to your sending any of this to Conlon. If you think he is capable of being "saved", and is worth "saving", I would be willing to exchange letters with him this summer on any matter that he thinks the WC handled properly, or on any matter in which he thinks the WC is right. Not now, but later, when I have time.

Still,

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