

May 20, 1975

Dear Roger,

There was no need to return my "Memo" on Hamlet/Burkley. I have Xerox copies. If you like I'll send it back to you.

It was good to read you "concur in the validity of the points" I raised. But I must disagree with two. On rechecking, which I should have done before writing, I found I had made a number of errors in stating autopsy surgeon Finck had named Burkley as a source of the autopsy-report lead statement given the surgeons on November 22, 1963, that a Dallas news photo had shown a rifle disappearing from a Texas School Book Depository window.

The autopsy-report sentence about which Finck testified in February 1969 in the New Orleans trial of Clay Shaw, and which I misreported, reads: According to newspaper reports (Washington Post November 23, 1963) Bob Jackson, a Dallas Times-Herald photographer, said he looked around as he heard the shots and saw a rifle barrel disappearing into a window on an upper floor of the nearby Texas School Book Depository Building." When asked, "Can you tell me who called that particular newspaper article to your attention?", Finck responded, "...it was Dr. Humes" (page 106 of the transcript of Finck's testimony.

Inasmuch as the Jackson report appeared on November 23, it could not have been called to the pathologists' attention during the autopsy which was concluded before midnight on the 22nd. That I disregarded the clear language of the autopsy report and Finck's testimony, mistook the date, and misreported an unambiguous newspaper story in what I intended to be a painstakingly accurate probe of Burkley's ambiguous role in the assassination of president Kennedy is inexcusable and will long be a source of chagrin and mortification. I detect the hand of an old adversary, imp of the perverse, Freud's unconscious perhaps, lying in ambush to strike when the critical faculty is seduced by conceit at violations of Anatole France's advice to writers - if you like a sentence, strike it out.

Criticisms may also be leveled at my flat statement the tracheotomy on Kennedy was performed in Burkley's presence. The doctor's much neglected Report notes, probably for good reason, he arrived in Parkland Hospital five minutes after the president. Was the tracheotomy an accomplished fact, that is, had Kennedy's anterior neck wound been extended by the procedure to insert a cuffed tracheotomy tube, when Burkley arrived? The Burkley Report does not say. My recollection is none of the Parkland doctors noted the specific times of the procedures they undertook in their reports to the hospital administrator which, I believe, were forwarded later to Burkley. None, if I am not mistaken, noted in their reports, Burkley's presence, his intervention and non-intervention into their work, or any conversation between him and any doctor while in the emergency room. The probability is Burkley was a-

were a wound in Kennedy's anterior neck had been extended, but I was and am not certain and should have qualified what I said rather than assert it as fact. Better still I should have limited myself to asking questions. I object strongly when others extend possibility into probability or stretch the latter into "fact." I ought not be guilty of the practice.

These errors, of course, impair but, I believe, do not destroy the case for investigation of Burkley's activities as the motion of a cog in the assassination gear train linking Dallas and Washington. The many other "points" of the "Memo" will sustain close examination. Burkley was, for example, a source of the statement appearing in the autopsy report, that three shots had been fired in Dallas; at least Finck did say so. And so on. Burkley was a link between frame up in Dallas and manipulation of evidence in Washington. I take it this is what you mean by "our two minds traveled in parallel directions after we each independently learned of the Burkley death certificate."

But can it be said that this idea of ours, eked from scraps of evidence and testimony and needing solid verification, gives us a frame of reference? To my mind it is rather, in the first instance, the fruit of an approach which rests on two truths: 1) murder of the head of the mightiest state in history at the peak of its imperialist power can be understood only as a political act in source, motivation, and aftermath; and 2) the assassination of president Kennedy was conspiratorial in conception, execution, and coverup: Oswald, a self-proclaimed Marxist "but not a Marxist Leninist," critic of both Russian soviet and American capitalist society, a twofold red herring denounced by the soviet government as a Trotskyist and framed by the American government/a leftist assassin, in the ironic sport with which Clie amuses herself, was a victim of detente.

