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The Assassination Number 21

Reopen The Warren Commission

After the assassination, rumors circulated thick and fast out of Dallas. An early rumor was that Lieutenant George Butler would be one of the investigators for the Warren Commission. This writer wrote to Chief Justice Earl Warren, begging him to see that Butler was not on the side of the investigation. Certainly, we felt the Warren Commission was going to conduct an impartial investigation at that time.

This was one of the very last rumors to circulate out of the Police Department of Dallas. The clamps were really nailed down, and the police there continue to be very tight lipped.

This week we comment on the testimony concerning Lieutenant George Butler, a very interesting policeman. Butler is a speaker for the right-wing anti-communist fighters. He was formerly head of the Policeman's Union for Dallas, and it is common talk that he is in the good graces of H. L. Hunt which makes him immune to pressure from anyone.

During 1961, Butler made talks in Midlothian and on one such occasion he approached this writer in The Mirror offices and wanted to know if we would print a region wide KKK newspaper. While in The Mirror, Butler made two statements. He claimed we did not have to bid on a competitive basis, but simply tell him how much we wanted for printing the job. His second statement was that half of the police force in Dallas were members of the KKK.

We repeated this statement to an FBI investigator during 1965. The FBI representative said: "Ah, I believe he was lying." Our comment was: "After what has

happened in Dallas since 1961, it appears you might say "It may be true."

The Warren Commission did not see fit to answer my letter concerning Lt. Butler, and they did not see fit to call Lt. Butler as a witness.

The only information in the testimony concerning Lt. Butler is given by a newsman, Thayer Waldo from The Fort Worth Star Telegram. His testimony is terribly revealing. As he entered the hearing room where his testimony was to be given, the Commission lawyer looked at his watch and said: "Mr. Waldo, I have just 28 minutes to catch a plane. What do you have to say?"

Our comment is that Mr. Waldo made very good use of his allotted 28 minutes.

MR. HUBERT. State your full name, please?

MR. WALDO. Thayer Waldo. There is no middle initial.

HUBERT. Where do you live, sir?

WALDO. 200 Burnett Street in Fort Worth, Texas.

Some testimony omitted here.

WALDO. I am a newspaper reporter.

HUBERT. How long have you been such?

WALDO. You mean in the profession?

HUBERT. Yes?

WALDO. Approximately 24 years.

Some testimony omitted here.

Testimony begins with the events of Friday afternoon.

HUBERT. In any case, you observed Ruby about 10 minutes before you had any further contact with him?

WALDO. That's right.

HUBERT. Was there anything that called your attention to him especially?

WALDO. Only, I might say, a somewhat aggressive manner. I noticed that he was plucking at somebody's sleeve to turn them around, and a few minutes later, seeing him give that man a card, and then a few minutes—2 or 3 minutes later—seeing him moving closer to where I was, giving out another card—as he gave out the card, giving the man a hearty slap on the arm—although I could not catch the words, I could catch the rather strident tone of his voice, and when he came up to me, although he did not behave in as gratuitously familiar a way in the sense of either clutching at my clothing or patting me, there was still a sort of overdone ingratiating manner as he gave out this card and said, and I'll have to paraphrase it—I cannot remember the exact words—but it was something to this effect, "You are one of the boys, aren't you? Here's my card with both my clubs on it. Everybody around here knows me. Ask anybody who Jack Ruby is. As soon as you get a chance, I want all of you boys to come over to my place, the one downtown here is more convenient and have a drink on me. I'll be seeing you." That's approximately it.

HUBERT. About what time was that?

WALDO. Approximately 4 o'clock, I would say, again basing it on my memory. I did not have a clock, I did not look at a watch or have a clock in vision at that moment.

Some testimony omitted here.

WALDO. In the jail—no, I went directly, as is stated in this transcript, the report, I went directly from the Trade Mart to Dallas Police Headquarters on the afternoon of November 22 within a matter of 30 minutes after we had learned that the President was shot. In fact, I was on the Stemmons Freeway passing the resort motel called "La Cabana" at the moment that the car radio reported the President is dead.

