

To: Dick Bernabei, David Lifton, Sylvia Meagher, Fred Newcomb, John Nichols,
Howard Roffman, Gary Schoener, Robert Smith, Josiah Thompson, Harold Weisberg

From: Paul Hoch

October 27, 1970

My thanks to all of you for your valuable critical comments on the draft report on the melon recoil tests. The enclosed draft supplement to that report includes my discussion of most of the points raised about the degree to which such tests say something about the assassination. In separate letters I am responding to some of your more specific comments on other parts of the draft, and to arguments which I can not understand or which I feel are not at all relevant.

After I get your comments on this supplement, I will send a revised version of it to everyone who got the original draft report. (If any of you still want to send your own comments out to all these people, I will be glad to take care of the mailing and Xeroxing (at your expense, but cheap).)

Many of you raised points which I had already considered, although they were not discussed in the report I sent you. Also, several people often presented the same objection. Thus, I have generally not given credit for the specific points in the enclosure, except (for example) for information that I have not verified for myself and am simply passing on. Some of you sent me detailed comments on the language, inferences, etc. of those parts of the report which did not deal directly with the experiment and its applicability, and pointed out a number of errors and omissions. These will be corrected when and if another version of that draft is ever distributed. Similar comments on the enclosed material will be noted, but I emphasize that it is a draft and I am primarily interested in substantive comments on the interpretation of the evidence.

I regret that I did not make clear that the first report I sent was a draft, and that I was sending it out in that form specifically to get your comments on the interpretation of the evidence. I had, of course, thought about that - I do know that a melon is different from a skull - but should not have just presented my conclusions.

There is no need for you to rush your comments, since no report on this work is about to be submitted for publication. (I would like to have your comments within a few weeks.) As you can see from my conclusions in the enclosure, I do not feel that this work is publishable at this point. I would not be willing to make the speculation about the suppressed medical evidence that is required if one wants to come to a firm conclusions about the fatal shot(s). As of this date, Dr. Alvarez disagrees with me, and is working on a report entirely in his own name. If I do not persuade him that the limitations and criticisms set forth in the enclosure preclude publication in Physics Today or any such general journal, I will do everything I can to ensure that those objections are made known to the potential publishers and readers of the article.

October 27, 1970

Unfortunately, at several points in the draft report I referred back to my own conclusions in ways that - especially when taken out of context - were imprecise and inaccurate. For example, I wanted to point out that even if the jet-recoil hypothesis for the fatal shot is correct, the single assassin theory is not thereby salvaged. I wrote (page 23) that

"Our work has demonstrated that the fatal shot probably was fired from the direction of the School Book Depository, a sine qua non for any single-assassin theory."

The first part of that sentence is incorrect; as the supplemental draft report makes clear, the most that can be said is that, on the basis of this experiment and a generous interpretation of the other evidence, one may reasonably conclude that the shot probably came from that direction. As I point out in that supplement, some arguments about the metal fragments in the head which were new to me have persuaded me that even a qualified "probably" is a bit strong.

In the same paragraph on page 23, I set forth what I consider to be "the most likely hypothesis which is consistent with just one assassin." That meant "of the hypotheses which are consistent with just one assassin, the most likely". My reason for mentioning it was to point out that it has grave flaws, as we all know, as does any other single-assassin theory; not to endorse it as "most likely."

On page 24, I wrote

"Finally, we emphasize that although our observations tend to support the conclusion of the Warren Report that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone assassin of President Kennedy, they do not in any way vindicate the work of the Commission itself."

More precisely, "tend to support" should be "tend to counter one of the more persuasive arguments against", and I am well aware that this experiment says nothing at all about whether Oswald was on the sixth floor or not. There is very little to be gained by discussion of my choice of words in a draft, but because I did not discuss my reasons for concluding that the tests had some relevance to the assassination, the rather clear intent of the above-quoted sentences was widely misinterpreted. I assure you that I was not trying to sneak in, as my summary of the melon tests, the claim that "... our observations ... support the conclusion ... that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone assassin of President Kennedy"