

Partial draft of
uncompleted article

Dealey Plaza and Beyond:

Critics, Friends, and
Adversaries

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Lane

Let me begin with an embarrassing confession: I was, at the outset, an admirer and cash supporter of Mark Lane. In retrospect, I marvel at my naivete and shudder at my sophomoric assumption that he who challenged the Warren Report was by that very virtue an honorable, credible, and disinterested idealist. I suffer no longer under the illusion that the enemy of my enemy is my friend.

But in 1964, Mark Lane was a voice in the wilderness, and I went often to hear his lectures. He was knowledgeable and witty in his discourses on the official case against Oswald as it then was known from the Dallas authorities and from FBI sources. Later in 1964, Lane was equally effective in his attack on the Warren Report, both on the lecture platform and in a brief in defense of Oswald published in The National Guardian. I listened to him with fervent respect, taking copious notes of his lectures or radio interviews.

In my files, I find detailed notes of an appearance by Lane on the Barry Gray radio program on July 2, 1964, together with Professor Charles Rice of the Fordham University School of Law. The notes say:

Lane has in his possession a photostatic copy of the results of the paraffin test of Oswald reported on 23 November by the Dallas police laboratory, which certified that the test was positive for both hands but negative for the face. Professor Rice suggested that there might have been other paraffin tests of the face that were not negative; and Mark Lane had to point out the elementary fact that only one paraffin test can be performed after a suspected use of firearms...Lane and Rice also discussed the wounds. Lane insisted that it was certain and beyond any doubt that the first bullet had entered Kennedy's throat and had been fired from in front of the car. In attempting to refute this, Professor Rice said that he had seen a copy or a summary of the autopsy report and that the autopsy had indicated that the throat wound might have been caused by the exit or entry of a bullet fragment. It is not clear if this was a slip of the tongue on Rice's part, if it was a mistake, or if he was indeed reporting accurately what the autopsy report said.

The next day, on July 3, 1964, on the Huntley/Brinkley NBC-TV news broadcast, David Brinkley said that Mark Lane had been going around the country and abroad giving paid lectures in which he claimed that Oswald was innocent; and that Lane had been called by the Warren Commission and asked to give his evidence. However, he had no such evidence, and Justice Warren had come to the conclusion, in effect, that Lane was a liar.

This broadcast sent me to the typewriter, to write to Messrs. Huntley and Brinkley in defense of Lane. My letter, dated July 3, 1964, said that the item on Mark Lane was a masterpiece of inaccuracy, slanting, and misrepresentation:

Mr. Brinkley said that Lane was called before the Warren Commission, but in the first instance Lane had almost to break down the Commission's doors and force his offer of information down the Commission's throat ...I have heard Lane's lecture on the Oswald case, and read his brief ...and at no time did he ever claim that he had evidence in his possession other than the evidence announced by the FBI and the Dallas authorities (never mind that they changed the specifications of said evidence repeatedly--five times, on the nature and number of the wounds). At no time did he claim anything except that his analysis of the inconsistencies, contradictions, and conflicts in the evidence proclaimed by the official agencies concerned showed that on the strength of their evidence Oswald did not commit the crime acting alone.

As to his "paid" lectures, is there really anything sinister or relevant in that? Do you two gentlemen provide us with your version of the day's news as a public service or for salary?

I did not send Mark Lane a copy of the letter to Huntley and Brinkley, nor did they send me a reply. Apparently, I held Lane in too great awe to conceive of establishing any direct contacts with him through what might be regarded as an attempt at self-ingratiation.

My notes indicate that I next attended a lecture by Lane on July 20, 1964, at Theater East in New York City. On this occasion, Lane revealed that his investigators had recently visited Mrs. Helen Markham, a witness to the murder of Tippit, and that she had said that she was "terrified."

Dallas police cars appeared on the scene. But one member of the family said he was not afraid, gave full information which is very damaging to the Government case...He was arrested the next day..."Jumped or fell" from window in Dallas jail, was severely injured and is on critical list...

Dr. Perry told Newsweek reporter, "Our official position now is that the wound in the throat is an exit wound. That's all I can tell you. There is much more about the case and about the medical evidence but I am not allowed to open my mouth." This interview was never published.

