Paul Hoch
1525 Acton St.
Berkeley, CA 94702

3/17/93

Dear Paul,

Nice obit on Ranftel. I met him only once, had no idea he was manic-depressive, and I wonder from your account if the medication could have been a factor. It is not uncommon today for doctors to ignore existing conditions and medications that are dangerous for them or in combination with other medications. I've been through this too often. People will be wise if they check new medications in the standard sources.

I'm glad also that you refer to what I'd not heard and like, the "Sane Caucus." But we do not agree with who belongs. Like John Davis. I know him as you do not.

This is not for a correction and I'd rather not have one but those Bronson reports were not included in the 1977 releases. They in fact were not even sent to HQ. I got them in CA 78-0322. As soon as I saw them I sent copies to one of the people in Dallas who did nothing with them. Then Ranftel saw them in the FBI reading room and sent them or one of them to I think Gary Mack. Could have been Golz.

I'd like to have your collection of his memorial documents just to have when my records go to Hood, so there will be what I've not had any occasion to make, a decent reference to him and to his work. Let me know the cost and I'll send a check.

Speaking of Hood, my friend Jerry McKnight, history prof, has been spending as much of his own time as he can going over Meagher's records so they can be available.

On freeing the files, a good idea, but don't build any hopes. I make those I have freely available and not a single one regarded in the broadest definition of critic has made any real use of them. It takes an enormous amount of time to go through so many and legitimate scholars can't afford it.

On the atrophy of JFK adrenals, did not John Nichols publish that? I think he did. So it is not something new that Livingstone brought to light. He had a different twist to it.

On page 6, Michael West, seems to me that many years ago I published something about Z226 or Z227 but I can't remember clearly now. However, you follow that with "as JFK starts to react." He reacted earlier, visibly.

Too bad you apparently did not know that Ragano wants some favors and is preparing a book. He had as I recall three convictions on appeal, two on taxes and one on something like jury fixing. He also said the exact opposite of what he now says to the FBI. He ridiculed those statements when others were saying what he now says. Maybe I'll get the new Blakey concoction and see if he picked up all the FBI disclosed that I recall. But to me it is Ragano's new version that has "tabloid quality" when coming up with it can do him some good.

What you may have perceived and decided not to use it Humes' additional claim that not dissecting the neck was ordered by some Kennedy. There is no reason to believe that and Bobby had signed a complete waiver, with the large space for exceptions entirely blank. Also in Post Mortem. Thanks and best to you all,

Harold

Nominal date: December 31, 1992
Paul L. Hoch
(Actual completion date: 3/8/93)

[redacted]

Robert Ranftel, 1952 - 1992:

Early in the morning of January 29, 1992, Robert Ranftel collapsed and died near his home in Berkeley. He was returning on his bicycle after a cable-TV appearance.

He had been struggling with manic-depression for several years. Read William Styron, he said, to understand what he was going through. Lithium was not working well, and he had just started on some new medication.

The immediate cause of death seems to have been head injuries from his fall off the bicycle. The blood toxicology report found nothing noteworthy except alcohol. He had some drinks earlier that night, and his medications might have exaggerated their effect. He did not wear a helmet. He was no longer thin, and there could have been a reaction to the stress of riding.

His recent condition not withstanding, he definitely remained one of the mainstays of the research community's already-too-small Sane Caucus. He was also one of the wittiest people around. I could count on him to get all the humor I squeezed into EOC, and he was the source of many of my jokes and insights.

Robert's political awareness grew out of his work as a unionized cab driver in New York. He was proud of the fact that he had progressed so far on the JFK case that Mae Brussell - who inspired him when he was young and green - called the semi-serious article he co-authored, "Did Lee Harvey Oswald Drop Acid?", the weirdest thing she had ever seen.

Robert was active with the Assassination Information Bureau before and during the HSCA investigation. He applied his good judgment to the selection of documents from the 1977 FBI release, including the report which led to the surfacing of the Bronson film. He later spent several months working for Bud Fensterwald as the Executive Director of AARC. He provided research assistance for books by David Lifton, Tony Summers, and John Davis, and for several TV programs. Several of his articles appeared in FAIR's "Extra!"

