

[I am making no effort to put these notes in any logical order.]

This is been the most bizarre media event I have ever seen close up! It was certainly a PR coup for the FBI. They got the sort of treatment that Nixon must have hoped for with his Watergate transcripts, but didn't get.

I wonder what sort of coverage there would have been if the FBI had released 1000 pages a week over the past year? Quite different, I'm sure.

I was told that someone in the FBI now thought it was a mistake to have released the first 600 pages to me in September - allegedly because it allowed stories to be written based on speculation which was rebutted in later documents. In fact, it allowed a couple of stories to be written based on careful selection of documents, with time to get the necessary background information from other sources.

I guess I didn't expect the press to focus on the conspiracy-oriented evidence, but I was astounded by the speed with which they concluded that there was nothing to contradict the Warren Report. (As if there was nothing in the 26 volumes or the Archives that did that!) Evelyn Wood must be proud.

Unless my ears were playing tricks on me, I heard NBC Radio report at 7 a.m. California time - half an hour after the documents were made available in the reading room - that there were "no startling new revelations."

Were there FBI briefings for the press? Maybe NBC got that on background. We should ask around. Was Gemberling prominently present?

It was also astounding how often it was reported that something had not been released before, or had not been given to the Warren Commission, when there could barely have been time to check that, and it was in fact not true. UPI "discovered" the Sibert-O'Neill report on the autopsy, which hadn't been released before, unless you count 1966. I would think it doesn't take a very great expertise in the case to know that.

The "new release" angle really got people going. What would happen if I took a few thousand pages from my file of internal Warren Commission memos, stamped "Top Secret" on them, and left a copy on UPI's doorstep, saying they had been obtained from a confidential source? We can't entirely fault the FBI; the form letter I got specified that much of this material had been in the 26 volumes or was available at the Archives. Didn't the press get the same letter?

I was impressed that Jim McManus of CBS seemed to be out of step a bit. While most of the press was saying that there was nothing to disprove the Warren Report, he said that: So far, reporters have found no new information to put to rest the many controversies that began in Dallas.... (Radio News, 6 p.m. 12/7) Nothing about the Warren Report being upheld. Good for him!!

I guess it's not wise to jump to any conclusions without asking McManus, but a little literary analysis of what he said does suggest to me that there was some conflict, involving corporate policy. The just-quoted conclusion was tempered by the following: but in half a ton, assassination buffs will certainly find new leads to pursue. Here, "but" doesn't make much sense; "and" would be more appropriate. That's the sort of glitch I would expect if the first part of the sentence had originally been to the effect that there was nothing to disprove the Warren Report.

[Whoops - I have been quoting from a rough transcript of McManus' remarks. Here are his exact words: "So far, reporters have found no new information that would put to rest the many controversies that began in Dallas 15 [sic] years ago, but in a half ton of FBI records, assassination buffs almost certainly will find new leads to pursue."]

For the Cronkite show (which may or may not have been taped later), Cronkite started out by saying that McManus "so far has found suspicions of conspiracy, but no hard facts to contradict the Warren Commission conclusion" that LHO did it alone. McManus' own conclusion again contained an inappropriate "but": "It is likely that amid the half ton of FBI papers, assassination buffs will find more leads to pursue; but so far, the record reveals no new information that would put to rest the many lingering controversies surrounding the death of President Kennedy." Again, "and" would be better. [I recognize the possibility that I'm reading this much too closely, but...]

By the morning news on the 8th, CBS had pretty much gotten back in step, and "but" was used correctly: "So far, the once secret record does not contradict the Warren Commission findings, but the documents also confirm that the FBI did not tell the Commission all that it suspected in the murder of President Kennedy."

In fact, contrary to this report, the FBI did tell the Commission about the Pedro Charles letters. (What they withheld was much more interesting!) Still, one has to give McManus credit for trying!

A few facts about the Pedro Charles letters. McManus was not the only reporter who said this was withheld from the Warren Commission. Not so; in fact, it's even in the 26 volumes. (CE 2763: 26H148) The text of the Pedro Charles letter was obtained both from the Secret Service (CD 87, SS 308) and from the FBI (CD 205, pp. 183-5). I'm confident that the accompanying letter to RFK is in the Archives, but I don't know where offhand. Peter Scott wrote about these letters in 1973 ("The Assassinations," pp. 360, 363), suggesting the obvious interpretation, that this "oddly self-incriminating letter" might have been planted by militant anti-Communists to make the case for a U.S. invasion of Cuba. (This interpretation could also apply to the "D" story, which was taken so seriously by Ambassador Mann and others, as detailed in the Schweiker Report.) Scott also suggested that "according to a more sophisticated version of this hypothesis (involving a 'two-tier conspiracy'), the clumsy fraud was meant to be exposed. Having first served as a pretext to engage the services of anti-Castro Cubans, its ultimate intention was to justify not an invasion but a massive federal de-bunking of all traces of conspiracy - the false and also the true." As the LBJ-Warren meeting shows, such stories did have that effect.

