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The Feeble Individual

One of the most intriguing passages in the Report of the Warren Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy (hereafter the Warren Commission Report, or "WCR") is an oblique reference to a "feeble individual" who entered the Texas School Book Depository ("TSBD") shortly before the President was killed on November 22, 1963, at 12:30pm. The mysterious stranger got scant attention from the Commission — a mere two sentences in the WCR — and even less attention from the myriad writers and theorists who have examined many other curious aspects of the assassination, but who seem to have overlooked the significance of this one. The feeble individual could provide an important clue as to what happened on that fateful day:

Moreover, all of the [TSBD] employees were asked whether they saw any strangers in the building on the morning of November 22. Only one employee saw a stranger whom he described as a feeble individual who had to be helped up the front steps of the building. He went to a public restroom and left the building five minutes later, about 40 minutes before the assassination.(234)

This passage was apparently included in the WCR only for the purpose of discrediting Arnold Rowland, a witness to the assassination in Dealy Plaza who told deputy sheriff Roger D. Craig at the scene that he, Rowland, "saw two men on the sixth floor of the Book Depository Building... one of them had a rifle with a telescopic sight on it — but [Rowland] thought they were Secret Service agents or guards and didn't report it. This was about... 15 minutes before the motorcade arrived."(234)*

Deputy Craig's report of Rowland's eyewitness account created a problem for members of the Warren Commission, whose investigation was focused solely on the lone gunman theory, and on Lee Harvey Oswald as the only possible suspect. Arnold's statement clearly indicated the existence of at least one accomplice, which would necessarily imply the existence of conspiracy — a conclusion that was contrary to the one sought by the Commission through its "investigative" arm, the FBI. "Rather than addressing its investigation to all significant circumstances, **including all possibilities of conspiracy**, the FBI investigation focused narrowly on Lee Harvey Oswald." (final subreport of the Church Committee, U.S. Senate, 1976)

Therefore, Arnold Rowland's sighting of two men with a rifle in the TSBD minutes before the assassination had to be discredited. The Commission attempted to do so with an extraordinary attack on Rowland's credibility:

"At times my husband is prone to exaggerate," claimed Mrs Rowland in the only quote attributed to her in the WCR (233). The Commission duly noted "the lack of probative corroboration" of Rowland's account, and they expressed "serious doubts about his credibility." The Commission went so far as to fault Rowland for "matters about which he would not normally be expected to be mistaken -- such as subjects he studied in school, grades he received, whether or not he had graduated from high school, and whether or not he had been admitted to college." The Commission resolutely determined that such statements "were false."(233)

Had the Commission ended its attack on Mr. Rowland here, they might have succeeded in destroying his credibility as a witness and relegating his statement to a minor footnote in the historical record of the assassination of JFK.

But the Warren Commission deemed it necessary to go beyond this point. They went an extra mile to discredit Arnold Rowland by bringing up the "feeble individual" -- a stratagem that ironically does more harm to the Commission's credibility than it does to Mr. Rowland's. For the feeble individual leads us down a path of investigation that yields not only evidence of conspiracy, but also perhaps the identities of some of the assassins and/or accomplices.

This passage bears repeating (JFK scholars might test themselves by counting the number of falsehoods contained in these three sentences):

Moreover, all of the employees were asked whether they saw any strangers in the building on the morning of November 22. Only one employee saw a stranger whom he described as a feeble individual who had to be helped up the front steps of the building. He went to a public restroom and left the building five minutes later, about 40 minutes before the assassination.(234)

Every JFK scholar knows that there were no "public" restrooms in the TSBD, beyond the two "toilets" used by employees at the rear of the building on the first floor, roughly 100 feet from the front door (see first floor diagram, page 138 (CE 1061)).

More serious scholars know that the first statement is false: Not all TSBD employees were asked about strangers; only a small percentage were asked this question. Surprisingly, more than a dozen employees were not asked any questions at all by the Commission, including several who were reported to be in locations conducive to witnessing the assassination.* (These silent witnesses might also have been asked about sightings of LHO.)

*TSBD employees who were not questioned under oath by the Commission include, alphabetically: Haddon Spurgeon Aiken; Gloria Calverly; Ochus Virgil Campbell, vice president of TSBD; Jack Charles Cason, president of TSBD; Avery Davis; Betty Drago; Joe Earl Jarman (brother of James?); Carl Edward Jones; Spaulden Earnest Jones; Herbert Lester Junker; Roy Edward Lewis; Sarah Stanton; Sandra Styles; Lloyd R. Viles; Lee Watley; Otis N. Williams. (Underlined names reported to be in key locations from which they could and should have witnessed the assassination.)