I particularly missed Robert when the anniversary of the assassination came around. It is particularly discouraging to encounter all the strange things being said on the JFK case without him around to share and encourage my skepticism. I could always count on Robert to make me see that widely publicized nonsense (particularly prominent in late November) was not just frustrating but amusing. The fact that he is no longer suffering is only a little consolation for me.

The Santa Cruz Sentinel noted that his death forced the cancellation of a panel on the case on which he was to appear. If Robert were alive, he would be turning in his grave to hear one of the panelists say "you gotta wonder" about his death. As he liked to remind people, "coincidences happen; that's why they call them coincidences."

And he would ask if it made sense to wonder about the usual suspects. As he wrote to the organizer of that panel, he had come to consider himself "a conservative among the critics," concluding that "the question of 'who killed JFK' remains unanswered in any satisfactory way." (Nonetheless, Robert had a "three-hurricane theory" [see 8 EOC 2.10] which involved - in ways I never understood - LBJ, Ed Weisl, and Yves Leandez.)

For Robert's friends and colleagues, I put together a sort of memorial collection of documents, his writings, obituaries, and cartoons (26 pages). If you would like a copy, just ask.

Also, I can provide a videotape of his only known TV appearance, the local cable talk show on which he appeared (with an unfortunately talkative big-conspiracy-oriented guest) the evening before his death. I think Robert's eloquence and wit, as well as his expertise and analytical ability, come

through. A second segment of that tape is a video drama, "Houses of Mud and Rocks," in which Robert was one of the principal actors. I don't really get it - most of Robert's large circle of friends were much less linear than me - but it reflects Robert's artistic side.

Jim Garrison, 1921 - 1992:

His own description of David Ferrie fits him: "One of history's most important individuals."

Ted Gandolfo, 1930 - 1992:

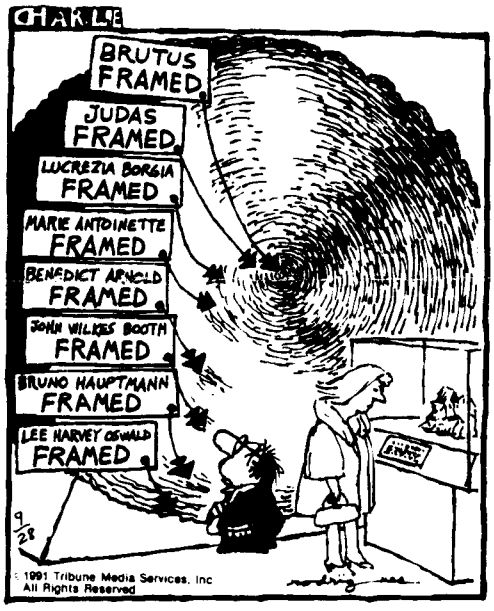
He was a loyal supporter of Jim Garrison and a vigorous opponent of anyone who, he felt, stood in the way of the truth. Ted is survived by his widow, Anita Piaggio Gandolfo. Those wishing to offer her personal or financial support can write her at 857 Garfield St., Franklin Square, NY 11010; she is offering copies of some of his tapes - 22 hours for $65.

About this issue of EOC, and Chicago in April:

Information overload is a problem particularly for those of us holding down day jobs. Even though my programming job is only part time (75%), I have not been able to keep up with my correspondence, read all the new books, or dig into areas of special interest.

In 1979, I started compiling the lists and comments which turned into EOC as a substitute, in those pre-PC days, for typing the same information repeatedly in letters to a few colleagues. To get started on this issue, I reversed the process, reviewing the letters I wrote over the past year or so and extracting parts which might be of general interest. In no way am I purporting to have picked out the most important recent developments. I do not have the time to sort out my views on controversial issues well enough to include them in EOC, so I am basically skipping over a number of topics which are hot in some circles. (E.g., JFK and Vietnam, Tom Wilson, and the tramps.) Only a few articles from a two-foot-high stack are being listed.