(Didn't anyone check the index to our anthology? Oh well. I did hear that an early AP story had used the Pedro Charles item as their lead, but that it was toned down later - I gather when they found out it was a hoax, or in the Warren Commission files, or both. Does anyone have such a story?)

Actually, the situation is even worse than I had realized - I just checked, and the Pedro Charles story is even mentioned in the Warren Report itself. (Page 307, at note 570.) Charles is not named, but referred to as a "particular Cuban agent." The footnote cites CE 2676, which is unrelated, rather than CD 2763, which does name Charles, as well as describing the Molina allegation that Charles had paid Oswald \$7,000.)

(Parenthetically, at least one report mentioned the Pedro Charles letter and the allegation that a Cuban had paid Oswald \$7,000 without connecting the two.)

Anyhow, what I was getting at was the one piece of substantive information on the Pedro Charles matter which I did find in my files: the FBI lab had completed the tests which established the hoax (i.e., that the Charles and Molina letters had the same source) on or before December 11 - the day before Hoover's now-famous memo. It is not clear to me whether Hoover had separate conversations with Johnson and Rankin, and whether one was held on the 12th, but if so I think it is newsworthy that he was apparently treating this story as a live one after his lab tests had been completed. (My source is CD 205, pp. 186-7, which says that the FBI Lab advised the Dallas office of the results of the tests on December 11.)

Back to berating the press: I guess if there had been a signed and notarized confession by Fidel Castro or Richard Helms in these 40,001 pages, it would have been noticed. As Haynes Johnson pointed out on PBS, no smoking gun was found; I think what we have seen is a serious problem with the "smoking gun syndrome." Certainly something important but less obvious could have escaped everyone's attention.

The often-quoted half-ton figure doesn't really give the best impression of the press' task. Let's suppose that one news organization had 10 people working 8 hours each before coming up with the conclusion that there was nothing really new. That works out to 10.3 pages per reader per minute. The first time I looked at the 600-page preliminary release, I might have been going that fast. And I don't think I noticed the 6 pages relating to Army Intelligence and the Hidell draft card - an item which, I think, most of us (and quite a few press people) do consider potentially quite significant.

Speaking of Army Intelligence, the 11/27 document mentioned by Carl Oglesby on "Good Morning America" may be quite useful. I'm not inclined to give any credence to the story that there were two people playing with rifles in Dealey Plaza on November 20. It sounds very much like a number of similar reports which I have seen in the Warren Commission files. If this particular report is in the Archives, or even the 26 volumes, I probably wouldn't remember it. (Mary et al. - is this familiar?) If we can locate it, I would like to know which police officers were talking about it - that might be an important clue to an information pipeline between the DPD and Army Intelligence.

Is there a whole series of reports from the Army back to the FBI? Were they getting lots of goodies from the DPD? (Someone should check.) What struck me about this new document is that one of the two items which Army thought important to pass on to the FBI as late as 11/27 was that Marina had told the DPD that Lee had a rifle matching the description of the assassination rifle. As Peter Scott has discussed in detail, it was an interpreter who had been brought into the case via his Army Intelligence connection who may have been putting words into Marina's mouth, specifically on the matter of the appearance of the rifle. Let's check this out.

By the way, from what I have heard, this memo does not imply that Army Intelligence knew about the alleged 11/20 Dealey Plaza incident before 11/22.

Jack Anderson reported on December 1 that certain Defense Department files on the assassination have been destroyed. My guess is that this would refer to Army Intelligence files. (Harold Weisberg may know more about this.) I have asked the Army for their pre-assassination records on Oswald (and Hidell). I was told that an index check gave a "no return," and that no relevant records were found in the history of the 112th INTC Group or its successor, the 92nd Military Intelligence Battalion. My request did not cover post-assassination files, although of course I am very interested in them, especially the records of contacts with the DPD, the FBI, etc. in the week or so after 11/22. On December 1, I wrote the Army again, pointing out the references to pre-assassination Oswald items in FBI Serial 49D; there has been no answer. If anyone wants to pursue this, my request was handled by the FOI Office of the Army Intelligence and Security Command, at 301-677-4011/4743.

One more substantive point - I am quite curious about what the meeting with Hoover meant for Rankin and the Commission. Someone could ask him, of course. Also, we should check the executive session transcripts of January 24 and 27, where there was (as I recall) some discussion of the difficulties caused by Hoover's position. (I don't recall anything relevant in the earlier executive sessions.)

