

52 Columbia Street
Newark, Ohio 43055
13 March 1971

Miss Sylvia Meagher
c/o Bobbs-Merrill Co

Dear Miss Meagher:

I was recently picking up books at the local library to read at the fire house, provided the taxpayers don't light their homes during my next shift, and came across your tome on the doing in of JFK and some possibilities in the Warren Report. I note that I was quoted as a footnote, so figured I might as well express an opinion while I was at it.

After reading your comments on the deal, it appears to me that the experts called in lacked somewhat in smarts, technical knowledge, and numerous other things as well. You did mention Dr. Halpern, the NYC medical examiner, in your book. Too bad they did not get him in on it, as he is claimed to be the nation's top authority on violent death, sue to NYC being a place where people get lots of it. (Statistically, it has to be that way. More people, more crooks, more crimes, ergo, more deaths by violence.)

I cannot qualify as a ballistics expert, but do know quite a bit about basic military weapons and their effects. The people who testified on this case and others who wrote books on it later didn't always know what they were talking about. I haven't read Mark Lane's, but after reading his "Conversations with Americans" I would take his works with at least a 50# bag of Morton's Codized. At least 4 of his Vietnam Veterans had not left the USA before they left for Canada.....

The Warren Report may or may not be the truth. However, in all the fuss and panic a lot of things got lost. For example, the laws of Texas were badly bypassed by removing the body of a murder victim from the jurisdiction. (A recent similarity was the failure of the Edgartown Chief of Police to inform Ted Kennedy of his rights, etc, due to the fact that he was not only prominent, but could probably have had the Chief barbecued by his political connections, had he so desired.) The Dallas Police were no doubt in a state of flap resembling almost any US military post on the 7th of December 1941. (I was at one and speak as an expert on Confusion Cube Rooted.) Every one else was shook, and it is a wonder any one could have done anything right.

I hate to second guess doctors, but as an occasional first aider on fire runs, doing a tracheotomy on a man with half his head gone does not seem wise. Had JFK recovered by some misapplied miracle of medicine, he'd not have been the man he was before, or even a pale imitation.

There is one further thing that might have happened. Suppose that Oswald did not do it, but that the unknown wights, the CIA, KKK, Birchers, US Army Rifle Team, Viet Cong sympathizers, Black Muslims, or whatever mob did it, had used, not a rifle, but an electrically controlled mine of the Claymore type? That would have really been a hell of a mess to think of. Not only the President and Jackie, but the Governor and his wife, security men, and God only knows how many bystanders. It was bad as it was. It could have been a hell of a lot worse.

The only solidly conspirational murder of a President was the shooting of Lincoln. Others have been claimed, including the last. Garfield and McKinley were killed by nuts, and FDR could have been, as well as HST by those Puerto Rican crackpots. My personal feeling is that it was Oswald, and that he did it for Fame....TS. It didn't last long.

SMALL ARMS OF THE
WORLD 1TH ED.
U.B. AND W.H.B. SMITH

Concerning the basic Mannlicher-Carcano 6.5 rifles.....
1891 design, load for the period similar to the 6.5 Krag, Mauser, Arisaka
7.62 Mosin, 7.65 Mauser, 7.9 Mauser, 8mm Mannlicher, and 8mm Krag. Almost
like early .303 Marks. Velocity of 160 gr bullet around 1980-2000 fps,
expansion not too high, penetration reasonably so, due to long thin
bullet. Accuracy, average for period considered. The Smith manual lists
the Oswald rifle as an M1938 rifle, a definite sub-model of the 91, a
6.5 version of the 7.35 rifle, made in 1940 at the Terni arsenal in
Italy. MV listed as 2320 fps, Note: ALL 1938 rifles have caliber marked
on sight bases....

OK

Identification of the rifle by policemen. This is a point on which there
can be a lot of error as the only policemen really informed on weapons
are those who teach them or the ballistics men. Some of them are not too
sharp. The basic design looks to some people like the M1888 Mauser rifle
as used by the Germans a long time ago, the Belgian M1889 Mauser, which
is similar outwardly, some British Enfields which have projecting box
magazines, and various other Carcanos which can be found in 6.5 M1891,
7.35 M1938, and 7.92x57 Mauser calibers, the outward appearance being
similar aside from barrel length, stock styles, etc.....

OK

Mark Lane has been informed that almost every Mauser and almost every
Italian carbine has the caliber stamped on it. This is true in the MC
for the 1938 series, and for rifles imported to the US under rules that
required origin and caliber to be stamped on them. Souvexnir rifles did
not come under this ruling. Most Mausers marked as to caliber are the
commercial sporting rifles. Caliber markings found on military Mausers
are usually the bore diameter and they are not easily visible without
taking the rifle down.