Of course, I have some strong opinions on the state of the case. Stone's film, and the reaction to it, has made me even more dubious of most of the work being done. Arguing with bad analysis feels even less productive than it used to. It is amazing what can get published or broadcast now, and what people are ready to believe without much evidence. Skepticism towards the new orthodoxy of the critics seems to be rather scarce. Rodrigues has captured my take on the new situation:



Hoch contemplates the new dominant paradigm

[Reprinted by permission: Tribune Media Services]

Perhaps I should compile an issue called "Echoes of No Conspiracy," to call attention to a possibility that does not get thought about as much as it should: a lone nut could have triggered many of the coverups which convince many people there was a conspiracy. Or, as someone suggested, "Accessories

Despite the Fact."

I certainly do not have the resources to keep up with even the good things being published. If you have a special need for material I might have accumulated, write - especially if you have been sending things to me, or are interested in making lists or indexes for general circulation.

I am trying to restrain my pontificating for now. I will try to sort out some general theses before or during the second Midwest Symposium on Assassination Politics, to be held in Chicago on April 1-4, 1993.

The main organizer, Doug Carlson, has put together an impressive list of speakers, mainly from what I consider the center of the critical community - that is, people I feel comfortable either agreeing or publicly disagreeing with. Several HSCA staffers will participate, and Burt Griffin will represent the Warren Commission staff. In conjunction with the 25th anniversaries, special attention will be given to the RFK and MLK assassinations. If you did not get the flyer with the last catalog from The Last Hurrah Bookshop, write to Carlson at P.O. Box 1570, Highland, IN 46322.

I have never been to a major assassination conference, and I look forward to finally meeting people I have known only via mail or phone. On April 1 and 2, I will participate in a workshop on "exploring the hidden record," and a panel on intelligence agencies.

Freeing the files:

On October 27, President Bush signed the JFK Records Collection Act of 1992. By January 27, President Clinton was to have nominated the five members of the Review Board for Senate confirmation. He does not have to choose from the 16 names proposed by professional organizations of lawyers, historians, and archivists. As of the end of February, no names have been submitted. In light of the delay in nominations for many Cabinet-agency jobs, there may well be no special problems holding up this Board.

Helpful EOC readers sent me much information as the files bill made its way through Congress. However, I have not kept up with recent developments, except through some memos prepared by Mark Zaid. For the three so far, ask for #1992.1 (13 pp.); to get on his mailing list, write him at 47 South Lake Ave #4, Albany, NY 12203.

Zaid (who is a lawyer) emphasizes the importance of decisions to be made by the Board about its staff, and about the meaning of "assassination record."

It will not be trivial for the board to work out a definition of assassination-related records which deals reasonably both with NSAM's relating to changes in Vietnam policy and with the CIA's records on ships named "Barbara."

What are the chances of moving from a document-review board to some sort of official investigative capability? Slim to none, I suppose. But Al Gore has some interest in the case - during the campaign, he was quoted as saying he believed there was a conspiracy and that the records should be released. Clinton said he agreed. (#2, 20 Jul 92, SF Examiner)

Shortly after "JFK" appeared, Gerald Ford reportedly called for a "new panel of outstanding scientists" appointed by the National Research Council to review the acoustical evidence. (#3, 30 Jan 92, WP) (This report is a surprise, since I assumed Ford and David Belin were quite satisfied with the Ramsey Panel.)

Also, the government may see an interest in being able to deal with the wilder allegations, which will be reinvigorated by the released files. Enough was released years ago to shoot down many of them. Some of the most vocal buffs will just pick out the most sensational new material and ignore any evidence to the contrary, having already shown that they are unable or unwilling to weigh evidence adequately.

Perhaps we might get a restatement of Hoover's 1964 position that the

case would never be closed, and an ongoing official FBI review of new information. This would, of course, inhibit future FOIA requests.

The Board has some investigative powers, but only in the context of searching for documents whose existence can be established. In specific areas, such as pre-assassination files on Oswald, inquiries by the Board could be productive.

If you have ideas for technological solutions to the overload problem, which will be aggravated as documents are actually released, please get them in circulation. It would be nice to have the best of the new material, plus old documents, books, and above all indexes, on CD-ROM's. That sort of thing is being talked about but I don't know what is being done. I hear that information retrieval technology has advanced rapidly in recent years, but that it remains expensive.