The major challenge of the Kennedy assassination is not rationalization of the physical evidence which, in the end, may prove to be impossible, as in the Lincoln assassination in which Booth approached Lincoln from the latter's right and fired one shot with the bullet entering the left side of Lincoln's head and coming to rest, two doctors testified; over the right eye, and two others finding it over the left eye. And all of this irrelevant to the identity of the assassin, motivation for the killing, punishment of his confederates, discovery, long afterward, of the political source of the murder plot in the Union government, and historic significance of the event. No, the challenge is recognition of the Kennedy assassination as an incident in the conflict of giant interests to set and control the evolution of government policy; and definition of those interests in the context of challenge to older financial/industrial/political forces long dominant in the government by historically newer forces created by the "cold war," Eisenhower's "military-industrial complex" whose "total influence - economic, political, even spiritual," he warned Kennedy, the nation, and the world on leaving office in 1960, "is felt in every city, every state house, every office of the federal government." In short, the challenge is to counterpose historical truth to the falsification of the government which projects the assassination of Kennedy as a random intrusion into history as made by governments.

To my knowledge no one has taken this approach. I dare say most "critics" of the government's assassination policy are unaware of the challenge. The problem of motivation has been almost totally ignored in the concentration on the question: who killed Kennedy? Virtually all interest centers on some aspect the artificial mystery created by the government. Little heed is paid to the need for elaboration of a systematic account of the structure and operation of the assassination, about which we know very little. Resolution of the Burkley problem may advance us some distance along this line.

Rather than conceive Burkley's assassination activities as a frame of reference for undertaking "a new and more meaningfully structured study of the medical evidence in its entirety," as you propose, for which I am not qualified, and which, in any case, should be Dr. Wecht's assignment as he is most competent to do professionally, I prefer to regard "Burkley" as a springboard from which to explore the role of the navy as a part of the military-industrial complex in the Kennedy assassination. We might consider it, for instance, in the light of the conflict in "strategic orientation" in Drew Middleton's words (U.S. Reviewing Its World Military Posture After Saigon's Fall, N.Y. Times, May 5, 1975), between the army and air force on the one hand, which since World War II, according to Middleton, "have focused their planning on northwest Europe and the Mediterranean," and the navy and marine corps on the other hand, which "have been looking westward at Asia." Middleton is a journalist, not a historian. The dichotomy in strategic orientation, resulting in interservice rivalry and competition for money, arms, intelligence, and influence, originated after World War I when the U.S. became a Far Eastern dominant naval power. In World War II the United States fought in Europe, Africa, and Asia. But, it is noteworthy, after the holocaust, the United States was engaged in two wars in Asia. And, as Peter Dale Scott has documented, the triggering motive for the assassination of President Kennedy was the removal of an obstacle to large-scale military intervention in southeast Asia.

A large conspiracy to remove the head of state by murder, moving through government agencies, would, of necessity, involve numerous individuals, including highly placed naval brass, some of whom, no doubt, were privy to the plot before or after its execution, and others unwitting accessories as functionaries discharging duties associated with their offices. At the moment Burkley fits either description.

Culpability of naval brass would have to be related, in a systematic account of the assassination, to the roles of other agencies; e.g. the CIA which, it is established had a hand in the overthrow of Dien in South Vietnam after he opposed U.S. troop increases in 1963 (N.Y. Times, April 27, 1963; The Lost Crusade by Chester Cooper, p.207); and possibly also in his assassination before Kennedy was killed following his decision to withdraw from Vietnam. On the other hand, while current clamor indicts the CIA as Kennedy's executioner, aspects of evidence establishing existence of a "second Oswald," correlative material in the Warren Commission executive-session transcripts, and other data suggest the possibility the CIA, some part of it, or another agency was aware of the murder plot and was moving covertly, the only means available to such a party, to embarrass or frustrate a rival agency in the underworld of intelli-

gence and counterintelligence. Is it not remarkable that no one has asked what purpose and whose interest was served by the seemingly clumsy creation of a "second Oswald," at times, in circumstances, and with traits even the accommodating Warren Commission found unbelievable? Doesn't it seem reasonably certain the creators of this Oswald were not the skillful plotters of the enfilade in Dealey Plaza? The thought is not likely to find place in the eventual report of the Rockefeller Commission; nor in that of the Church Senate committee; nor to issue from any government investigatory body. But investigators and historians who understand the government as a congeries of competing, conflicting, clashing, and contradictorily cooperating personalities, interests, agencies, and institutions vying for prestige, money, and power may one day unravel the mystery of the CIA's covert role in the assassination of president Kennedy.

If any of this is congenial to your thought we might have much pleasure and satisfaction in pursuing it together. But you must not allow me to deflect you if your interest is fixed on the medical evidence. In that case we can conclude again as we did in school - parallel lines do not meet. In any case you can count on what help I can give you in recreating the recent past.

Cordially,


Thomas Stern