When I arrived at Dallas Police Headquarters, I was the first reporter of any medium, so far I know, certainly there

was no other in evidence—to reach the third floor. No one attempted to stop me or ask for any identification at that time.

HUBERT. Did you have any identification on your person?

WALDO. Yes, sir; I had a badge—I have it with me in this book, if it's of any interest to see it, merely identifying

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“Dallas, November 22, President Kennedy's Visit,” which I was wearing on my lapel.

HUBERT. It was a press identification card in connection with the visit?

WALDO. That's right, and the offices of the hierarchy of the Dallas Police Department are located on the third floor, were almost deserted, since Chief Curry, Deputy Chief Stevenson and others of the staff had either been assigned to the Presidential motorcade or to the Trade Mart, or in the case of Chief Curry, were invited guests or to have been invited guests at that luncheon. The man who was in the building in the offices, the highest ranking officer to whom I was directed by one of the secretaries, was Capt. Glenn King, who has subsequently been identified to me as in charge of public relations of the Dallas Police Department. I walked into Captain King's office—is this of interest?

HUBERT. Yes.

WALDO. I walked into Captain King's office and identified myself by name and newspaper and immediately noticed a fleeting expression on his face which sometimes we who work in Fort Worth and have dealings with Dallas officials, have come to recognize, most particularly when something has taken place in Dallas which may give unfavorable publicity to that city, and before I could finish my question, Captain King interrupted and very courteously said, “Mr. Waldo, we know absolutely nothing here. We have heard rumors that there were some shots. We do not know where the shots came from or who they were aimed at, if anybody, or if anybody was hit. We don't know anything.”

I could not help but assume that this was what in the vernacular might be called a brushoff since in several open unoccupied offices and within hearing distance as I was speaking to him, there were police radio receivers turned on. Therefore, I had to assume that he sitting there must have been informed of the events.

Some testimony omitted here.

HUBERT. What were the circumstances under which the viewing of Oswald in the assembly room on Friday were held?

WALDO. Well, at what I would judge to be approximately 10 or 10:30 p.m., Captain Fritz and District Attorney Wade came out of the homicide office into the third floor corridor and Captain Fritz whose voice never carries—he speaks in a hoarse whisper most of the time—tried to say something, and there were immediate shouts of “We can't hear you, we can't hear you” from people only 15 feet away. So Mr. Wade took over and I was close enough to hear him say that Oswald had been formally charged with the assassination of President Kennedy, but immediately there were cries from people two or three rows, if that's the word, behind me in this jammed, packed mass, “Henry, we can't hear you. We can't hear you. Can't we hold this some place else?”

He then conferred with Captain Fritz and by then Chief Curry had moved in maybe Chief Curry was there all the time—I didn't notice him—but the three conferred and then Chief Curry, who can on occasion speak with considerable force and volume, called out and everybody heard this, “All

right, we'll set it up in the Police Assembly Hall in the basement for Mr. Wade to make his announcement, if that's what you want?" Or—approximately those words and then there was another momentary conference between the district attorney and the two police officials, and Chief Curry added, and I am almost certain that no one requested this—it was a voluntary statement on his part, "And I'll have the prisoner brought down for you, if you like."

So, immediately there was movement, because the TV people had to start getting their equipment down, all of which of course took a considerable time. I might add first that Curry said, "We can do it in about 20 minutes," but while waiting for the TV cameras to be transferred down and set up properly, it took more than an hour.

HUBERT. What security measures or identification measures were used to start security as to the assembly room, as to who would go in it?

WALDO. None whatsoever that I observed. I myself walked down the stairs, which faced the elevators on the third floor, to the basement. The basement is also the site of the police booking office. People were being brought in or coming in to inquire about relatives, I presume. That seemed to be the general tenor of it, and were not being kept away, and peering curiously into this police assembly room where everything was being set up.

HUBERT. There were no guards at the entrance of the assembly room?

WALDO. None that I saw, sir; no.

HUBERT. So that everybody got into the assembly room who wanted to get in, and Oswald was brought down shortly thereafter?