I hope Jim Lesar's AARC will be able to play a central organizational role for researchers. A new organization is the Committee for an Open Archives, headed by John Judge and Bill Kelly. Judge often maintains a reasonable demeanor, but even then he sometimes says things which are, by my standards, far out. I have subscribed to their newsletter, "Prologue," and several leading buffs are on the board of directors. The newsletter reflects the irony of the situation of much of the critical community - a push to get more information by people who already know the answers.

Oliver Stone's movie hit some public nerves having nothing to do with Kennedy, and there seem to be psychological components to some of the talk about releasing documents "so that people can make up their own minds." (Based on the evidence, on any political issue? That would be a nice change.) Someone who understands "empowerment" issues might make more sense of the "JFK" phenomenon than I can.

Stone was smart enough to realize that he would benefit by getting the discussion of historical issues away from his film and Garrison, and on to the files. So Stone gets political credit, if not moral absolution, for his successful push to "free the files." He certainly redefined the Zeitgeist.

The Review Board may, but need not, set up formal advisory panels. In either case, we should send in our specific ideas about locating key documents and evaluating the need to release them.

My personal short list of areas with the potential for real surprises starts with Defense Department records on Oswald, the medical evidence, and the plots against Castro.

Stone has publicly referred to the routinely destroyed Army file, suggesting that they un-routinely un-destroy it. That is a good proposal, since it is hard to believe that neither a copy nor a descriptive paper trail was created in 1964.

In the medical area, I would start with material gathered by (and in some cases cited by) the HSCA, but not published. (I made a list of relevant citations in a letter of March 17, 1981, to Rep. Stokes [#1981.217, 2 pp.]) Many of the general arguments for nondisclosure (classification, informants) do not apply. If Lifton's book had already been published, the HSCA probably would have published more medical evidence for rebuttal purposes.

Some material is already being processed for release. For example, Bill Adams obtained some 1963 material from an Army file in the Ford Library (presumably among the Rockefeller Commission papers) relating to the funeral ceremonies. As of 4 p.m., the plan was that JFK "would be choppered from there [Andrews] to the Navy Medical Center for autopsy." This is a reminder that interesting information might be buried in obscure files. We might not solve the case, but there are still things to be learned about Oswald:

<u>Oswald's DD-1173 card:</u>

An article by Mary and Ray La Fontaine appeared in the Houston Post on

November 22, under the headline "Oswald ID card may be missing link." Since it was not picked up elsewhere (and since I helped with some of the documentary research), I will quote it at some length. For the entire article, ask for #1992.4 (2 pp.) and #5 (two unpublished pages of exhibits).

The lead is that Oswald was not a card-carrying communist, as alleged in an Army Intelligence message to the U.S. Strike Command on the evening of the assassination, but that he "was carrying a card that suggests he may have been an employee of an organization much closer to home" - a Uniformed Services Identification and Privilege Card, DD-1173. "It's a card officials today say Oswald should not have had."

"Oswald's military record notes the identity card was issued 'in accordance with paragraph 3014.5 PRAM (Personnel Records and Accounting Manual).' However, this paragraph pertains only to the issuance of USMC member cards and does not apply to a DD-1173. The appropriate card for the discharged Oswald, as stipulated by the PRAM, would have been a 2MC (RES), reflecting his new status in the Ready Reserve."

By the way, I got the cited section of the PRAM in 1974. It probably disappeared into a pile labeled "important" around the time I got married and Nixon resigned; I did not pursue it enough and cannot now locate the text.

"Lt. Kim Miller, a Washington spokeswoman for the Marines, said Oswald could have been issued a DD 1173 for one of two reasons: because of an injury while on active duty entitling him to medical privileges, or because he was a civilian employee overseas needing a military ID. But records do not show an injury to Oswald, and civilian employment, she adds, 'would not have been annotated to his military book.'"

