

24 May 1969

Dick Bernabei  
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Queen's University, Kingston

Dear Dick,

I have read your letter of the 19th with very keen interest and some unhappiness at what you say about Thompson's work on the dented cartridge case. Some months ago a local WR buff called my attention to rather serious discrepancies between the text of the FBI interview of an eyewitness (F. Lee Mudd) in *Six Seconds* and the actual text of CE 2108. I was disturbed about these discrepancies as such, and also because Thompson indicates in his book that I checked his ms. for accuracy. That checking did not include comparisons of quoted testimony or documents against the transcripts or CEs but only checking to make sure that the volume and page numbers cited were accurate; but the reader of *Six Seconds* has no way of knowing that, and might well consider that I am responsible in part for any inadvertent or deliberate misrepresentation of the evidence.

Naturally I called the matter to Thompson's attention, and he provided an explanation which more or less satisfied me that the misrepresentation was an unfortunate accident of which he had not been aware. Now you call attention to another instance of misleading presentation which you consider can only be deliberate. While in this particular case there is no ambiguity about my possible responsibility (since I did not see the shells and merely assumed that the description was complete and correct), I am still very disquieted. You may well be right in ruling out negligence, but I would like to hear Thompson's explanation before reaching any conclusion--and he is leaving for Europe in about two weeks, for a period of more than a year. I would like if possible to get this cleared up, one way or the other, before Thompson leaves.

Have you written to him already? If not, would you be willing to write right away (his address is 3 College Lane, Haverford, Pennsylvania 19041) and let me have a copy of any reply he sends? Or, if you do not wish to contact him yourself, would you give me permission to send him a copy of your letter to me dated 19 May 1969?

(I must interrupt this letter here as I am late for an appointment uptown, I just realized, but I will resume it tomorrow.)

To continue: You must not be too disheartened by the set-back in your research. We have all been through this kind of experience. I remember the great disappointment we all felt when the "doorway photo" had to be discarded, finally, as being Lovelady, not Oswald; and the enormous danger to which all WR criticism was exposed when one of the critics thought early in 1966 that he had discovered absolute proof that it was Oswald in the doorway and that the FBI and WC knew it and deliberately suppressed it. He had actually scheduled a press conference to announce it to the world, when, only 36 hours before the announcement, another critic discovered a crucial error which invalidated the "proof" entirely. Fortunately it was in time to stop the press conference and the publication of the "findings" in a magazine which was rushing to press with a special issue.

That near-disaster underlines your wisdom in keeping your work secret until it has been thoroughly tested and verified. I hope that you will persist with your investigation, since I completely share your impression that the shells and other hard evidence (the paper bag, etc.) were planted in order to incriminate Oswald. And even the failure of part of a hypothesis is a gain of information, which also has value. Some of the conflicts and discrepancies in the evidence undoubtedly can be explained as innocent and careless. But the important thing is that a considerable amount of purposeful misrepresentation and falsification has already been established, and it is enough to demonstrate a resolute effort to frame Oswald. Recently (and this is confidential, please) one of the researchers shared with me certain data which he has assembled, hopefully, for a book, and included in this material was strong confirmation that I was correct in my analysis of the Charles Givens testimony (see Accessories, pp.64-69) and that there has been perjury and collusion, involving not only the witness and the police but also two WC lawyers.

I have hesitated to mention even this much, since the information is not mine to share and was given to me on condition of secrecy, but I did want to encourage you by this indication that not all conflicts turn out to have an innocent cause and that falsification of evidence can be proved in some instances.

There is little you can tell me about Harold that I do not know already from long personal experience. His personality is extremely difficult, and he has made some very bad errors of judgment. I think his greatest achievement was his first book. I have tried, even recently, to work with him; but it has turned out to be very, very difficult, largely because of his insistence on being "first" with absolutely everything. I thought he did a brilliant job of analysis and demolition on the 1968 panel's report on the autopsy photos and X-rays---but what good is it if he cannot write it up understandably or get it published? When I tried to persuade him of the importance of placing his findings before the public, he only tried to convince me that I should write an article on the difficulty of getting commercial publication for any serious work on the Dallas assassination--which, as I pointed out, would come with poor grace from me after my fortunate and pleasant personal experience with the publishers of the Subject Index and later of Accessories. To say nothing of the commercial publication of many of the other critical books, some of which were best-sellers, but in each case Harold brushed reality aside as only a fluke of some kind---even insisting that I had had a very difficult time getting my book published, as if my repeated assurances to the contrary were somehow not authoritative or valid.

The sad fact is that Harold's persistent failure to get his work published is due largely to his deficient writing style, and to his personality, which many people find abrasive, overbearing, and which at least two editors were not willing to work with, to my direct knowledge. Although I retain considerable respect for Harold's abilities as a researcher, I am wary of his quite serious errors (speed of Zapruder's camera; the road stripes in the Altgens photo; etc.), and dialogue with him, verbally or by letter, often reduces me to tears of sheer vexation. It is really very sad, because when all is said and done he has done considerable harm to the credibility of WR criticism--by (for example) his TV debate with Liebler, his association with Garrison, and erroneous research prematurely announced to the press.

I suspect that you will continue to make more and more insights into critics and criticism, by trial and error, as I did and am still doing (if you are right about Thompson). I never had strong illusions about Lane, so it was not traumatic to

discover his complete lack of principle, his consuming opportunism, and his contempt for plain fact. But many of the other critics were my close and valued friends, and it was a bitter experience indeed to see those friendships dissolve or turn into animus in the whirlpool of the Garrison controversy. I cannot agree with you that his worst fault is his vanity--that is probably the least of his faults. It is not a question of his "trusting the wrong people" but of his complete inability to evaluate evidence and to discriminate between possibility, probability, and proven fact, or in any other way to perform with professional competence and diligence. He has never really mastered the WR or the H & E, nor has he really read to completion the critical books--even one as short and easy to read as Inquest. He has lusted for publicity, like the demagogue he is, and stopped at nothing to get it, vindictively and with total disregard for the "justice" he pretends to demand, not stopping even at the fabrication of documentary "evidence." Such harm as he failed to do out of plain evil, he accomplished by means of folly, laziness, and stupidity. The net result is that he has destroyed the credibility of attacks on the WR, and the critics who actively helped him have destroyed their own credibility and any moral basis for their stand on the WR.

You may not be ready to agree with such an "extreme" view of Garrison and his clique; but I think that, with time and perhaps with more experience, you may shed any illusions you still have about Garrison and the critics who supported him and try, even after the humiliation of the trial, to exonerate and idealize him.

Dick Sprague is a very courteous, decent, pleasant man, but he has little judgment and very uneven talents as an investigator. He has been wildly wrong, about almost everything, from the time I met him. But he has made a real contribution by at least collecting and cataloguing the film and photo evidence, and it is a pity he did not stop right there.

I will certainly be most interested to learn the results of your further research, at such time as you feel ready to discuss them. Meanwhile, I would like very much to resolve the matter of the dent on CE 543, as to Thompson's presentation, and I will be grateful if you would reply on that specific issue as soon as you are able (page 1 paragraph 3 of this letter). All good wishes, and kind regards,

Sincerely yours,