



Dept of Classics
QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY
KINGSTON, ONTARIO

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Sylvia Meagher
N.Y.

Dear Sylvia:

I am anxious to know the chain of possession of the two bullet fragments (CEs 567 and 569) which the Secret Service is supposed to have found in the front portion of JFK's car. There is heresay testimony from Robert Frazier and Roy Kellerman, and a couple of "just for the record" statements by Commission lawyers, but I could locate no direct knowledge of the circumstances under which the fragments were found.

According to Frazier (5 H 66ff), this is the chain of possession: SS agents Paterni and Boring passed the fragments to FBI liaison Orrin Bartlett; Bartlett turned them over to Frazier at 11:50 p.m. on 22 November.

~~There~~ I could find no indication in the record that Paterni ~~or Boring~~ or Boring found the fragments, or even whether they witnessed the finding of the fragments. I am pretty certain that no testimony was taken regarding the finding of the fragments, for Paterni and Boring were not called as witnesses.

I have not yet checked SS or FBI reports in the Hearings, but considering that Commission lawyers successfully managed to avoid getting direct testimony on this, I expect there will be little help in the reports. I'll look in likely places, though.

If your memory serves you well enough, could you steer me toward material that might mention the finding of the fragments?

Enclosed is a copy of a letter from Josiah Thompson, written in reply to my letter of 27 May 1969. I still think he is a crumb and a liar. However reasonable it may seem (on paper) for him to have missed the dent on the case mouth of 557, a view of the cases or good photos of the cases should convince anybody that it is not possible for him to have missed it. The dent on the shoulder of that cartridge case is a wispy scrape that is hardly visible to the naked eye, yet Thompson observed the case carefully enough to see that. The distance between the shoulder dent and the case mouth dent on that cartridge case is just a few millimeters. I have said enough about this. You have the pictures and can make up your own mind.

Some time ago you referred to Weisberg's error in saying that Frazier had wiped CE 399 clean before examining it. Since then I found that Harold was right about the cleaning, but wrong about the item. Frazier said that CE 399 was clean when he got it, and did not have to clean it for examination. But referring to the two ~~fragments~~ ~~Frazier~~ (CEs 567, 569), Frazier says (3H 437)

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There was a very slight residue of blood or some other material adhering, but it did not interfere with the examination. It was wiped off to clean up the bullet (sic) for examination, but it actually would not have been necessary.

Harold's criticism of removing the "material" without definitely ascertaining what it was is perfectly proper, beyond reproach. His error originates in confusing ~~what Frazier said~~ the bullet with the two fragments.

I have not informed him about this yet, but I shall.

I think I can satisfactorily explain the three unidentified marks that appear on the base of cartridge case CE 543. You will recall that this is the case which caused Joseph Nicol to suggest that they might have been produced by another rifle than CE 139. I'll explain the whole thing in a memo after I get certain tests that will sharpen the ~~ex~~planation somewhat. Briefly it is this: By three separate operations, the cartridge was inserted manually into the chamber of the rifle (i.e., without the use of the clip), and the bolt was closed over the chambered cartridge. On each occasion, the extractor rubbed against the base of the case and left a mark. I am almost certain that that is the operation involved, and consider it likely that CE 139 was the rifle involved.

The curious aspect of these marks is that they do not occur on any other case that was known to have been chambered in the rifle. ~~This~~ was bewilderment all around, for neither the FBI nor Nicol could explain why such marks would appear on CE 543 and not on the others. Hence, Nicol's assertion that they might have been produced by another rifle. The origin of their difficult is that they applied their knowledge of other rifles to the Mannlicher-Carcano, which was a mistake, for the M-C's extractor operated in a manner very different from most rifles. The other cases were chambered from the clip, the normal method (and in some M-C rifles the only method) for chambering cartridges. The explanation is elaborate and requires drawings, so I'll give you a better account later. It is sufficient now to say that ~~is~~ it is unlikely that the three marks were caused by another rifle.

I hate to leave things half-explained like this, for it usually causes more confusion than it clears. Sorry.

Still,

Dick

Dick Bernabei