

15 September 1968

Mr. Robert Ockene
Bobbs-Merrill Co.
New York 10019

Dear Bob,

Thanks for sending me a xerox of Tom Bethell's letter of the 6th; I am sending him a copy of this letter.

I am glad to clarify the business of my "confidential information," which derives from an unpublished monograph written by the head of a university department. Until it has found a publisher and been protected by copyright, I am bound to discuss it in the most guarded terms. My first thought, on reading Tom's letter to you, was that my circumspection had misled him into thinking that the monograph "removes one of the major obstacles to accepting the WR." That cannot be so, however, since I wrote him on 3 August 1968 that it "presents data which leave the Commission's conclusions about the shots and the wounds in wreckage, despite the reconciliation of the seeming contradiction in the position of the bullet wound in the back, and which eliminate the sixth-floor window as the source of the shot." Apparently Tom, in his eagerness to "accept the WR in toto," retained only that part of my description of the monograph which suited his need, and brushed aside the rest.

The monograph does explain convincingly how the autopsy surgeons may innocently and ignorantly have arrived at a measurement ("14 cm. below the right mastoid process") which would seem to place the bullet wound some inches higher than the position indicated by the holes in the clothing and by eyewitness descriptions of 4 to 6 inches below the neck. It does not exonerate other parts of the autopsy report or the testimony of the autopsy surgeons. It does prove conclusively on anatomical grounds, as we knew already from other evidence, that it was impossible for the bullet that entered the back to exit at the Adam's apple.

The monograph, then, in no way removes "one of the major obstacles to accepting the WR." Nor does an earlier first shot (long postulated by Ray Marcus and others on the basis of multiple riflemen) do what Tom hopes for--the reinstatement of Oswald as the lone assassin --because the monograph eliminates the sixth-floor window as the source of the shot in the back, and because the total number of shots that hit the two men is at least 4 and perhaps as much as 6, and the direction of at least one shot (other than the shot in the back) eliminates not only the sixth-floor window but the entire Book Depository.

Add to all this the curious information I have just received in a letter reporting on a recent conversation with a Commission lawyer: that, as to the head shot, "this was thoroughly discussed among the staff and agreement was reached that dum-dum bullets had been used"! No wonder the spectrographic test results are still so zealously withheld; no wonder the opportunity to take testimony from Gallagher on the spectrographic tests was so carefully shunned.

Tom and I have discussed and corresponded at length on our disagreements as to particular items of evidence, but what really surprises me is his statement in his letter to you that he is "quite interested in the possibility that all the pieces of the Warren Commission's puzzle can in fact be assembled so that they all fit." If one has a commanding knowledge and objective view of all the evidence, in its specificity and its aggregate, such a notion simply does not arise. A dialogue on such terms is anachronistic and I really cannot take it seriously.

Tom is not the first one to pursue the romantic idea of rehabilitating the WR. Curtis Crawford has been trying to do it since 1965, Jacob Cohen since mid-1966, and Wesley J. Liebeler with 20 helpers from the students and faculty of his law school since late 1966. As of now, they have come up with a deafening silence, and I suspect they have given it up

as a hopeless cause. When one considers Liebeler's personal stake in exonerating the WR, and his insider's advantages, his default on the promised work of vindication has self-evident significance.

I am surprised also that Tom has somewhat misstated my argument on the "undated note" and then dismissed it, not by counter-argument but by stating his conclusion that I am wrong. I argued in Accessories that the undated note is not consistent with Marina Oswald's claim that she had no prior knowledge of Oswald's intentions. I then questioned the compatibility of parts of the undated note with the alleged attempt to shoot Walker, but I discussed these in the vastly larger context of the totality of known evidence which compels me to reject the Commission's conclusion that Oswald was responsible for the Walker shooting. Now, I am not about to retreat whimpering to a corner because someone "examined my arguments carefully, and concluded that the note was consistent..." (It reminds me of a letter I got from Harold Weisberg, haranguing me for having given moral and material encouragement to Kerry Thornley. Weisberg assured me in the most ominous terms that he had devastating and solid evidence against Thornley, which he could not offer me because of my position on Thornley, which he urged me to change because he had the devastating and solid evidence, etc.)

If Tom believes that the undated note is consistent with Marina Oswald's story, he is obliged to defend his view and not merely to state his conclusion. He must also overcome all the other objections which have been raised against the thesis that Oswald shot at Walker--and in dealing with them, he may not rely on the unsupported word of Marina Oswald, a self-confessed and demonstrable liar who, according to a Commission lawyer, lied repeatedly to the FBI, the Secret Service, and the Commission.

As to the duffel-bags: I can only say that Tom has rushed in where the Commission feared to tread. The WR does not say that he transported the rifle in the duffel-bags, but by saying nothing conceals the fact that there was any problem about its transport. Tom, not the WR, says that the duffel-bags were longer than the dis-assembled rifle, and he is mistaken when he suggests that I made that point in Accessories. Not at all. I merely quoted the relevant passage of Ruth Paine's testimony, in which she estimated from memory that the duffel-bags were 40 to 45 inches high. The Commission, which went to considerable pains to establish the dimensions of the suitcases and published photos of three pieces of the luggage, neither published the dimensions or the photos of the duffel-bags. Perhaps that was only an oversight, but I find it hard to believe in the light of Jenner's unmistakable desperation to find something by way of luggage large enough to hold the rifle. If it was not an oversight but a deliberate omission, perhaps it was because the duffel-bags had to be disqualified, for size or other reasons. Again, Tom has misstated my argument and, without in any way dealing with it, dismissed the whole thing with his conclusion that the proven liar, Marina Oswald, was truthful about this specific episode.

Earl Warren, at the outset of his remarkable career, tried to persuade the then-Governor of California (1938) to cover up the sordid, acknowledged truth that the State had deliberately and criminally framed Tom Mooney and Warren Billings and incarcerated them for some 20 years knowing them to be innocent. (Frameup by Curt Gentry, pp. 418-419, Norton & Co., 1967) Twenty-six years later, the same Earl Warren was the chief architect and proponent of the thesis that Oswald was the lone assassin. If he was the lone assassin, how is it that despite the best honest and dishonest efforts of the Warren Commission and its servant-agencies, the evidence as to motive, means, and opportunity---in each instance, a huge complex of circumstantial and hard evidence---falls apart at every seam when it is probed? It is no answer to talk about jig-saw puzzles, for we are certainly not obliged to accept a demonstrably false and fraudulent "solution" rather than none at all.

Tom is quite welcome to proceed to examine my work in detail in pursuing his attempt to resurrect the corpse of the WR but I am not, as he assumes, in favor of his proposal. I have neither compromised myself by seeking to cover-up the framing of two innocent men by State authorities, nor have I issued a "report" stuffed with cunning misrepresentations and falsehoods, of the letter or the spirit, and I decline to have my work equated with the WR. Even more do I decline to have my arguments misstated or stated incompletely, and then dismissed with arbitrary unsupported "conclusions," as in the case of the undated note and the duffel-bags, with every legitimate or illegitimate benefit of doubt conferred on the WR. As Anthony Howard wrote more than two years ago, "It is the majestic Warren Commission that is in the dock today, rather than the lonely Oswald" or those who speak on his behalf.

I am certain that Tom is, as he says, sincere in his position on the WR. I will not join the other critics in seeing the ubiquitous CIA in every failure to join in their concepts and convictions. But his sincerity is perhaps the saddest thing of all.

As always,


Sylvia Meagher