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Sep 6, 1968

Dear Bob,

Thank you for your letter of Aug. 30th. The ms. arrived safely. Let me say that I completely accept your decision to reject the book, and what I say here should not be construed as an attempt to get you to change your mind in any way.

I am, however, obviously in considerable disagreement with you on one fundamental point, and I would like to discuss it. You say: "It seems to me that you are using your criticism of the Garrison investigation to try to support the Warren Report, and to a surprising degree." It is true that in the course of writing the book I find it difficult to take time out to criticize such notions as "the second Oswald", and "the mysterious deaths", and it may well be that they harm the book in that they represent tangents to the main theme, and ought to be excluded. However, I completely reject your implication that my whole aim is to rehabilitate the WR. My aim is to write a book about the Garrison investigation, and no chapters were included to discredit ~~Garrison~~ "not only Garrison but anyone who does not agree with the conclusions of the Report."

I do admit that there is a slight pro-Warren flavour to the book, even though I state that my position is the same as that taken in Life ("A Matter of Reasonable Doubt") and in Inquest. It shows what a state of affairs has been reached when merely to endorse Inquest's position is to be regarded as having a pro-Warren "bias".

The point I want to make, and I feel strongly about this, is that to take a stronger position is simply not tenable on rational grounds. Your letter implies that had I but looked at the evidence I could not have avoided coming to a much stronger anti-Warren position. I think this is where we disagree. I have been doing little else during the last 20 months but look at the evidence, and to end up by saying, in effect, well, Oswald may have had an accomplice, but on the other hand, the Warren Report may be right, is somewhat painful, as it almost amounts to saying that for the last 20 months I have been wasting my time. But I sincerely do not feel that any other position is tenable.

Let me use an analogy here to demonstrate my thinking on the subject. There are 3 ways, and only three, the assassination can have occurred: 1. Oswald did it alone. 2. Oswald did it with accomplice(s). 3. Oswald did not do it at all. These 3 "scenarios" can be analogously represented by 3 jig-saw puzzles, the numerous facts in the case representing pieces which can be applied to any one of the 3 puzzles. If we take puzzle no.1, (The Warren Report) the trouble is that certain pieces simply don't fit, eg. the autopsy report doesn't fit, the head movement at frame 313 apparently doesn't fit, the timing of the shots don't fit. A classic case of a non-fitting piece is the carrying of the bag by Oswald into the TSB. In other words, it is impossible to finish the puzzle without obviously having to bend some of the pieces around in a rather blatant way. The Warren Commission tried it, and were caught out. The only honest thing one could do would be to say that it is impossible to finish the puzzle.

When you turn to puzzle no.2, or 3, the trouble is that most of the pieces are not there at all. The puzzles are even more incomplete. In the case of the Oswald-innocent puzzle, about the only pieces you have are precisely the ones that won't fit into the first one. In my view, there are not very many of these, and this is definitely where I disagree with Sylvia Meagher, and probably with you.

Sylvia's book is very interesting, because consideration of it is, I think, appropriate to the ~~xx~~ jig-saw puzzle analogy. Sylvia has taken a powerful magnifying glass, and carefully examined all the interstices between the pieces of the Warren Commission's puzzle. Time and time again, she discovers pieces which don't quite fit. However, if I may here use the analogy to suit my own opinion, my view is that if you examine any jig-saw puzzle with a magnifying glass, you

or rather
3 subsidiary
material pertaining
to the autopsy

might well conclude that masses of pieces didn't fit, when in fact they did, because the criteria you were using were more precise than the limits of precision set by the thickness of the saw blade etc. I think that many of Sylvia's criticisms fall into exactly this category. In other words, I feel that most probably if you try to reconstruct any historical event by assembling a large number of facts which went to make up that event, you are always going to encounter this phenomenon of the "pieces" not quite matching. (This idea was touched on in a New Yorker 'Talk of the Town' piece (Dec 9, 1967) when they mentioned Tink Thompson's book. "We wonder whether a genuine mystery is being concealed here or whether a similar scrutiny of a minute section of space and time would yield similar strangenesses - gaps, inconsistencies, warps and bubbles in the surface of circumstance.")

