

31 August 1970

Mr. Paul Hoch
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My dear Paul,

The last few days have produced a noteworthy amount of coincidence and irony. I had written you a letter last week, but then decided not to mail it, only to receive today your letter of the 28th with its enclosures and find my unmailed question answered anyhow. I read this morning the news of Zapruder's demise, with an accompanying recapitulation of the history of his famous film and especially the controversy generated by the head snap which the film reveals. A few hours later, I had your paper in hand, with its reassurance that the backward/leftward recoil was, despite all assumptions to the contrary, consistent with a single shot from the rear. I will revert to your paper later.

I hope that I interpret correctly your comment that Al Newman is a Bringuier with brains. As to my review, the Texas Observer for unknown reasons elected to delete a paragraph--perhaps to save space--which made an important, if unrecognized, argument against Newman's hypothesis of Oswald's methodical attempts to conceal his presence in Dallas and his preoccupation with Walker. (the murder of
Walker) I pointed out in the excised passage that Oswald's public criticism of Walker at the Dallas ACLU chapter on 25 October 1963 was completely unreconcilable with Newman's theory, and that Newman had failed to acknowledge or dispose of this pivotal evidence.

Earlier this month I visited Dallas for the first time, for some ten days, finally viewing for myself Dealey Plaza, the Book Depository, the Walker house, and all the other sites involved in the case. While in Dallas, someone remarked during a general conversation, in a casual aside, that as I surely was aware, Paul Hoch believed that Oswald was the lone assassin and generally accepted the main conclusions of the Warren Commission.

I was floored and immediately contested the accuracy of that remark. Upon further reflection, however, I realized that I had perhaps taken for granted your disavowal of the WR and that you had not made any explicit statement to that effect in the course of our long correspondence. I did recall that you had taken a pro-Garrison position and had suggested (if my memory is correct) that I should suspend judgment on him, from which one might have inferred that you accepted a conspiracy hypothesis.

After preparing a letter in which I asked you to clarify your views, I decided that you might find the request insulting, and I scrapped the letter. Ironically, however, your paper arrived today and provided the clarification I had decided not to request, as well as other illuminations.

You ask that I keep this paper confidential, but may I assume that you have sent copies to the other critics quoted or mentioned therein--specifically, to Tink Thompson and Thomas Stamm--and may I also assume that I am at liberty to discuss your experiments with them? I understand, of course, that you do not wish to risk pre-emption or leaks of material which is to be published, but I assure you that I would treat it in a responsible manner even without a request for confidentiality.

I am less able to understand the stipulation that I keep "very secret" the Odio information--perhaps it originates with Schmitt rather than with you. Whom would I tell? how would I substantiate the allegation? what possible harm

might result from mentioning the matter to other critics who have over the years demonstrated integrity and trustworthiness? I am increasingly troubled about the trend among the WR critics to impose secrecy on small, medium, and large items, indiscriminately and automatically. We have always needed and continue to need co-operation and the fullest possible sharing of information--and you have always been forthcoming about your own work, perhaps because you share that view. The secrecy fetish has become increasingly irrational and gratuitous and I believe that it is a real disservice to the progress of research. I think I am reaching the point where I would prefer not to receive information at all, to receiving it under prohibitions against discussion or disclosure which does not involve the risk of misuse.

Returning now to your "Experimental Study of the Motion Produced by the Fatal Shot..." -- my lack of even the slightest competence in physics or related sciences inevitably impedes my understanding and assessment of your study. Still, I am willing to ask fatuous questions and raise objections that may seem presumptuous in the context of my acknowledged handicap--these are small sins, weighed against the sometimes breathtaking intellectual and moral transgressions which have often characterized debate and argument on various aspects of the evidence.

My general impression of the paper is that while it purports to be an even-handed, objective, and strictly scientific study of a prescribed sector of the forensic evidence, it is an invidious apologia for the lone-assassin theory which will inevitably influence and mislead the lay public, which has already shown its complacency and vulnerability to the ostensible authoritativeness of pronouncements on the case by scientists or experts who have served as spokesmen on behalf of the official conclusions.

By selecting a narrow area for discussion, the paper implies that only a particular set of problems needs to be resolved in order to validate and close the discussion of the Warren Report. The real scope of the WR's infirmities and deformities encompass every single area of the evidence, involving repeated misrepresentation, omission, and invention of fact. I must question the very principle of attempting to demonstrate that so corrupt a document is correct and valid in spite of itself.