OK

Concerning the "humanitarian" rifle part, this came from extensive read-
ing over the last 30 years and I can't quote the source, but it was not
hearsay. I did, however, get an opinion on the M6 rifles from a man I'd
consider knowledgeable. Back in 1953, about the time the last Chinese
drive in Korea fizzled out. I was at the J. P. ...

for KMAG officers. Two correspondents asked if they could sit there to eat (since I was, without doubt the lowest ranking diner, WOI at the time) One was American, whose name I have forgotten, the other was from Yugo-press, one Timotejevic by name. He had been a partisan, so we talked about small arms. The American was somewhat informed on this, also, and we had a good bull session. Tomo, etc, said that they used any rifle or other arm available, but noted that Italian rifles were plentiful but not liked, due to excessive flash and blast, heavy recoil, and lack of accuracy. He said they were viewed as little use. Yugoslavs in general have some regard for armament, due to their long background of national and family feuds and wars, and favor such rifles as the Mauser 98 and variations when they could get them. One Yugoslav factory still makes a 98 action for gunsmiths.

OK

Two-stage triggers? What the hell was that alleged Army expert talking about? The M1 and M1A rifles both have it, so did the 1903 and 1917 rifles. The method of trigger squeeze taught for the M1 in the USMC and US Army at the time Oswald was in would have required little change to use a Carcano well.

OK
 (2-stage triggers
 common in
 WWI heavy
 arms)

With any bolt action rifle, the action of loading moves the rifle off target, but proper position can be taken which allows the muscular action of the body to "return to battery" as the artillery puts it. I am curious as to what sort of rifle these Army experts used.....If any .

So what?
 The gun that is
 not that it came
 "back to battery" but
 how long it takes)

If the scope laid shots in high and right, that would not be hard to correct for, since holding off with a scope is far easier than with the lousy iron sights found on issued Carcanos.

All may
 amount
 to
 (right)

Serial number? That might be duplicated, due to military security rules, but the distinctive markings applied at the factory would allow the rifle in question to be traced to origin, such as the Terni arsenal, Beretta, or whatever place made the weapon. The Smith book says that

OK

OK

it came from Terni, and Joseph E Smith and his assistants have forgotten more about rifles than these so-called experts ever learned....

OK

Accuracy of the particular rifle could have been established by limited controlled test firing. Usually, forensic ballistic men fire suspect arms as little as they can, due to the need to preserve condition of the bore and action so as to duplicate markings on case and bullet. I gather these lunkheads shot the C2766 rifle quite a bit. I don't know if they fired groups or not. However, the 6.5 Carcano could do better than an 8" square at 100 yards. It happens in mass production that one rifle can make groups like all hell and the next won't even get on the paper. This is corrected by the armament men who handle such things.

OK

Scopes, Shims, and Tests? I see ads all the time for the spare parts left over after 1945, used to convert the 1903 rifle to the 1903A4 sniper version. Due to slight variations in production, standard mounts often need to be shimmed to center the axis of the mount or scope with the axis of the bore. Such shims are furnished for the 1903, a rifle known to be far more accurate than any service rifle of Europe in its day. The Carcano to my knowledge never appeared in sniper versions....The elevation shims had to be used to align the scope parallel to the line of the bore, and the other shim probably was used to prevent the scope being mounted in a canted position. All modern gunsmiths use bore alignment collimators, optical devices which allow the workman to see how far the scope lines off the center of the bore, and to correct the misalignment. It would be foolish to shim a scope for a right or left handed man, and the shimming would have to be changed to allow for the next owner, if sold. People who mount scopes do so so anyone can use them.

This is correct, but some of the shims (the M.C. shims, but did not have them)

Oswald's qualifications? The USMC is fanatical about rifle marksmanship, to the scrow of a lot of German and Japanese gentlemen who have met them professionally. A man capable of making sharpshooter could do better, and I expect that his good sergeants did not like it when he only made mark-

OK sman. However, consider this...I have noticed in a hell of a lot of unit qualification firing with rifle and pistol from 1937 to the present, that quite often a man fires poorly on slow fire and drills them in far more accurately rapid! This is due to the fact that the man has to get shots off rapidly and can't spend time fussing with little things. I myself have done this. The Army used to use a silhouette RF target at 200 yds and with iron sights a lot of guys could run 45x50 on ten shot runs.* I seem to recall that the bull of this target is roughly the size of a man's head and shoulders, and we were using iron sights. * 10 Shots - 60 Sec. 1903 Bolt Action

OK Sling? A detachable thing can be replaced. I have no comment on this,

OK Ammo? Previous to the famed 1968 Gun Control Law, sales of rifle and pistol ammo interstate could be made to private persons from firms that sold it. Delivery could be made by express, freight, or UPS. In addition to this, there are often open gun shows, namely, displays by collectors and merchants, etc, which allow anyone to enter and look around. Quite often a private sale of ammunition could be made at such a show with no record of it on paper. Currently, much paperwork is done on over the counter sales, and sales by mail are tightly restricted. At that time, there was little documentation on casual sales of ammo, even from stores. They usually checked to see if the buyer was old enough, and if he had money. Ammunition is sold in package units commercially, tens, twenties, fifties, hundreds, and case lots. Center fire rounds are ~~xxxxxxx~~ commonly sold in packages of 20 or 10 (German DWM) aside from pistol cartridges and small rifle sizes like the 25-20, etc.

