

1 March 1968

Mr. Duane Bradley Sanborn
Old Warner Road
Henniker, New Hampshire 03242

Dear Mr. Sanborn,

On checking the article "A Death in Emergency Room No. One" by Jimmy Breslin in the Saturday Evening Post of December 14, 1963, I found that your recollection was partly correct. The relevant passage is: "There was a mediastinal wound in connection with the bullet hole in the throat. This means air and blood were being packed together in the chest. Perry called for a scalpel. He was going to start a tracheotomy, which is opening the throat and inserting a tube into the windpipe. The incision had to be made below the small bullet wound." You will find some very pertinent criticism of the autopsy with respect to this very point in the book WHERE DEATH DELIGHTS by Marshall Houts, published last year and giving an account of the career of Dr. Milton Helpern and his pioneering work in forensic medicine.

As to the incineration of papers by Dr. Humes, it seems indisputably clear from his testimony that he burned a handwritten (first) draft of the autopsy report and not, as he certified, "preliminary draft notes" (see ACCESSORIES, page 137). You might wish to read the excellent critique of the autopsy by Dr. Cyril H. Wecht which appears as an appendix in Thompson's SIX SECONDS IN DALLAS. Dr. Wecht has told me that he dictates a running commentary, during his performance of postmortem examinations, into an overhead microphone, for later transcription from a tape recording. This is perhaps a technicollogical innovation which is not yet available in all morgues; but I have no doubt that there are other standard procedures (the standard form which you mention, or the like) by which the autopsy surgeon can ensure that his precise findings, observations, and measurements are recorded while he works. Unquestionably, as you say, Dr. Humes' account of his handling of the preparation of the autopsy report is preposterous and highly suspect.

I did not intend to be "kind" in my description of the Hearings and Exhibits; but here, as in the discussion of the actual evidence, I had to place an arbitrary limit on description, lest my book spilled over into another twenty-six volumes. But you will find, on pages 427-428, a reference to FBI interview reports which end in mid-sentence; and, on page 192, an indirect reference to the illegibility of documents reproduced in the Exhibits.

Of the various letters I have received from persons known and unknown, commenting on ACCESSORIES, few have impressed me so deeply as your letter of 23 February, in terms of its understanding of the enormous significance of this case. As you say, what is at stake is nothing less than the democratic character of our system. A governmental policy of deceit, abetted by the indifference and complacency of the citizenry, has already moved us perilously close to national disaster and disintegration. Those like Fred Graham, who refuse to confront reality and seek to discourage others from such a confrontation, will have to bear a heavy load of responsibility for the dreadful transformation of this country in a few short years into the most troubled, most detested of nations. Incidentally, if you would permit me, I would like very much to send Graham a copy of your letter, with your name and address blocked out, if you wish. I thank you very much for what you have written. There are times when I feel that I have wasted my time and energy in a futile and naive enterprise; then, a letter like yours arrives, and renews my belief that the book was necessary and that I do have, in the true sense, fellow countrymen. I hope that we will remain in touch.

Yours most sincerely,

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