"A similar finding was reached by Dennis Velock, reference historian of the U.S. Army Military History Institute of Carlisle, Penn... [Defense Department] guidelines limited recipients of such cards largely to military dependents 'and civilians who require military identification.' If such a card was issued in error, says Velock, 'it wouldn't have been authorized, and immediately upon being called to official attention would have been changed or revoked.'"

How reliable is the current USMC conclusion? They did take some time to check Oswald's file (e.g. for a record of a relevant injury), and said that they were puzzled by its issuance.

Until several months before Oswald's discharge, that card was issued to some reservists. Oswald's attempts to get special treatment because of his mother's health apparently did not make either of them eligible for a DD-1173.

My impression is that the value of such cards, which could grant medical and PX privileges, meant that they would not have been given out casually. As of 1990, the Air Force used a Form DD-1172 as an application for the DD-1173, and required accountability for each of the ID cards. Inquiries have been made about USMC procedures in 1959. An official inquiry could look at the personnel records of other Marines discharged from El Toro in September 1959.

A potentially productive secondary issue is what happened to this card after the assassination. Its absence from the WC volumes and known FBI lab records might be significant. The Archives told the La Fontaines that the card itself was transferred from the FBI in 1966; that does not mean that the WC did not have copies, but is consistent with that possibility. The Report gave much attention to the phony Hidell draft card; at no point does anyone seem to have known that the same photo appears on a second ID card.

Certainly the FBI should have examined the card for alterations. The original has been almost obliterated by testing. A FOIA request for FBI records has been filed. Relevant FBI records may be in the 1977 release, but I know of no easy way to locate them. It is a long shot, but the FBI records might even show that some other agency took possession of the card.

I think the photo on the card is also a secondary issue, so far more

confusing than enlightening. Refer to Jack White's article in the January 1993 "Third Decade," and to Jerry Rose's piece in "The Continuing Inquiry" for May 1984 (listed as #1984.106) In summary, the photo on the card is one otherwise identified by the Commission as Oswald in Minsk. On what basis? I don't know; perhaps as little as a casual remark by Marina. White alleges that Russian ID photos (as shown in the "Penkovsky Papers") typically have the same rounded white area in the corner, to accommodate an official stamp.

Adding to the impression of special treatment for Oswald: he used this card, and a note from the Marines saying he was to be discharged, when he applied for his passport on September 4, 1959 - a full week before the issue date on the card. Maybe that resulted from routine USMC helpfulness.

Also, the photo on the card shows a less shorn and (to my eye) older Oswald than his passport photo. In any event, the DD-1173 and passport-application photos are not contemporaneous. Perhaps the Marines let Oswald grow some hair before his release, and the passport office was willing to accept a photo that was at least a few weeks old.

Or perhaps Oswald later attached a photo taken in Russia to the DD-1173 card. Someone observed that, in the absence of a driver's license, this was the best legitimate photo ID Oswald had, and he might have wanted to make it usable by attaching a vaguely current photo and adding a stamped date which to the casual viewer would override the expiration date of December 7, 1962.

A variant of this Oswald card is in the photo section of Dick Russell's new book on Richard Nagell, discussed below. I see no reason to believe that copy is authentic. If that card was actually found in Nagell's property by the FBI before the assassination and later released to Fensterwald, I really think Bud would have told us about it.

The La Fontaines believed that an "OCT 23 (or 28) 1963" date on the card is a postmark, presumably generated when the card was dropped in the mail, returned to the Defense Department, and sent back to Oswald. Both Blakey and Liebeler are quoted as finding this interesting. To me, that date (and another, "JUL") does not particularly look like a postmark. I suspect that Oswald was "renewing" the card with his rubber stamp kit. (Several of Oswald's papers had vaguely similar date stamps; ask for #1993.6.) It would surprise me if the FBI had the original card in 1963-64 but did not study the photo and the date stamps.

Where does this evidence leave us? The La Fontaines quoted me as saying "The HSCA attempted to deal with the possibility that Oswald had been working with the U.S. Government after he left the Marines. But as far as we know, they didn't deal with this card. It may have been the missing element." It may be as close as we have come to direct documentary evidence that Oswald's relationship with the U.S. government was not always what it seemed.