Back to "Beat the Press": I wonder if any of the reporters feel that they have been had by the FBI? For some, it might be awkward if a smoking gun did turn up in the 40,000 pages tomorrow. (Or in the next 40,000 pages, even.) They may have been sandbagged into a pro-Warren Report position, the way Hoover may have been committed to that position by his initial reaction. As Sylvia pointed out to me, we're seeing a bit of a rerun of 1964, when the Warren Report was resoundingly endorsed before the 26 volumes came out.

It's amusing to see the press having problems with a swamp of details, the way the Commission did. Some reporters might appreciate seeing the comments made by the Commissioners in the early executive sessions, to that effect.

It is interesting to see the press make a virtue of the way the FBI tracked down all the junk leads, and of Hoover's suspicions of conspiracy. The dynamics of the pro- and anti-conspiracy forces right after the assassination are, I think, quite complex and not at all clear yet.

I think the S.F. Examiner gets the prize for the most astounding editorial on this subject. (And not only because part of it is based on the report that Hoover withheld the Pedro Charles story from the Commission, which the Examiner thought he really shouldn't have done.) The writer seems to have perceived that the claims of "nothing to contradict the Warren Report" might have been a trace premature. "Considerable time would be needed to digest the entire report." Do we get a call for a careful study along those lines by the press? No; "Once that has been done

by the many who make either a career or a hobby of questioning the conventional verdict on the assassination, a number of conclusions will emerge. All will differ." (Actually, one will be the same.) The 40,000 pages "provid[e] an extensive feast of fact and speculation to stimulate the appetite of that insatiable breed, the conspiracy cultists."

What have we done to deserve this? This time I can't even blame Mark Lane!

Seriously, it does seem odd that conspiracy buffing has such a bad reputation now, after Watergate, the Church Committee, Cointelpro, and MK/ULTRA. Or, as Rod McLeish put it, referring to Watergate, "finally, real conspiracies in high visible places."

What to do: for one thing, I think we should continue to talk about the files which have to be released before the FBI can be said to have made everything available: the pre-assassination files on Oswald (other than the one HQ file), whatever they may have on the critics, anything relevant in the COINTELPRO files, or in Hoover's personal files, and (maybe) even the field office files on the investigation.

We can refer to specific documents of interest - e.g., those cited in the Schweiker Report, particularly the Gale memo of 12/10/63. (I have been after that specifically for some time, with no luck; is it in the 40,000 pages?)

We can try to turn reporters on to Sam Stern's unsuccessful request for the pre-assassination files. (See my manuscript.)

We should make an effort to focus attention on the 1967 Morgan-Roselli-Anderson flap, as detailed in the Schweiker Report (in edited form). For one thing, Schweiker is one of the few public figures who will say critical things about the FBI's record on this. (There are problems with the SR's analysis of the WC-FBI relationship - mainly that the WC doesn't get its share of the blame - and the analysis of the FBI's pre-assassination Oswald file is weak, but that's another story.)

(Maybe this isn't the time for it, but I would like to see some press attention to the still withheld testimony taken by the Schweiker Committee, and some pressure to get it out. There is probably more of importance there than in all but 1% of the 80,000 pages.)

Since some reporters have been looking for interesting things in these FBI files without much concern about whether they are new or not, we can easily offer them old material on specific topics which will be in the next release. You want a report on what JFK said when he was hit? Easy. Some nice documents on Loran Hall, maybe? We can get them wholesale.

On the other hand, there may be some reporters who would want to know if certain documents have been released, and what related material is available. We certainly can do that for them; preferably, in exchange for some documents.

One specific lead which I would like to see pursued: in the recently released COINTELPRO documents (which got far too little attention in the press), there was a reference to operations against the Cuban movement starting in June 1961 - specifically including the FPCC. (Washington Post, 11/22/77, p. 6; by John Jacobs) Jacobs said the documents do not specifically mention Oswald. Nonetheless, I would like to see any general instructions to field offices, especially in 1963, and anything relating to New Orleans. Were the field offices under pressure to come up with COINTELPRO ideas, as they were in other programs? Does DeBrueys' name appear anywhere? (I've long been amused by the possibility that Oswald's letter to the Militant (the "L.H." letter) was a COINTELPRO-type operation, especially given the report that he sent the rifle photo to them. If they had published that photo of Oswald before the assassination, the SWP would have been quite effectively disrupted.)

By the way, we should definitely continue to go after the inventory worksheets, which the FBI apparently isn't giving out. That has no apparent function other than making things difficult for us and the press.

I'll hold back on additional comments on specific documents until I see them.