Astute scholars may detect the subtle deception of the Commission's presumption that only a stranger could have been an accomplice to any assassin in the TSBD, as opposed to an employee or familiar visitor to the building. And it follows logically that, if not all employees were asked about strangers in the building, as is clearly the case, it is not possible to truthfully assert that "only one employee saw a stranger."

Only those scholars who have carefully studied the testimony of TSBD employees would recognize the most important lie in this passage about the feeble individual: the timing of his visit. Recognition of this lie requires scrutiny of the deposition of the "only one employee" referred to by the Commission — Danny Garcia Arce. It was Arce who helped "this old man, this gentleman in there" (he did not use the words "feeble individual"), and it is Arce's testimony that provides a key to solving the mystery of this conspiracy.

The Warren Commission claims that the stranger arrived at the TSBD at about 11:45am, stayed five minutes, and left around 11:50. But Arce placed the time of this visit "about 10 minutes, some place around there, 15 minutes" before the assassination (i.e. 12:15 or 12:20).(VI,366) Arce never said how long the stranger stayed in the restroom — the length of time he spent there, like the time of his arrival, appears to have been wholly fabricated by the Commission. What's more, Arce did not provide this information in response to a question about strangers — he brought it up in an apparent attempt to divert Joseph Ball's questioning about earlier statements Arce made to police:

Arce: ...and they took us down to city hall to make statements out.

Ball: Then you made out your statement?

Arce: Yes, sir; to the Police Department.

Ball: Well, just one minute, let's see—

Arce: I helped this old man, this gentleman in there.

Ball: You saw an old man?

Arce: Yeah.

Ball: Where?

Arce: Right in front of the Texas School Book Depository.

Ball: When?

Arce: Right, you know, it was before it happened; I don't know.

Ball: How long before the President went by?

Arce: I don't know. I think it was about ten minutes, some place around there, 15 minutes; I'm not too sure.

Ball: What about the old man? What was noticeable about him?

Arce: Well, he said he had kidney trouble, could I direct him to the men's room and I said I would and I helped him up the steps and walked him into the restroom and I opened the door for him and that's when I went inside to eat my lunch

and then I seen him walk out.

Ball: Did you see him talk to anyone in there?

Arce: No; he went straight out.

Ball: Was he in a car?

Arce: Yeah, after I went outside I seen him driving out in a black car.*

Ball: He drove away?

Arce: Yes, sir.

Ball: Did you ever see him again?

Arce: No, never seen him again. (VI,366-7)

At first glance the 30-minute discrepancy might appear to be trivial, a simple typographical error where "10 minutes" became "40 minutes" during transcription. However, serious problems arise with either of the two time frames given: Arce is documented as having been at work on the sixth floor until just before noon (Arce estimated they broke for lunch at 11:55), at which time he and his co-workers took part in the infamous "elevator race" down to the first floor. Arce claimed that he then ate his lunch in the first-floor "domino room" before going outside, (VI,365) but later said that he ate his lunch after helping the stranger into the building from outside (see above).

On the other hand, if Arce's account is true and the stranger arrived after noon, it is implausible -- if not impossible -- that no other employee saw Arce helping him into the building. By 12:15 most TSBD employees were standing in front of the building, on the front steps, in the doorway or in the south windows awaiting Kennedy's arrival. Yet none of them reported seeing Arce and the stranger.

The Commission, evidently aware of the logical absurdity of the latter scenario, decided to go with the slightly lesser absurdity of the implication that Arce must have seen the stranger from a sixth floor window, that he rushed downstairs before lunchtime to help the old man into the "public" restroom, and that he then rushed back upstairs in time to join his colleagues for an elevator race back down. The absurdity of both versions is probably what prompted the Commission to omit Arce's name from its mention of the feeble individual on page 234, in the hope that the discrepancies would not be easily discovered. Again, they only brought it up in the first place as a means for discrediting Arnold Rowland.

