

Haverford College
Haverford, PA.

June 8, 1969

Professor Richard Bernabei
Department of Classics
Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario

Dear Professor Bernabei,

I think you deserved better than what you got from me last week. Although certain of the things you say, I still find offensive, I am able to understand how from your point of view they may seem justified. Many of your points are valid and I think I have an obligation to at least try to "satisfy" you. I'm leaving for Europe on June 15th, so I don't know whether I'll be successful, but I'm going to at least try to get to the bottom of this, and the enclosed letter to Marion Johnson is a first step.

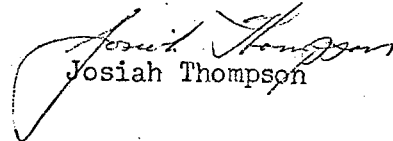
I totally reject your charge that the dent in 557A was apparent to me in January 1967 and that I suppressed this information. It is possible that the dent was there in January 1967 and that I missed it. But the more I puzzle about this alternative, the more I think it is extremely unlikely. My memory of the situation is that I was hurried in my examination of the cases by the fact that this was being done on my own, and that the Life photographer was working on something else and soon would need me. The grey jacket and the cases had been brought down for my own inspection although Life was not interested in them. I hold in memory, then, the sense of time pressure ~~to~~ to finish the inspection here so that I could get back to the job I was getting paid for doing. But I definitely recollect picking up the two cases and turning them until the chambering marks/shoulder dents became visible. From my notes it's also clear that I examined them long enough to draw sketches of each case showing the location of the chambering marks on the case shoulders. It seems almost inconceivable that I could pick up the two cases, turn them in my hands, note the two chambering marks, and fail to see the much larger dent in the lip. I say "almost inconceivable" and "extremely unlikely" because all I have is my certain knowledge that I didn't see it, and from this negative certainty I cannot deduce the positive certainty that the dent was absent. I am particularly reticent to embrace the third alternative that the cases were fiddled after I saw them, because it smacks so of the paranoia that has permeated research in this case. When Vince Salandria suggests something like this, I reject it out-of-hand, and so I'm terribly reticent to suggest it myself. But I'm also extremely reticent to accept the idea that the mark was there and that I missed it. I don't think it's likely that the government fiddled the evidence, for the simple reason that had they done this they would have replaced these cases with others that lacked the chambering marks. It is possible, I suppose, that some researcher may have dented the case either deliberately or accidentally sometime between my examination and yours. With this in mind I am particularly anxious to learn the identity of this "Philadelphia resident", who, although working in this area, never got in touch with me. But as for any answers -- at this point I don't have them.

I think your point with respect to the FBI exhibit numbers C6, C7, and C38 is well-taken. As Sylvia Meagher pointed out to me, it does seem difficult (if not impossible) to explain why the FBI should number a case "C38" on November 22 and one received some time later "C6". On the other hand, Lieutenant Day did say quite definitely that the dented case, CE 543, was the one held back by the Dallas Police, and his later recantation is totally unconvincing. If the FBI numbers were not incised on the cases themselves but only written on envelopes, it is possible that the cases were inadvertently switched, and I'm checking this with Marion Johnson.

Over the weekend I turned up an additional fact that you may want to consider in your own study. From Frazier's testimony we can set up the following equivalences: C6 = CE 543; C7 = 544; C38 = 545. Turning now to Hoover's letter of June 2, 1964 (26H449-450) we learn that both C7 and C38 had "one set of marks.. identified as having been produced by the chamber of the C14 rifle," while C6 [CE 543] lacked this set of marks. I don't see why the FBI would want to call the chambering mark/shoulder dent a "set of marks" and thus wonder whether we don't have an additional indication that CE 543 was never in the chamber of Oswald's rifle.

I will do what I can to pursue this matter. For your part, I hope you will forgive the offensive tone of my letter, and extend to me the courtesy that I have consistently tried to extend to other researchers -- that is, to respect their basic honesty and good faith until one has overwhelming grounds to doubt it. It may very well be the case that I'm being victimized by the actions of a person or persons whose identity and purposes are quite unknown to either of us. I've been called a thief by Life, a CIA agent by Salandria, Marcus, et al., and now a liar by you. I'm more than a little weary of this whole atmosphere, and it was this weariness that inclined me ~~to~~ not to give your letter the truly serious consideration it clearly deserved and is now getting.

Sincerely yours,


Josiah Thompson