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Stephen H. Trott
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Dear Mr. Trott:

In connection with your ongoing review of the HSCA's investigation of the assassination of President Kennedy, I would like to call your attention to some new information in the just-published book "Reasonable Doubt," by Henry Hurt. For your convenience, a copy of pages 158-169 is enclosed.

The House Committee looked into the murder, allegedly by Lee Harvey Oswald, of Dallas Police officer J. D. Tippit. The Committee noted that Tippit had "engaged in a relationship" with Johnnie Maxie Witherspoon, a waitress at the restaurant where he worked part-time. (See 12 HSCA 43.) The HSCA published nothing about the nature or possible significance of this "relationship."

Hurt talked with Mrs. Witherspoon and with the man who was then her estranged husband. She said that when she was pregnant in 1963, she believed that Tippit was the father. The timing suggests to Hurt that she would have confirmed the pregnancy shortly before November 22.

Hurt reports that the husband was jealous enough to have "followed Tippit and the woman around Oak Cliff at night when they were together during the months of their affair." He notes that "both deny any knowledge of Tippit's death other than what is in the official account." (Pp. 167-8)

However, a retired DPD officer who talked with Hurt reached a different conclusion. He "asserted flatly and without prompting that he believed Tippit was killed as a result of a volatile personal situation involving his lover and her estranged husband. He added, 'It would look like hell for Tippit to have been murdered and have it look like he was screwing around with this woman.... Somebody had to change the tape. Somebody had to change the cartridge hulls.'" (P. 168)

Clearly, tampering with evidence in the Tippit case would reinforce some profound suspicions about the integrity of the evidence offered by the Dallas Police Department against Oswald in the JFK assassination. The basis for the former officer's assertions should be determined.

The suggestion by the retired DPD officer that "the tape" was changed has implications for your review of the HSCA's acoustical analysis.

There were two distinct parts to the Ramsey (NAS) Committee's rebuttal: that the analysis by the HSCA's experts was statistically and otherwise deficient, and that the "crosstalk match" established that the supposed shots were at the wrong time.

I have previously sent you material arguing that the Ramsey Committee's challenge to the statistical analysis is not conclusive. (Reference: my letter of April 23, 1984, to Mr. Mark Richard of your office.) Nonetheless, the crosstalk match in itself is enough to disprove the HSCA analysis, if the DPD Dictabelts are authentic originals. The Ramsey Committee did not deal with the authenticity issue in sufficient detail, in my opinion.

Among other things, the report of the Ramsey Committee noted that a deliberate attempt to remove recorded evidence of the shots was unlikely (I agree),

and in addition that "it seems equally unlikely that such an elaborate and risky substitution of forged evidence would have been made for any other reason, such as to cover up a broadcast of an embarrassing remark." Furthermore, any alteration would have occurred "despite the importance of the case and the well known police requirement not to destroy evidence." (NAS Report, pp. 82, 84) Hurt's new evidence, however, provides a plausible motive for the alteration, addition, or deletion of broadcast messages relating to Tippit.

The authenticity of certain messages relating to Tippit's movements has previously been questioned, because of their content, their formal tone, and the apparent absence of the expected reaction (both at the time and when an explanation was later sought for Tippit's presence in Oak Cliff.) For details, please review my letter of November 11, 1981, to Dr. James Barger, which I sent to Mr. Richard in 1984; another copy is enclosed. Some of the evidence on Tippit's movements is discussed in the enclosed pages from Hurt's book.

If the messages in question are not authentic, it should be fairly easy to establish that fact, using technical or psycholinguistic analysis.

Insofar as they relate to the Tippit case, messages prior to the JFK assassination could be very relevant to the case against Oswald. In my letter to you dated June 3, 1985, I noted that there is no known available copy or transcript of the first ten or twenty minutes of the crucial Dictabelt, and that the official FBI transcript omitted at least one message from Tippit.

I have suggested that copying and alteration of the "original" Dictabelts could conceivably result in a shifting of the recorded shots or the crosstalk. (See my letter of February 27, 1982, to Dr. Barger; copy enclosed.) This is obviously very speculative, but I think the possibility needs more detailed consideration than the Ramsey Committee gave it.

The evidence in Hurt's book - including the DPD officer's remark that "somebody had to change the tape" - deserves careful scrutiny, especially if you are considering a determination that the case should be officially closed.

Sincerely yours,

Paul L. Hoch

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cc: Mr. Hurt
Dr. Barger
Prof. G. Robert Blakey