* This reference to a black car could be corroborated by the testimony of Lee Bowers, the railroad worker who observed, in the parking lot behind the grassy knoll 10 minutes before the motorcade arrived, "a 1957 black Ford, with one male in it that seemed to have a mike or telephone... to his mouth with one hand while driving with the other... [A]fter 3 or 4 minutes cruising around the area, it departed the same way." [i.e., Elm Street in front of the TSBD] (VI,286)

The absence of any physical description of the feeble individual, beyond Arce's use of the word "old", is one of the more damnable omissions of the Commission's deceptive account of this mysterious visit. We cannot know, for example, if the man walked with a cane, if he walked on crutches, or if he simply walked like he had a rifle or two in his pants. However, we do know from Arce's deposition that he "went straight out" of the TSBD without assistance — an indication that this "feeble" individual was somewhat less feeble after he finished his business in the building.

The Warren Commission could have ignored Arce's account, just as they could have ignored Arnold Rowland's statements, and most researchers would have been none the wiser. Or the Commission could have been truthful about Arce's claim of the time of this visit without attracting undue attention to the absurd notion that no other TSBD employee saw Arce with this stranger. The Commission had already established, indirectly, that TSBD workers were amazingly non-observant; for example, none of the several dozen employees who arrived at work that morning, within five minutes of the 8:00am starting time, saw Oswald enter the building carrying a three-foot long, ^{rain-soaked} brown paper package — except, of course, Buell Wesley Frazier (more on him later).

The WCR's account of the feeble individual's brief visit to the TSBD on the morning of November 22 thus did not achieve the Commission's goal of destroying Mr. Rowland's credibility. On the contrary, this account did far more harm to the Commission's own credibility, providing further evidence of an overall pattern of mendacity that permeates the Commission's so-called "investigation" of the assassination of JFK.

The fact that the Warren Commission was disingenuous in this account of a "feeble individual" who was seen by "only one employee" does not mean that the employee, Danny Arce, was completely truthful in his deposition before Joseph Ball. Had the Commission applied the same scrutiny to Arce's testimony that it did to Mr. Rowland's, it might have noted that Arce first claimed to have eaten his lunch before he went outside (VI,365), then claimed that he ate it after helping the stranger into the building (VI,367); Arce first claimed to have ridden the elevator* with Bonnie Ray Williams from the sixth floor to the first at lunch-time (VI,364), then claimed that Williams "stayed upstairs with Hank"(VI,365); Arce's account of his movements on the grassy knoll and railroad yard at the time shots were fired (VI,365-6) is abstruse, if not suspicious.

The two passages above (WCR 234 and VI,366-7) thus comprise the sum total of any references to this "feeble individual" or, in Arce's words, "this old man, this gentleman in there." (This is apparently not the same person who had a "seizure" in front of the TSBD just before JFK arrived, since that person reportedly left the scene in an ambulance.) Incredibly, no one's curiosity was aroused by the strange story of an old man with kidney problems who apparently drove through cordoned-off streets in Dealy Plaza to make the unlikely choice of the TSBD as a place to seek a public restroom.

The testimony of Danny Garcia Arce, and the Warren Commission's oblique reference to it, thus provide incontrovertible evidence of mendacity concerning events surrounding the assassination of JFK. The half-hour time discrepancy between these two accounts suggests more than a simple error; the fact that neither the Commission nor the FBI took any action to eliminate this mysterious visitor to the TSBD as a suspect — a step that any competent investigator would have taken — clearly indicates an effort to cover up key evidence in the investigation of JFK's murder.

Danny Arce's testimony provides leads to other paths of investigation not taken by the FBI or the Commission. Careful scrutiny of this testimony is therefore necessary to understand particular aspects of what happened on the ground in Dealy Plaza on November 22, 1963.

Arce's deposition was taken by Joseph Ball and Samuel Stern on April 7, 1964, in Dallas. Unlike many other witnesses, Arce was not asked his age or asked about any record of military service. Arce did mention, however, that he had previously done "odd jobs" during his employment with "Rubenstein and Sons" on Hall Street (this former employer may or may not be related to Jack Ruby, who had changed his name from Rubenstein). Arce was not sure about the nature of this business, other than it was "kind of an oyster place; they pack them and send them out, I guess."(VI,363)

Arce began working for the TSBD in September 1963, by his recollection, but was assigned to the warehouse — a separate building "directly behind the TSBD at Elm and Houston"(VI,364) — where he worked as an order filler. Near the end of October, Arce was transferred to the building at Elm and Houston because "they were short of help up there and they sent me and the other boy [Bonnie Ray Williams] down there." Arce and Williams were then assigned to a floor-laying crew, who were reportedly at work on the sixth floor the entire morning of November 22.