Lane's account of the near-defenestration of a member of Mrs. Markham's family (her brother, I then thought, but in actuality, her son) shocked me. I put aside my diffidence and wrote to Lane on September 11, 1964:

In your lecture on the 20th of July, which I attended, you related to the audience the shocking "accident" which befell the brother of

Mrs. Helen Markham in the Dallas jail. Despite my confidence in your reliability and accuracy, I must admit that I found it an almost incredible story. I have seen no reference anywhere, not even in the National Guardian, to this astounding and sinister development in the case...I would be grateful if you would take the trouble to confirm and if possible to document your account of the arrest of Mrs. Markham's brother and his subsequent "accident," and if you would also indicate his present whereabouts and condition, if these are known...

I realize that demands on your time are very great and that you may not be in a position to reply, soon or at length, to this letter. I shall understand if that proves to be the case. In closing, I should like to emphasize my personal gratitude for the vast amount of information which you have made available and my warm respect for your efforts to bring the truth to light, in the face of the great odds and the tremendous barriers set up by the Establishment. Personally, I have not the smallest doubt that the truth is being concealed, at all costs, by a deliberate and organized policy and with considerable desperation. The very desperation of these efforts to sell to the people of the country and the world a story which refuses to accommodate the facts, however often they are revised, must make one wonder and suspect that the truth is even more appalling, terrible and dangerous than all the perversions to which it is being subjected.

With this letter, I enclosed a small contribution to the Citizens' Committee of Inquiry which had been organized by or around Lane. I did not receive any reply, then or later, from Lane, but I did receive a prompt letter of thanks for my donation from Deirdre Griswold, Executive Director of the Citizens' Committee. I wrote to Miss Griswold on September 23, 1964, asking whether I would receive a further reply to the questions I had raised in my letter to Lane, in particular the questions dealing with the "new" paraffin test results and with the fate of Mrs. Markham's son, explaining:

I have been using every possible occasion to call the attention of many friends and acquaintances to the anomalies in the official case and...have encountered pronounced resistance to the facts and their implications. These sceptics, who should direct their scepticism to the weird inconsistencies and weaknesses of the case put forward by the Establishment, usually demand instead that I provide chapter-and-verse verification of the information discovered and made available to the public by Mr. Lane. It is for that reason that I requested further information on the paraffin test and on Mrs. Markham's son. I would like to be able to compel attention to those shocking and strange developments in the case rather than to have them dismissed as unsupported rumor. I hope, therefore, that you or Mr. Lane will take the trouble to reply to the relevant parts of my earlier letter.

After attending a "final lecture" by Lane at the Jan Hus Theater on October 3, 1964 I wrote again to Lane, asking for further information on a new event he had related --the suicide of a stripteaser named Teresa Norton, who had been involved in the trial of Jack Ruby--and again enclosing a check for a small sum, in support of the work of the Citizens' Committee. On October 10, Miss Griswold wrote to me, expressing appreciation for the contribution and replying to some of the questions

in my earlier letters. In the ensuing weeks and months, I called or wrote to the Citizens' Committee to relay my discovery of further contradictions and anomalies in the Warren Report, which I was studying with minute care. Miss Griswold and other Committee members also provided me with new information, by phone or letter. (I have never met Deirdre Griswold, nor did I ever go to the Committee's office, although I did encounter a number of individuals who were then working very closely with Mark Lane---some, in the early days, and others as late as 1968.)

It was in a telephone conversation with a Committee member that my first small doubt about Lane arose. In his public lecture on September 12, 1964 Lane had said, according to my notes, that:

The Warren Commission did not even know yet, with their report being set in type, that the alleged murder rifle in its possession was NOT the same as the rifle sent to A. Hidell by the Chicago mail order house. Mr. Klein, the owner, has said categorically that this model of the Italian carbine was not in stock in March 1963 and only became available some time later.

When I mentioned this sensational statement to a Committee member in a telephone conversation on November 1, 1964, I was told that Mark Lane was overstating when he said that Klein's did not have the 40-inch model of the rifle in stock when the Hidell order was filled---maybe they did, maybe they did not. But Lane has never, to my knowledge, repeated what he said publicly on September 12, 1964---that Mr. Klein said categorically that the rifle was not in stock in March 1963---nor is such an allegation to be found in his book Rush to Judgment. In the wisdom conferred by hindsight, I see now that I should have been far more disturbed than I was by Lane's "overstatement."