OK The Ammunition Clip? The Mannlicher Carcano, in common with the M1 and a number of French rifles, has to have a clip to be used as a fast repeater. Such clips are plentiful where guns are sold...The 1891 rifles are loaded with a six round clip, which fits into the magazine opening. A spring powered arm rises under the shells and pushes them one by one
contd

OK

until the last one is fed through the action. The clip then falls out the bottom of the rifle, no mechanism being used for this action. If all the rounds had been fed into the breech, the clip would then have dropped out. Clips of this sort are considered ammunition items ~~and~~ are not part of the rifle proper. This one would have to be a 6.5 for the Carcano, and as I recall it, all the military ammo the Italians loaded for it came ready clipped. This type of clip can be loaded full, or the clip can be put into the action with less than 6 in it. Other rifles, such as the M1, can be part loaded, but it takes practice, due to a different action system. An item made in million lots with batch marks instead of individual markings is hard to trace. If the Italians stocked 6 000 000 rounds of M1891 ammo, the packing would have included 1 000 000 clips for this amount. I expect their ammo records would have shown astronomical amounts of rounds and the number of clips would have been the same divided by 6. (Of course, this means for the rifle only, as loading machine guns and auto rifles would be done by belts, magazines, or feed strips, depending on the action.)

Here, I rest, as I am not a fingerprint expert, etc. However, I'd like to mention that one factor may have been left out.

What about plain, incredible, dumb luck? The fate that seems to dog the Kennedys might also enter into it, starting with Joe Jr being blown up in 1944 by an overdesigned safety circuit on a firing device, thru JFK's little episode with PT 109 and the Japanese destroyer, Ted's airplane wreck, the assassination of JFK itself, the following death of Robert, and Teddy's little goof at Chappaquiddick? I leave out some others that hit the paper. Suppose that Oswald was suffering from beginner's luck.

As to penetration, single bullet theories, etc, I would like to comment that the Mannlicher Schoenbauer 6.5 carbine was a favorite weapon of many early elephant hunters in Africa. W.D.M. Bell killed hundreds with it or a similarly loaded 7mm Mauser. contd

I am not
sure of this

There are no
machine guns
that fire
the 6.5mm

Also

All the military cartridges of the 1890-1900 period were similar to the 6.5 round as used in the M1891 Carcano series. They had solid jacketed bullets, long, slim, and round nosed, ranging in weight from the 160 grain size of the 6.5 Arisaka, Carcano, Mauser and Krag, thru the 175 grain used by the 7mms, to the 215 grain .303, 220 grain MS Krag and 1903, and the nearly 230 grain 8mm Mauser and Mannlicher. These were all fired around 1800 to 2100 fps and penetrated deeply with comparatively little expansion. Wounds in tissue were characterized by frequent full penetration of the body. One man shot at San Juan Hill in 1898 was hit in the shoulder, the 7mm bullet went down to the waist, surfaced against his cartridge belt, burrowed back, and came out again at one knee joint! W.D.M. Bell and others mentioned several cases of elephants shot with the 6.5 MS and 7MM Mauser which were drilled from rectum to breastbone, or vice versa, depending on whether the pachyderm were facing or taken from behind.... The 6.5 Carcano is close enough to the MS that I feel a bullet could penetrate through one person into another. Since the autopsies were probably confused by the tracheotomy at the hospital and further snafued by the lack of really good forensic men, we'll probably still be getting Inside Stories Of The Kennedy Assassination from now to 2500 AD, at which time all of us will have lost interest, even the readers of Analog.....

I once accidentally fired an M1 rifle into the rear bed of a Willys station wagon and the dispersion of fragments amazed me. The main part of the bullet drilled the tank, but pieces flew far and wide, tearing cushions, digging into trim, and cracking the lower right corner of the windshield. If one bullet hit JFK and fragmented, Governor Connally could have caught some pieces in addition to one reasonably complete bullet.

Anything is possible, though some things are improbable as hell.

Next time we lose a president to an assassin, I hope they call Dr Halpern in on the case. Washington is full of experts and hell is full of good intentions.

finis

* PROWS POSITION

ok

ok

No. 11

Not a 399

No