



Dept of Classics  
QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY  
KINGSTON, ONTARIO

19 May 69

Sylvia Meagher  
NY, NY

Dear Sylvia:

Thanks for your prompt reply and the information that you are not close to Braverman. I did not know exactly what the situation was, and I am glad to find out.

I have been in the States for the past few days and had the opportunity to use ~~shoot~~ proper equipment in testing what I was after. It was disappointing in that I proved myself wrong about a matter of fundamental importance, but satisfying in that I did not let false information go public. I had what I thought was an unassailable case that the three cartridge cases had been prepared and planted specifically for the purpose of framing Oswald. Information that has already been made public satisfies me that that is the case, but what I had in mind would have made it undeniable. Moreover, it would have deeply implicated Frazier in the frame-up. Over the weekend I chopped an important piece of what I thought was a solid block of evidence; that has shaken my confidence in the rest of what I prepared. That is good, really, for the failure of gun experts in this ~~area~~ area to crack my material gave me an unusual and unwarranted degree of confidence.

I am not normally a secretive person, and my interest in keeping the matter confidential stems from my desire to avoid issuing something that is wrong. If the matter were not as important as it seemed, I would have spread it more freely; but if I had issued the stuff with the assertion that the matter was settled, and then it was proved that I was wrong, it ~~would~~ would have done much damage to "the cause".

I am still tracking all aspects of the issue, for I smashed only a part of what I had done. The rest may be equally vulnerable, but so far it seems sound.

My concern was with the dents on the three cartridge cases. You may recall that Josiah Thompson discusses them in his book. The aspect of my work that fell apart was what Thompson had developed in his book-- the discussion about the cartridge case that was dented on the case mouth (CE 543). I found that the dent was caused quite normally by the process of ejecting the empty case from the rifle. The rifle that I had in my possession for tests had a faulty ejector, and did not produce the case mouth dents when I ejected cases, but tests with another rifle showed that there is nothing at all unusual about the case mouth dent.

I could criticise Thompson for failing to seek an explanation for the dent, but that would be mild compared to what he deserves for withholding other information that he knew. He convincingly puts the case under serious criticism because it is marked by this dent on the case mouth, but he does not inform his readers that one of Frazier's test cases (CE 557) is dented in the same place and in the same way. Thompson saw those test cases, for he describes them in his book. Knowing what he did, Thompson had the choice either of rejecting his assertion that the suspect case was illegitimate evidence, or of ~~im~~ charging Frazier with preparing an illegitimate test. Instead, he declined to mention that Frazier's test had such a dent (although he mentions other dents on Frazier's cases).

I cannot attribute Thompson's action to negligence. If he regarded the dent on CE 543 as significant, he should have supposed that the same dent on Frazier's test was equally significant.

I had considered that Thompson settled the question of the dent on the case mouth, so my chief interest was (and is) in the dents on the case shoulders of CEs 544 and 545 (also on Frazier's tests). I have not been able to reproduce them except in the course of chambering bullet cases. If they were produced in that fashion, then the cases and Frazier's tests are illegitimate, for the act of firing bullets from them would have caused the dents to be removed. 37,000 pounds per square inch pressure inside the case re-forms the brass, so that such defects are removed. It requires considerable explanation that I cannot undertake now, but that is part of what interested ~~me~~ me about the cases. There is another aspect that puts all three cases under suspicion, but this too requires more examination and consideration. I cannot say that I now exercise more caution in pursuing ~~such~~ questions about the cartridge case, because I had been exceedingly cautious before-- I mean cautious in the sense that I earnestly tried to disprove what I believed. But now I shall continue caution with a good deal less confidence that I am right.

Anyway, you can be almost certain that Thompson is wrong about CE 543. I say "almost" because until recently I was able to reproduce the case mouth dent only on a manner which suggested that Thompson was right. The dent can have been produced by illicit or innocent means, and I am willing to accept the innocent and natural causes as the true cause-- at least until other evidence suggests otherwise.

I am only beginning to understand the need for caution in trusting those whom I usually regard with trust. I am still very close to Harold Weisberg and share with him anything that I get, yet I am coming to understand his shortcomings-- things that I find tedious, but not unbearable. Harold is interested in developing publishable material, and I am not especially interested in publishing. What I regard as research, he regards as "literary property". That does not bother me too much, for I am interested that what little I do should become part of a public record and care little whether it brings profit or whether it appears in my name; I am satisfied as long as the material is correct.

What bothers me most about Harold is that it is difficult to engage in an extended conversation over issues without his mentioning his "firsts". That is interesting material for a literary review, but often it bears not at all on the substance of what I want to know. In any case, I have sufficient admiration for his work that I do not wish to disrupt our relationship over something that to me is nothing more than an annoyance.

I have lost faith in others who have given me bum steers in the past and caused me to waste my time with stupid things. I maintain contact, but show a measure of skepticism that I should have shown from the beginning. The problem is not that I know so little (for my knowledge is good), but that I came into the field late and foolishly tended to regard with awe those who had been at it longer than I. That was a mistake; length of service is no substitute of attention to common sense and simple detail. I am bound to get sucked in again, but it will happen less often in the future.

In regard to "old friends", Dick Sprague has been the biggest disappointment. He has passed me so much garbage that I may never be able to get it out of my system.

As for Garrison, he has strengthened my faith in the jury. Of his many faults, the worst is his vanity which causes him to trust the wrong people. It is a shame, for of all people he could have made it for us all.

Well, slog along, even though the mud is thicker.

If things go good for me in present research with the cartridge cases, I'll let you know. Finding out about CE 543 took a hunk off what I was doing, but there are still features that make pursuit necessary.

Good luck.

*Dick*

Dick Bernabei