I continued for some time to admire Lane, to make protests that he was receiving unfair treatment---writing to Harrison Salisbury, who had moderated a televised round table discussion of the Warren Report on October 18, 1964, to point out that it seemed unfortunate that Lane had had to oppose five apologists for the Report and had been prevented repeatedly from making his points---and to defend him from unreasonable and snide criticism even at the cost of alienating close friends. After a most unpleasant disagreement with one ~~close~~ friend, I wrote him on June 20, 1964:

(Quote letter to Lex, under "M" in 1964 notebook)

Shortly after the Warren Report was published in September 1964, I met Marlene Behrends, one of Lane's principal aides and researchers in the Citizens' Committee. Marlene and Ralph Behrends were an attractive young married couple with a young infant, whose apartment was only a short distance from the building in which I lived. They were friendly, ready to share and exchange information, and no less obsessed than I with the mysteries of Dallas. For several months, the Behrends and I were on the best of terms. Marlene provided me with lists of witnesses and indices compiled by the Citizens' Committee; and she called me in great excitement one evening, to tell me that a Committee member had found sensational information in a volume of the Hearings published by the Warren Commission---that there was a real "Hidell," a fellow-Marine of Oswald's who was known by that nickname. In turn, I gladly communicated to Marlene Behrends my own findings in the Hearings and Exhibits, for transmittal to Mark Lane. At about Christmas-time 1964, Marlene came to see me one evening and took notes for some two hours of the commentary I was then compiling on various facets of evidence, to send to Lane in Europe.

My collaboration with Marlene Behrends came to an abrupt end about March or April 1965, for reasons which remain baffling to me. Lane, in a radio broadcast on WBAI on March 11, 1965, had referred to a Commission Exhibit (CE 2980) and had described it as a memorandum from the CIA to the Warren Commission concerning the history, associations, and activities of Jack Ruby. I was dismayed to hear Lane's description, for I remembered that the memorandum in question had been written by two of the Commission's lawyers to the CIA. I made it a point to call Marlene Behrends the first thing on the following day, to ask her to point out to Lane that the memorandum was to, not from, the CIA, so that he would not repeat his inadvertent error. But Mrs. Behrends vehemently insisted that Lane was correct: she was certain that there was such a memo from the CIA, perhaps by a different number. I was surprised that Mrs. Behrends bristled at my well-intentioned call, and even more surprised that she seemingly considered Lane incapable of error. I, too, then held Lane in high regard, but it had not even entered my mind that he was to be considered infallible. Indeed, I was troubled by serious accusations Lane had hurled at Curtis Crawford, his adversary on the March 11th broadcast, and by Crawford's remark afterwards, in a telephone conversation, that Lane was the most unscrupulous man he had ever met. It was through Curtis Crawford that I had met Marlene and Ralph Behrends, after some months of discussion and exploration of the evidenciary issues with Crawford. I had learned of Curtis Crawford's interest in the Warren Report from his broadcast, right after the Report was published, of a very thoughtful and thought-provoking assessment of the Commission's conclusions. In my subsequent long conversations with Crawford, I was sometimes irritated by his excessive generosity toward the Commission; but I had considerable respect for Crawford's scholarship and judgment,

and could not dismiss his comment on Lane as a mere reaction to Lane's harsh position on the Warren Report, which Crawford—one of the early critics—now tended to accept and defend.

Returning to the question of the CIA memo, I took it for granted that despite her unyielding insistence that Lane was correct, Marlene Behrends would still mention my objection to him. However, Lane proceeded to repeat his description of a memorandum from the CIA, this time in print, in an article ("Who Is Jack Ruby?") published in The Minority of One in April 1965. The illustrations included the first page of CE 2980, which left no doubt that the memo was directed to "Richard Helms, Deputy Director for Plans, Central Intelligence Agency," and was "from" Commission staff members "Leon B. Hubert and Burt W. Griffin." Mrs. Behrends apparently had not informed Lane of my telephone call to her, and clearly she was mistaken in her belief that Lane had in his possession a different but similar memorandum from the CIA.