WALDO. Yes.

HUBERT. I understand that the interview was of very short duration?

WALDO. It was, and it was preceded by a very stern warning from Chief Curry—that any undue movement to crowd in on the prisoner or shove cameras forward or to clamor on furniture, would immediately cause the interview to be cut short and he said, "The prisoner will be taken away and will not be brought back; is that clear?" He said, "I want everybody to stay where he is."

The interview was very brief. The thing that sticks most in my mind considering the fact that before Oswald was brought down District Attorney Wade had stated in some detail how Oswald was taken before a justice of the peace and formally charged with the assassination of President Kennedy, that when the prisoner in the assembly room was asked, "Why did you kill the President?" He replied, "I haven't killed anyone and no one has even mentioned to me anything about the President except you people."

HUBERT. Who was it asked him the question, "Why did you kill the President?"

WALDO. Gosh, I couldn't tell you.

HUBERT. It was some newsman?

WALDO. It was a newsman; yes.

HUBERT. You did not see Ruby in that group?

WALDO. I did not see Ruby that evening; no, sir. I do recall, but only because it was called to my attention afterward, that at the tail end of the interview, a man with a loud voice was calling to Wade to come over and say something in a microphone, and I do recall distinctly that this voice cut through the din with remarkable stentorian quality, and of course it has been testified at Jack Ruby's trial that this was he, acting for a friend at a radio station who wanted to put a statement by Wade on tape for subsequent broadcast.

HUBERT. That was while Oswald was still in the room?

WALDO. No, sir.

HUBERT. That was after Oswald had left?

WALDO. Yes.

HUBERT. What caused the end of the Oswald interview?

WALDO. As I recall it, following what could have been anywhere from 3 to 5 minutes of questions, Chief Curry stepped forward and said, "That's enough. Take him back."

HUBERT. Was there any violation of his regulation about crowding and so forth?

WALDO. Not seriously. There was a little sort of press forward, but not seriously.

HUBERT. I mean, did he indicate that's why he was ending the interview?

WALDO. No.

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HUBERT. Now, turning finally to November 24, I think you've told us how you got down there, and your statement indicates that you were standing on the outside of the building at the Commerce Street entrance?

WALDO. Yes, sir.

HUBERT. Along with a number of other newsmen, when a Lieutenant Butler invited the press people into the jail; is that correct?

WALDO. Yes, sir; with one exception. There was not a number of other newsmen, there were only, as I recall, three of us standing out on that sidewalk at that time.

HUBERT. You had a press identification on you then?

WALDO. Yes, sir; and when Butler, and pardon me—let me put this in—the armored vehicle had by that time been backed into the ramp, and there was some comment among the three of us standing on the sidewalk, the curious fact that the vehicle which was too high to go down the ramp, was being left there, when a smaller armored vehicle had been brought at the same time and was parked by the curb. Lieutenant Butler stuck his head out around this vehicle and said, "Come on down." There were two motorcycle policemen who were two of the same policemen who had been standing guard duty on the third floor. They had over the period from the 22d through the 23d, they had several shifts of them. They were two of the same, and as I approached one of them in this comparatively narrow space between the column that forms the frame of the ramp and the side of the vehicle where he was standing, he grinned at me and recognized me immediately and said, "How are you this morning? I know you, but I still have to ask you for your credentials." So, I got out my credentials. I had the badge on, but beyond that he required my Department of Public Safety identification.

HUBERT. That was even after Lieutenant Butler invited you in?

WALDO. Yes.

HUBERT. Had you been seeking to get in prior to that and had been denied?

WALDO. No.

HUBERT. It was just that you had arrived at that time?

WALDO. Well, we had arrived some time earlier and had seen the preparations. I had gone upstairs and checked Chief Curry's office and had been told that it would be half to three-quarters of an hour yet before the prisoner would be removed. This was at the time that I arrived over there on Commerce Street from the hotel, and that everybody would be notified before there was any movement, so since it was a pleasant morning, we were standing out on the sidewalk—the three of us.