One puzzle - if Oswald was sent to Russia by the military, why would they give him a non-standard ID card? Not for the Moscow PX, and it could detract from a "legend." Possibly it could have been to facilitate his air transportation in Europe (although he took a nonmilitary ship there), or to identify his role to someone at the Embassy in Moscow. Or Oswald could have been given the card for some other intelligence assignment - e.g., checking out someone at Schweitzer College - which never got done. Intriguing as this card is, it is still hard to make sense of it.

<u>JAMA and the medical evidence:</u>

For those of us who still feel that the Dealey Plaza evidence is crucial and unresolved, a highlight of the Chicago symposium will be a four-hour session on the medical evidence. It features Dr. George Lundberg (editor of JAMA, the Journal of the American Medical Association), Dr. John Lattimer, and two others who generally support the autopsy physicians. An opposing panel will consist of Roger Feinman, David Lifton, Wallace Milam, and Cyril Wecht.

In case you managed to avoid the press coverage: JAMA published two sets of articles based on interviews with the Bethesda and Dallas doctors. To a first approximation, the thesis was "no problem." I do not think there is any new information to convince even someone who, like me, is open to being convinced that the WC/HSCA reconstruction is correct.

I just have a few non-systematic comments, and will not try to summarize the articles. They are

#7. (27 May 92, 10 pp.) "JFK's death - the plain truth from the MDs who did the autopsy," by Dennis Breo.

#8. (7 Oct, 7 pp.) "Dr Finck speaks out: 'two bullets, from the rear'"

Related material, all from JAMA unless otherwise indicated:

#9. (27 May 92, 4 pp.) "Dallas MDs recall their memories,"

#10. (5 Oct 92, 5 pp.) AMA press release

#11. (7 Oct 92, 3 pp.) An editorial by Dr. Lundberg on "closing the case" and "solving the puzzle of Kennedy's adrenals"

Of the various rebuttals, I particularly recommend

#12. (27 May 92, 15 pp.) Unpublished letter, Lifton to Robert MacNeil

#13. (7 Oct 92, 5 pp.) Letters to the editor of JAMA

Livingstone was also active in rebutting these articles.

The second round of JAMA articles may be the more important ones. They try (inadequately) to deal with the conspicuous absence of Dr. Finck from the first article. More important, perhaps, is the admission by Dr. Boswell and Dr. Robert Karnei (then a pathology resident at Bethesda) that "no adrenal tissue could be found grossly on routine dissection." Basically, JFK had "severe Addison's disease."

Harry Livingstone deserves credit for bringing this issue to the fore. His work was cited in #11 and the New York Times (#14, 6 Oct, 2 pp.). His new book, "High Treason 2," includes several fascinating interviews with doctors on this and other points. Dr. Karnei, recently retired as director of the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, told him in 1991 that the adrenals could not be found. Dr. Joseph Brierre told Livingstone that Humes "clammed up" when, after being asked to proofread the autopsy protocol, Brierre asked about the absence of reference to the adrenals. The book as a whole is as intense and passionate as its author, and undoubtedly contains many facts and arguments of value, but I still do not see any single piece of evidence to convince me that the photos or X-rays are forged or altered.

The admission about the adrenals confirms that it was right to suspect that the doctors sometimes operated in the cryptic mode - e.g., in the 1967 report which noted that "the Surgeon General of the Navy advised Dr. Humes that the purpose of the autopsy was to determine the nature of the President's injuries and the cause of his death" - something he presumably knew. ("Post Mortem" [Weisberg], p. 575) Humes explicitly told JAMA that "my orders were to find the cause of death," and that "Dissecting the neck... would have been criminal." What could he mean? A court-martial offense, given his orders?

Now that we know the doctors suppressed the atrophy of the adrenals, I have no doubt that they would also have kept silent about other circumstances which they deemed unessential - such as indications of pre-autopsy "surgery of the head area," perhaps explainable to them as part of a "national security autopsy."

For example, perhaps someone in Chicago can explain why (in Sibert & O'Neill's words) Dr. Humes was "instructed" that a late-arriving bone fragment had been "removed" from the President's skull.