If I am right, then the criticisms which Sylvia raises ought themselves to be examined in detail (a proposal I am sure she would be in favor of,) to see whether the criteria she uses are not maybe too rigid. In one or two instances I have done this, but I soon came to the conclusion that a minute examination of the book along those lines would result in a book approximately twice the size of Accessories After the Fact. One example is her argument that "the undated note" (CEL) is not consistent with the interpretation that Oswald intended to shoot Walker. I examined her arguments carefully, and concluded that the note was consistent with such an interpretation. (The argument runs to about 2,000 words.) Another instance is her opinion that Oswald did not take the rifle to New Orleans because of his luggage being too small. However, as she herself (I believe, I do not have the book here,) points out, the duffle bags were longer than the dis-assembled rifle by a margin not too far to worry about "bulging" at the ends. The argument is important, because if she is ~~not~~ right, then Marina lied about it, and I think the episode is consistent with Marina's being truthful about it.

It may sound like heresy, but I am quite interested in the possibility that all the pieces of the Warren Commission's puzzle can in fact be assembled so that they all fit. Maybe I am interested in doing this because, at the present stage of our knowledge, that is the only way the assassination problem can be solved. I concede that it may be an impossible task. However, it is certainly impossible to solve it any other way unless someone provides us with a whole bagful of new pieces, and until that happens, if one happens to be employed and paid money simply to work on the assassination, as I am, then one might as well work with the pieces we have already got. I don't think there is anything necessarily knavish or foolish about this, it is just that if the WR is right, then presumably all or nearly all the pieces are there, and it ought to be possible to reconstruct them to the satisfaction of every thinking person.

The pro-Warren "bias" (as you call it) in my book results from my conviction that the WR is in fact closer to the truth than most people realize, and have been led to believe in the last two years. CBS evidently thought this too, but were in the end guilty of precisely the same distortions as the WR. However, this does not mean that either CBS or the WC knew that what they set out to prove was not the case, but merely that both tried to be too tidy about the whole thing. They both made the mistake of thinking that blank spots in the puzzle would be worse than pieces bent into shape to fit the picture.

Ironically, Sylvia is now apparently in possession of some information (of which I don't know the details because she got it in confidence,) which, it seems to me from what I know about it, removes one of the major obstacles to ~~reconciling~~ accepting the WR. When I first met Sylvia in Jan 1967 I proposed to her that most of the really serious objections to the WR could be got round if one proposes that Kennedy was shot earlier than is believed and also discards the single bullet theory. Her objection to that was: "Then you have got a faked autopsy." As I understand it, she is now able to explain how the back wound is located (a) erroneously, i.e. too high, and (b) in good faith. This error then formed the basis for the single bullet theory, which again was proposed in good faith, to account for the problem of the timing of the shots. If this is the case, (and I may have it slightly garbled because I don't know the details of the argument,) then all I can say is that I am very close to accepting the WR in toto. Of course the big difficulty is that it seems almost impos-

able to push the first shot far enough back to leave an interval long enough for the gun to have been reloaded and to have shot both Kennedy in the back and Connally with separate shots. This is where CBS fudged it, and it remains easily the most serious objection to the WR. It is the one big piece that doesn't fit, if you discard the single bullet theory, as I am convinced one has to. Other objections, eg. the head movement at 313, and Oswald's marksmanship, are serious but not fatal, because they relate to implausibilities and not impossibilities. A great deal of the criticism of the WR I regard as being more or less irrelevant to the assassination, eg the Tippit killing and the whole Ruby business. Epstein was roundly criticised for omitting reference to the Tippit murder in his book, and yet it is logically independent of the assassination. Oswald may have done it and yet not shot the President, or he may ~~have~~ not have done it and yet shot the President. Of course its relevance to the critics is that if Oswald was framed in this instance, then we have good reason to doubt all the other evidence about Oswald. However, I do not regard the evidence that he was framed in the Tippit killing as being nearly good enough.

In summary, what I am trying to say is that I consider my position regarding the Warren Report to be a valid one, and I am slightly concerned that you evidently regard me as being a bit misguided, as best. If your objections were those of an editor who was concerned about balance and proportion in a book about Garrison, saying that there was too much about the Warren Commission critics etc., I would probably agree with you. But evidently that is not what you are saying. You are concerned that I am being unwarrantably kind about the Warren Report. On the evidence available at this moment, I cannot agree with you. It may be that in the future some sensational new evidence will turn up which will vindicate your position, (and certainly that evidence won't come from the classified documents in the National Archives, which I predict will turn out to be of zero interest,) but until that time, about all one can say is that the Warren Report, in its central conclusion, is possibly wrong, and possibly right.

I hope we can meet again if I come to New York, and maybe hammer this out some more. At any right, it ought to be worth clarifying precisely what points we disagree on.

Best wishes,

Tom Bettell

P.S. If you feel like it, perhaps you could either show this to, or send a copy to Sylvia. I have only made one carbon.

T.B.