HUBERT. Were you told it was going to be by elevator

down into the basement and then through the basement ramps out Commerce Street?

WALDO. Yes, sir.

HUBERT. Who told you that, sir?

WALDO. As I recall it, it was Lieutenant Butler himself, who was on the third floor at the time I went up, and I would like to for whatever it's worth, add something at this point. Lieutenant Butler was since, oh, probably 2:30 on the afternoon of the 22d of November, the man whom I had sought out on every occasion that I wanted to learn something about developments, whenever I could find him, because he was a man of remarkable equanimity, poise, and very cooperative within the authorization that he had, and the first thing—

HUBERT. You mean he would give you more news than anybody else?

WALDO. He was more able to understand what was wanted and he was always in on, apparently, on high-level information, and if it was for release, he would be the one who would have it and be most willing apparently to give it. This is a thing that happens in circumstances like this. A reporter picks out a man, tries him out, and if he finds that he's cooperative the first time, he tries to stick to him, because by that time the official recognizes his face.

HUBERT. Did you find that other officials were not so cooperative?

WALDO. I would say, yes, to that with reference to the 22d and part of the 23d. By Saturday afternoon, the 23d, everybody seemed to be pretty accessible and pretty willing to answer questions. What I wanted to say about Lieutenant Butler was that this almost solid poise, or perhaps phlegmatic poise is a better word, that I had noticed all through even the most hectic times of the 22d and the 23d, appeared to have deserted him completely on the morning of the 24th. He was an extremely nervous man, so nervous that when I was standing asking him a question after I had entered the ramp and gotten down to the basement area, just moments before Oswald was brought down, he was standing profile to me and I noticed his lips trembling as he listened and waited for my answer. It was simply a physical characteristic. I had by then spent enough hours talking to this man so that it struck me as something totally out of character. Now, he may merely have had a bad night.

HUBERT. At that time, had the movement of Oswald begun or was it known that he was coming?

WALDO. It was imminent at that time — it was imminent.

HUBERT. The words, "Here he comes"—those famous words—had not yet been uttered?

WALDO. No, sir.

HUBERT. How long prior to the time Oswald was brought down did Butler invite you into the basement?

WALDO. I'd say the time lapse there was 20 to 25 minutes.

HUBERT. Did he indicate to you that the time was getting imminent and that you must come in?

WALDO. That we could come in, that we should come in.

HUBERT. What did he say to you by way of indicating that the movement was about to take place?

WALDO. As I recall, when he stuck his head out and around the vehicle and looked to see who was there, he just said, "Come on down now."

HUBERT. He didn't say that it was imminent, but you construed it as such?

WALDO. Well, after we had passed the scrutiny at the ramp entrance and continued on down. I followed my custom and immediately sought him out and asked him, "Are they just about ready to move him?" and he said, "I

understand he'll be brought down shortly; you'll have notice." By the way, I recall one other minor discrepancy that exists in that report. At this particular time and thought we're talking about now, I believe it even states in that report that when I entered the ramp, there were several police vehicles parked; is that in there?

HUBERT. Yes; I think it does say that.

WALDO. That is incorrect.

HUBERT. On page 3, the last paragraph says, "Waldo said he noticed in the ramp three police cars were parked in a straight line, one behind each other, facing toward Commerce Street."

WALDO. Yes; that is some misunderstanding on the part of the gentleman who took the transcript. There was no vehicle in the ramp at the time I entered except the armored vehicle which had been parked right at the mouth of the ramp.

HUBERT. And behind the armored vehicle, there were none when you went in?

WALDO. When I first went down. It was approximately

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8 to 10 minutes after I had been down in the ramp area, and there were then a hundred or more representatives of news media in that area.

Behind us and now let me see if I can get this straight—the ramp of course goes from north to south, from Main to Commerce, and for perhaps half its length, one quarter at each end, there is nothing but blank wall on each side of the ramp. For the other half, the middle half, and on the—don't take this down and tell me the direction?

HUBERT. Well, if its pertinent we want it.

WALDO. Well, Main is north of Commerce—right?

HUBERT. It would be the east.