As I did not hear anything from Mrs. Behrends, as I half-expected, I sent a telegram to Lane calling his attention to his erroneous identification of the memorandum. Some weeks later, I received a telephone call from ~~Deirdre~~ Deirdre Griswold, who asked if I was the person who had sent the telegram and then said that they (presumably, Lane and she) were already aware of the error. A correction was published by the editor of The Minority of One in the May 1965 issue (page 28).

I had written to Marlene Behrends on March 19, 1965, reiterating that if there was in fact a memorandum written by the CIA, as she claimed, I was ready to withdraw and apologize for my ~~unwarranted~~ criticism of Lane's accuracy the moment I was informed of the exhibit number of such a CIA memorandum. I wrote further:

If there is no such CIA report but only the report to the CIA contained in CE 2980, I can only hope that you will be willing to acknowledge that my original assumption was logical, correct, and friendly.

I have always been deeply distressed by the spectacle of critics of the Warren Report attacking each other instead of the Report and I do not want to be forced into such a position. Much as I want to avoid it, I can't pay the price of accepting blame where I was not at fault.

Let's both suspend judgment until the facts are determined. If there is a report by the CIA, you will have my immediate retraction and apology. My assumption was based in part on the fact that I have scrutinized the exhibits very carefully and repeatedly but had no recollection of seeing a report of that nature. I may well have overlooked it; I certainly do not regard myself as infallible. Meanwhile, let's not feud—we have too much important work to do, and the work is the only important thing.

I intended the letter to be conciliatory, but either it did not read that way to Mrs. Behrends or she was irremediably alienated by my temerity in correcting Lane, even if the correction was well-founded and well-meant. I never heard from her again.

Lane was in no way responsible, of course, for Mrs. Behrends' undue zeal on his behalf. I wondered at the time if he would not himself be dismayed to know that he had inspired such religiosity and hero-worship. In his public appearances, he seemed untainted by self-importance in the wake of a growing celebrity status; he continued to be relaxed, good-natured, and in possession of a sense of humor and quick wit. I learned much later that during the initial phase of Lane's efforts on the case, in 1964 and 1965, one of his severest critics and detractors became persuaded that Lane, in spite of himself, had truly been captured by the immense drama and injustice of the Oswald case and was motivated by disinterested conviction. Quite a few months passed before the man in question realized that his earlier assessment of Lane remained valid, and that the apparent passion for justice was plausible but not real.

The next Mark Lane lieutenant whom I met was Stewart Galanor, an earnest, aloof, and clinical young man in contrast to the volatile Mrs. Behrends. Galanor and I attended a course on the Warren Report given at The New School for Social Research in the spring semester of 1965 by Joseph S. Lobenthal, Jr., an attorney and member of the faculty of the New School. Galanor and I entered into occasional cooperation and exchange of information, which continued after the course was concluded. It was apropos of my contacts with Galanor that an incident occurred which violently converted my admiration of Lane into disillusion and mistrust which I could never entirely erase.

Galanor had told me of a letter he had received from the Western Cartridge Company, in reply to his inquiry about the date of manufacture of the ammunition allegedly used to assassinate President Kennedy. The reply was in conflict with the statement in the Warren Report that the ammunition was of recent origin and was currently manufactured. After discussing this with Galanor, I decided to write to the Western Cartridge Company too, to see if the reply to Galanor would be reiterated. The reply I received not only confirmed that the ammunition had not been manufactured since shortly after the Second World War but added that any existing stock would ~~not~~ be ~~manufactured~~ of questionable reliability.

On June 30, 1965 I wrote to Stewart Galanor in care of the post office box maintained by the Citizens' Committee of Inquiry, on a number of matters. At the end of the letter, I said:

You will be interested in the attached photocopy of a letter from Western Cartridge Company. They reply so readily to inquiries that one suspects they never heard of the Warren Report.

Several weeks later, during a telephone conversation, Galanor told me, with audible reluctance and unhappiness, that my letter and its enclosure had never reached him: Mark Lane had collected the mail from the post office box and had opened my letter, although it was addressed to Galanor. He had then discarded my letter as "not important" but appropriated the enclosed letter from the Western Cartridge Company.