Even within the delineated area of your study, I find that the data has only a dubious relationship with the conclusions, which seems to me distinctly overstated. I question a number of assertions and predicates in the paper. It repeatedly refers to the backward recoil, which was actually backward and leftward. You do quote from CD 298 ("head suddenly snaps to the left") but if you have viewed the Nix film, especially in slow motion, you know that the leftward recoil had such force and velocity that the view of the back of the head yields to the left profile and then to the full face, in a matter of a very few frames.

I wonder whether a melon, even when taped, can really be equated with the human head. The melon is discrete, while--as has been established by one Danny Kaye--the head bones are connected to the neck bones, and the neck bones are connected to the shoulder bones, and so on and etcetera. You say that it is "not unreasonable" to use a melon to simulate a man's head--the phrase has a Warrenesque ring--but I will leave it to more competent individuals than I to comment on the degree to which the melon can serve as a facsimile.

Such individuals might also wish to comment on the rifle and the ammunition utilized in your melon-shoot. I would question whether they satisfactorily simulated the C2766 rifle and the WCC cartridges supposedly used, bearing in mind the quality and pre-shim condition of the weapon in question as well as the age and reliability of the ammunition.

Your paper acknowledges that considerable matter was ejected backwards and to the left (depositing a profuse amount of brain, fluid and blood on the motorcycle officer or officers). Is it really impossible to estimate the volume of material ejected backward and leftward, in relation to the forward spray? Your comments at the bottom of page 6 do not seem to me to provide an adequate explanation for the absence of a forward recoil to compensate for a backward jet. Does the "dynamical mechanism" postulated by Alvarez work in only one direction, but not in reverse?

The estimate of one pound of matter moving at about 70 feet per second would suffice, you say, to produce the measured velocity of the head snap backward (and to the left), but it is not clear to me whether or not you in fact estimate that one pound of matter was sprayed forward out of the head. The supplementary autopsy report gives the weight of the brain examined as 1500 gms. Is this consistent with the loss of a pound of matter sprayed forward, and an unknown but perhaps equal or greater amount ejected backward (and to the left)? I simply do not know, and if you have taken these factors into account you should have discussed your reasoning more fully and more clearly on pages 3-6 of the paper. The logic by which you argue that a backward head recoil is evidence of a shot from the back, but a forward movement is not evidence for a shot from the front, unhappily escapes me.

By the way, near the bottom of page 7 you refer to the fifth floor of the TSBD. No doubt that is merely a typographical error.

You proceed to claim that the results of your experiments "do basically resolve the issue..." etc. It appears to me that the results warrant a more qualified and tentative statement, consistent with your later comment that you are not claiming that what is observed could have been caused only by a shot from the rear, and with your further qualification that you are dealing only with the motion and not with the wounds.

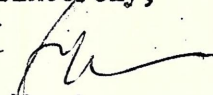
But of course you cannot not-deal-with-the-wounds, as you cannot present your "most likely hypothesis" (page 23) without even mentioning the body of arguments which have been put forward against CE 399 as either the "single bullet" or the single Connally bullet, and without explaining what deflected the bullet that struck the President in the back or the neck (do you seriously suggest that it might have been the neck?) or why it was not recovered despite the known searches of the surrounding area.

I note that you seem to accept and encompass the Alvarez "jiggle" hypothesis, without addressing yourself to the series of objections raised against it by Thompson and others. Nor do you address the evidence (eye-witness reports and testimony, and descriptions of the recovered pieces of skull) which suggest that it was the back of the skull and not the upper right side that was in fact blasted away, leaving a large gaping hole.

Your ingenious report--perhaps destined to be known as the "Hoch Report, or the Hoch-Olson-Alvarez Report or the HOAR (no phonetic pun intended)--is certain to intrigue and delight many readers, regardless of race, creed, color or national origin. Indeed, I predict that it will be regarded as a triumph by physicists, government functionaries, and certain other opinion-making groups. It certainly amazed me. I think I will never again see a melon without thinking of you.

It is past midnight, so I will close without further ado, salvaging some energy for my further confrontations with epistemological truth.

Yours sincerely,



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