

April 8, 1976

Paul L. Hoch
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Dear Paul,

I just received my copy of "The Assassinations" from Random House. Congratulations on its publication; I wish you success with it. In general I think it is an excellent selection, although I'm sure no two people would agree on what to include and I do have some objections. I'm ~~wir~~ writing now to warn you about a major inaccuracy in one of the selections. I only wish I knew beforehand what would be included.

Before I get into this matter, as I sidelight, please note that I've enclosed a memo I recently put together (in haste) on the business of 605 Elsbeth Street. I assume this would be of interest to you. I find it amazing, and am trying to amass more information on it. You have my consent if you care to pass the memo on to Scott, who is probably also interested, to judge from Anson's citations to Scott's work. By the way, I was especially impressed with your memo to the Rockefeller Commission re WC and CIA.

The selection about which I wanted to warn you was that from Six Seconds in Dallas, "Physical Evidence." The beginning part of that selection, dealing with the cartridge cases, is entirely wrong and, in my opinion, quite dishonest, for Thompson had to know better. Let me explain. (Page cites are to your book, not Six Seconds.)

At 214 note the allegation that the two cases first forwarded to the FBI by the Dallas Police were C7 (CE544) and C38 (CE545), and that the one withheld was C6 (CE 543). Thompson makes a lot of this because of what he says is odd about C6. However, there is no doubt that C6 and C7 were originally forwarded to the FBI on 11/22 and C38 withheld. See the FBI's report on its examinations dated 11/23 at 26H262. See also the envelope in which the cartridges were transmitted on 11/22, on which C6 and C7 is clearly marked, CE 717. Thompson ignores all this and cites Lt. Day's testimony, in which he concludes that C6 must have been withheld because he couldn't find his mark on it. What Thompson omits is that Day later retracted this testimony, after a subsequent examination in better light, when he found his mark on all the cases, 7H402. There can be little doubt that Day really was in error in the testimony Thompson cites. Otherwise it would be impossible to explain how a case sent later than C7 could have been given a smaller number, i.e., C6.

As you may know from Dick Bernabei or Harold, there is nothing unusual about the dent in the lip of C6. Dick and Harold ejected cartridges from a similar Mannlicher-Carcano and found that when the bolt is worked forcefully, the ejected case is spun into some projection on the rifle which dents the lip. Although Thomson wouldn't have known this when he published his book, he had to know something else--namely that an identical lip dent appears on one of the test cartridge cases in CE 577. Thomson admits having examined CE577 (p. 216), and long ago I had a photo made comparing the lip dents. Thomson makes no mention of the lip dent in 577. Also, he seems to put significance in the absence of a "chambering mark" on C6 (p. 216). However, C6 does bear such a mark, although not as pronounced as the other two.

It is visible on photos of all 5 cases taken under Thompspon's supervision for Life.

Another thing Thompspon does which is terribly deceptive is to say that the only mark on C6 connecting it to Oswald's rifle came from the magazine follower (p. 215). Thompspon attempts to explain his way around this in a footnote, in which he says that there is a conflict between Frazier's testimony that all three cases had contacted the bolt face of Oswald rifle and a later letter from Hoover in which Hoover says only C7 had such marks. First of all, Frazier was not talking about marks from the "bolt" in general, as Thompson represents him, but from the bolt face--these are marks produced when the cartridge is fired. The bolt marks of which Hoover spoke are not those produced in firing by contact with the bolt face but rather those produced by the mechanics of ejection. There is no conflict between Hoover and Frazier. But Thompson hides this by misstating the subject of Hoover's/letter. Thompson says the letter "recounts the results of FBI examinations on cartridge cases." (p. 215, fn. 4) The subject of Hoover's letter was not so broad (26H449). The examinations of which Hoover wrote were conducted to determine the cartridge cases "had been loaded into and extracted from the C14 rifle more than once." Here the FBI was looking for marks associated with loading and extracting, not with firing. Frazier testified about firing marks, which are produced by contact with the bolt face. Hoover's letter has nothing to do with that.

What this adds up to is that there is no (or very little) basis to raise the speculation about C6 that Thompson does. Some parts of it may be argued, I suppose, but there is no doubt that Thompson is simply inaccurate in stating that C6 was at first withheld by the Dallas Police; the police withheld C38.

I note that earlier in my letter I called this a "major inaccuracy. Please note I intended this to refer to the context of Thompson's piece, not your entire book. In terms of the scope of the book, it is trifling. I point it out to you for your information. Thompson's book is riddled with errors of this sort.

Again, best of luck with the book.

Sincerely,

Howard Roffman

cc. Sylvia