

17 October 1966

Dear Dave,

I have received your several letters and will attempt to comment on the essential points in them--from memory, as I do not have the letters with me at the moment.

First, concerning the Liebeler matter. I seem to have committed the faux pas of forgetting that the only satisfactory opinion or advice is that which the requester wishes to hear. Your 7-page commentary seems punctuated by barbs, reproaches, and ambiguities, some of which verge on the offensive. Certainly I do not understand at all the sentence which begins with "Please-----" and proceeds to appeal that I do not make this a family affair. Are you suggesting that I did, or will, discuss this with the other critics? If so, you are completely wrong, if for no other reason than that such correspondence or discussion, almost always carried out under pressure of time, is generally centered on objective rather than personal matters.

Then, as I recall, you suggest rather patronizingly that I have panicked and verged on hysteria over what is nothing but a trivial matter, involving essentially a continuation of your previous association with Liebeler. You will have to understand that I received a different impression, both from the content of your phonecall and the very fact of the phonecall. It hardly seems likely that you would need or solicit opinion or advice merely with respect to resuming an established contact.

If I did not misunderstand, your letter suggests also that you received a far more reasonable reaction from Lane than from me. Be that as it may. You may also wish to bear in mind that it was Lane, not me, who disclosed in public the Liebeler/Rankin/Redlich correspondence, presumably without permission or consent--the same correspondence that I had been careful not to mention even to the critics with whom I maintain the closest liaison. I would think that that in itself speaks a certain amount.

In any case, I am sure that you will be guided by your own best judgment in deciding how to proceed; and I doubt if either of us should spend so much time or emotion on such matters as this. I did not anticipate that my brief letter would involve me in such protracted and disquieting correspondence on what is essentially a personal decision for you to make.

Before leaving this subject, let me make it clear that I was and continue to be extremely and genuinely grateful to you for rescuing my manuscript from Ramparts. I intended in no way to imply that you had copied, memorized, or familiarized yourself with its contents; nor that you would deliberately disclose any part of it against my wishes.

I turn now to the other letters with their enclosures, for which I thank you. I am, of course, sorry that you and your colleagues consider that the article on LHO and the State Department is not as effective as it might have been. Perhaps I should have used the McVickar report rather than his testimony; but there is always an element of subjective judgment involved in organizing and structuring and synthesizing a body of data so as to achieve a specific illumination. I am encouraged by various reactions to the article to hope that I did achieve what I hoped for.

*Comments on*

On the question of CE 917, I frankly see no need whatsoever for a correction box or any form of retraction of an ambiguity in the official published documentation. I am of course interested to know about the Archives copy of the same exhibit and the words "former Navy." But I am not at all satisfied that the ambiguity would disappear even if it was certain that the blocked-out line contains Webster's name and/rank.

The cablegram (CE 917) consists of two parts:--(1) reference to previous dispatches; and (2) notification that Oswald had indicated certain intentions with respect to radar data. That being so, a reference to a preceding dispatch concerning Webster alone, and in no way involving Oswald (presumably unknown to the Embassy at the time of transmittal of the Webster dispatch on Oct. 26th), makes no sense. It might make sense of the message related to some general problem arising with defectors in general, or with citizenship status in general, or any other situation involving both Oswald and Webster. But I fail to see any logical or legitimate reason for the reference to the October 26th dispatch, even under the assumptions you present, on the basis of CE 914, which does establish that Webster was the subject of the earlier dispatch, but leaves an element of remaining ambiguity in CE 917.

In any case, I think it is important as a general principle to realize that one is not obliged to go beyond the published record in any study of the case. You can scarcely expect every critic to rush off to the Archives and search for duplicates of printed exhibits which may contain an extra word or two, or a loop or part thereof.

Since it is completely clear from my article that I raise both CE 917 and the letter from Snyder to Boster in terms of an ambiguity (the following paragraph starts with the words "another ambiguity"), and since I continue to find the material ambiguous, even with the additional information you have been good enough to provide, I fail to see any need for a "correction."

If I have not understood your point exactly, or completely, I should be grateful for a further clarification.

Despite the defects in the article--and I am sure that it could certainly be improved upon, and perhaps will be, in the future literature, hopefully by the present generation of critics--I am very encouraged by some of the reactions. After reading the article, and the preceding one on Bogard, one of the large publishing houses asked to see the whole manuscript. One of our fellow-critics, without my knowledge, wrote 50 letters to Washington urging various members of Congress to read the piece--telling me about it only afterwards. And there were several other developments of a similar nature.

I regret very much any hurt feelings or resentment which may have been sparked inadvertently by my brief and well-intended letter. I have at no time questioned your motives; but I did question, and still do, the wisdom of the proposed arrangement with L. as I understood it, or possibly misunderstood it. ~~Nevertheless~~, I want to emphasize that the appeal not to make this a family affair is both unnecessary and unwarranted.

Yours sincerely,

P.S. Another point on which I should comment just came to mind--your unmistakable suggestion that I failed to notify you of my changed appraisal of Liebelier. My earlier view was based on what you and others reported of your personal contacts with him. My first and only such contact was on September 30th and I informed you about it fully on October 8th, when you phoned. If days consisted of 48 rather than 24 hours, I would perhaps sent out an all-points-alarm immediately; you will simply have to forgive my failure to do my apparent duty this time.