Although I am skeptical of conspiracy theories about the role of the press in a coverup, I was amazed by JAMA's performance, and by the number of papers which used, as a lead, Breo's reference to Humes' "29-year silence." I recall seeing only one newspaper which limited that silence to unofficial statements and mentioned the HSCA testimony.

I wish I had the time and energy to make a proper review out of my notes on Mark Lane's appalling "Plausible Denial," and on Jim DiEugenio's book about Jim Garrison ("Destiny Betrayed"). But if you need to be convinced that both books are seriously flawed, my analysis will not convince you.

I think a reader can tell that DiEugenio came to the case relatively late. He seems sure that Shaw is guilty of something. It would be hard to find people who were active and serious researchers in 1967 and who did not think, at the end of the Shaw trial, that Garrison had no criminal case.

As a counterweight to that book, I again recommend James Kirkwood's "American Grotesque," on the Shaw trial. It has been reprinted, in paperback. Also out in paperback is "Of Kennedys and Kings," by now-Senator Harris Wofford. It is not about the assassination, but the section on RFK's reaction is provocative (see 3 EOC 4.9) and the book as a whole - subtitled "Making Sense of the Sixties" - is very good.

Several books have been reprinted, often with new material - e.g., the works of Tony Summers and John Davis. There is some intriguing information on DeMohrenschildt in the collected books of Ed Epstein ("The Assassination Chronicles").

I am making space for some skeptical comments on a book which - for some good reasons - will be well received by many readers.

"The Man Who Knew Too Much"

There is much of value in Dick Russell's book, from his own investigation of subjects such as Win Scott, Frank Ellsworth, and the right in Dallas. That makes it important to assess the claims of its central character, Richard Case Nagell. The book is designed around the story of Nagell - much more than "Reasonable Doubt" depended on Robert Easterling, who was relegated to a single chapter.

Unfortunately, I found no reason to believe that Nagell - spooky as he may be - ever had anything to do with Oswald. If Nagell was involved with the Los Angeles FPCC, for example, that is interesting but quite probably unrelated.

Russell must have gone through a period of intense skepticism about Nagell - his reputation as a journalist and researcher has been good. But, surprisingly, the book says little that explains to me why he ultimately found Nagell's story credible.

The book includes a page from a 1969 document provided by Nagell, and Russell gives much weight to the fact that it flatly asserts that Nagell investigated Marina Oswald for the CIA. But the remaining pages are not published, and even on that same page it seems obvious to me that the writer sometime simply omitted "subject claims."

Consider the alternative: is it plausible that the interviewer had access, before he wrote this memo, to actual CIA information? Would the CIA have told some military intelligence agent that Nagell had been involved with an investigation of the Oswalds? I doubt it.

Nagell seems to have served as a Ouija board, helping Russell fit the usual wide range of stories together. Go to him with the right question, and you'll get an answer. Maybe that is what it takes to get a coherent picture in this case: someone to say, yes, those pieces all fit - I was there.

I am disturbed that Russell does not even mention that Nagell told Garrison that Clay Shaw was one of the men associating with Oswald. (Or so Garrison says, in "Trail of the Assassins.") At the least, Russell should have pointed out Garrison's claim.

One also has to wonder why the Nagell story never caught on, except with a few buffs, such as Bud Fensterwald, who - "de mortuis nil nisi bonum" notwithstanding - didn't meet too many theories he didn't like. Russell says "There was, no doubt, a method to Nagell's seeming madness" (p. 266), but there certainly seems to have been madness there.

Oliver Stone's "JFK":

From Tom Stoppard's play "The Real Thing": "There's something scary about stupidity made coherent."

Most of the negative things that ought to be said about Garrison and about Stone are included in "JFK: The Book of the Film" (Applause Books). In addition to the footnoted script, it includes an impressive selection (reportedly compiled by Jane Rusconi) of about 350 pages from all sides of the debate in the press.

Credits: Thanks to B. Adams (#8, 11, 13), D. Barnes (15), B. Callahan (2), M. & R. La Fontaine (4, 16-7), D. Lifton (12), D. Stager (7, 9-10), M. Zaid (1), and everyone who has sent unlisted items.

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