Statements of Witnesses - Sheriff J. E. (BILL) DECKER

A number of statements by Decker appear beginning with Exhibit 5321 on p.452 of Vol. XIX. Following his statements are those by and those collected by officers on his staff. These continue without interruption through p.543.

On the subject of Oswald's transfer, which the Commission has tried to represent as a normal thing in Dallas which, whether or not it was normal, appears to have been entirely unnecessary, he gave a statement on Nov. 28, 1963.

This statement reveals the transfer is something about which he was not consulted inadvance. The statement is by Special Agent of the FBI Alfred D. Neeley who, in the first paragraph, said he asked Decker "when he was first notified that LEE HARVEY OSWALD was to be turned over to his custody ..."

Decker's reply is quoted as "he first learned OSWALD was to be brought to his jail from some members of the press, whose identity he does not recall, on November 23, 1963.

This clearly states that Decker didn't know Oswald was to be transferred.

Thereafter, according to Decker, he phoned the police and spoke to Curry or Fritz, he doesn't recall which, and received corroboration. Then this sentence, "He stated he and the Police Department both knew that OSWALD was a 'hot potato'."

The last paragraph of this report says, "Sheriff DECKER stated he had no desire to discuss this matter further and does not desire to furnish any details of conversations he had with the Police Department, and declined to state whether he advised the Police Department that he had a preference as to the time of day the transfer of the prisoner should be made."

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This integview took place on the 27th and was dictated on the 28th. (452)

On the 28th, FBI Agent Bookhout interviewed Decker (p.453) and was advised that "to his knowledge there is no State law governing transferring of prisoners from the Dallas City Jail to the Dallas County Jail." He described the procedure. He said that after the filing of charges "with court of jurisdiction, upon issuance of a warrant to proper authority, prisoner then becomes subject to transfer to the County Jail within a reasonable time." He also said that either the police or the Sheriff's department could handle the transfer. The last paragraph of this statement also bears on Curry's truthfulness in saying he had left everything up to Fritz. It quotes Decker as saying, "on the morning of November 24, 1963, Chief JESSE E. CURRY, Dallas Police Department, called and said he was going to use an armored truck to move OSWALD and wanted to know what DECKER thought about it." Decker says he told the chief he wasn't going to participate at all.

In the report it is clear that Fritz would not stand still for the use of the armored car. He found out about it only by accident. Thereafter, the alternate and unsuccessful plan was adopted.

They may all be liars, but here I think it is clear Curry is the biggest liar.

A longer, unsigned and undated statement appearing in Vol. XIX as part of a Decker exhibit 5323, pp.457-65, is clearly Curry's statement.

He was in Curry's car from about 11:15 when Curry picked him up. Also in the car were Sorrells and Lawson, the Secret Service agents. He places the time of the first shot at just after 12:31 p.m. by saying, "Mr. Lawson had just looked at his watch, stating it was 12:31 p.m. ..." (p.457) He heard only 2 shots and, looking around after the first, "saw

what appeared to me to be a spray of water come out of the rear seat of the President's car." As the cars moved toward the hospital, he told the police dispatcher to advise his radio room "to notify all officers in my department to immediately get over to the area where shooting occurred and saturate the area of the park, railroad and all buildings, also advising all deputies to return to the station and stand by for emergency assignment."

Here we have another presumed trained man right at the scene, and where does he tell his men to go - "saturate the area of the park, railroad and all buildings". The emphasis here again is on the parkland and the railroad. This is also what Curry did. It is not conceivable that they did it without good reason. There are a number of buildings on the same side of Elm Street as the Book Depository. He is not referring to the Book Depository in this statement. (p.458)

Sometime after arrival at the hospital and after he had seen Forrest Sorrells leave the hospital, he got the police to take him "to the scene of the shooting". Again notice he doesn't say to the Book Depository Building. At the Book Depository Building he found his chief criminal deputy, Allan Sweatt, and Police Inspector Sawyer, "both were getting witnesses together and also informed me that the building was secured". This was after his deputy, Luke Mooney, had found the empty cartridges, but apparently before the finding of the rifle at 1:22.

It is probable that the police did refer to the building as "secured", but this never happened. His own chief of identification had arrived and the sheriff told him to return to the office because "the Crime Search Unit was enroute and we would hold secure any evidence pending their arrival". (p.459)

Fritz arrived after Decker (p.461).

"After the capture of Oswald ... Deputy Sheriff E.R. Walthers contacted me and I ordered him and Deputies Harry Weatherford and J.L.Oxford to go to" the Paine home, "to meet there Detectives Rose and Adamcik of the DPD, Homidide Division, which they did." Note here again we have a reference to what was probably an illegal search. There is no reference in any of the ststements of any of the police who went to the Paine home of their having had a search warrant. The report also specifies that it wasn't until the 23rd that the police obtained a search warrant.

They say Mrs. Paine and Mrs. Oswald told them to make their search.

After getting Oswald's phone number from Mrs. Paine, the sheriff's office located the address from the phone number. "At this time I requested that David Johnston, Justice of the Peace, to issue a search warrant for the premises at this address, which he did and he personally delivered the search warrant to that location for officers to search the premises."

And, according to the police radio logs, he also participated in the search. (p.462)

After hearing on Saturday at about 3:30 p.m. of the transfer of Oswald and with several hundred spectators around the entrance to the jail, "I notified the city" and then "ordered special officers to the area and began roping off area to keep spectators away from the drive-in entrance to the County jail." Media people began accumulating. He stayed in his office until notified about 8 p.m. by one of his TV acquaintances "that Oswald would be transferred to the County Jail at 10:00AM on Sunday morning". He then says, "I later confirmed this with City Hall"/

Again this addresses itself to Curry's truthfulness. (p.464)

He confined the press in the County Jail "so that none of the Press could get to the prisoner as he was being brought into the jail."

(end reel)

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Hearings taped for Side 1 resuming from Decker's statement from Vol. 19.

Apparently the only people in Dallas who didn't fear for Oswald's safety were the police. Here the sheriff locked up the press so they couldn't get to Oswald at the time of the transfer. Elsewhere we have seen that people at the hospital were so concerned they had all of their emergency facilities ready. Only the police weren't concerned.

Decker was outside awaiting the arrival of Oswald with members of his staff when they heard of the shot shooting. He had to go in the jail and release the press so they could get to city hall "at great speed" (p.465)

The deputy sheriffs participating in investigation November 22, 1963 are listed on p. 466.