WALDO. Yes—but on the west side is the entrance to the building and the jail elevators and so on, and on the east side is a parking—a large submerged parking area, and it was 8 to 10 minutes after I had gotten downstairs when they began what appeared to be at first a quite confused movement—several detectives, plainclothes officers got into police cars parked down there and started to move them, with what appeared, and in fact I commented on this to a colleague, an unnecessary amount of jerking movement, lack of coordination so that one almost ran into the other and they were backing and filling and nobody could figure what they were doing with them, and meanwhile Butler, I believe it was, or someone was telling us all to get back out of the way, and finally they maneuvered these three cars into place one behind the other back of the armored vehicle.

HUBERT. How much time before the shooting did they back the armored car into the Commerce Street entrance?

WALDO. Oh, that would have been—lets see—I arrived over there about 9:30—10 or shortly thereafter it was that the car was brought in.

HUBERT. And then you went in at Butler's suggestion or invitation about 25 minutes prior to the shooting?

WALDO. That's correct.

HUBERT. And then the cars were moved in behind the armored car about 10 minutes before the shooting?

WALDO. Yes, sir.

HUBERT. Did you see a car go out the Main Street entrance about that time?

WALDO. No, sir; I did not. It could have happened and I didn't see it, but I certainly didn't.

Come to think of it, I don't believe it could have happened without my seeing it, considering the physical

setup over there, however, that's not important.

Might I add that at the time that I entered the ramp area, the crowd of people standing along the south side of Commerce Street had grown to about 200. It was maybe 100 when I first arrived there, and this I took to be due to the fact that there appeared to be, from what I heard and cars passing stopped for traffic lights that had their radios on, broadcasting announcements every few minutes that Oswald was going to be moved soon.

HUBERT. Do you know if all those people had been moved over to the opposite side of Commerce Street by the police?

WALDO. I cannot testify to that. They were all on the opposite side when I arrived there.

HUBERT. You arrived about 9:30, you say?

WALDO. About 9:30; yes.

HUBERT. And of course you went upstairs and so forth in the interval before you went down into the basement?

WALDO. Yes; but I was not upstairs a matter of more than 10 to 15 minutes before I returned to the same.

HUBERT. And during the period between 9:30 and approximately 11 or shortly before 11, when you went down into the ramp and excepting the time when you were upstairs which you say was very slight, you were in the area of the Commerce Street entrance?

WALDO. Yes, sir.

HUBERT. Did you see Jack Ruby in that area at anytime?

WALDO. No.

HUBERT. Did you notice a large TV—the vans and equipment they used?

WALDO. Oh, yes; they had been there permanently, I'd say.

HUBERT. Did you see Ruby or anyone who looked like him hanging around those vans around 10 o'clock or at anytime?

WALDO. No, sir; I did not.

HUBERT. I think that's all I have to ask, Mr. Waldo. Is there anything you want to add further, sir?

WALDO. No; I would simply offer you this, if it's of any interest.

Johnson and I within the week after the events of November 22-24, feeling that it might be of interest, sat down and collaborated on a manuscript which we called, "The Dallas Murders," which was sent to my agent in New York for possible placement. It did not get placed, apparently, because as she informed me of the announcement before she could get it to anyone that the Associated Press and the United Press were going to come out with these books.

I have a copy of that with me, and if it would be of any interest, I would be personally happy to have the Commission have it.

HUBERT. I do not know if they wish it, but suppose that we note it, and of course it has been noted by the mere fact that you stated it, with the understanding that if it is desired, the general counsel of the Commission or the Commission itself could write to you, I suppose, and you would be willing to send it on. It's a manuscript, as I understand it?

WALDO. Yes.

Mr. Waldo had good sources of information and could have told much more had he been urged, or had he felt the Commission was really searching for the truth.

NOTICE: This editor took pictures at Parkland Hospital in Dallas on the day President Kennedy was murdered. From these pictures, we know there were at least two women taking pictures before the President's body left the hospital. We urge these women to get in touch with the editor of The Midlothian Mirror. The pictures you took might be very important.