

Mr. L. Fletcher Prouty
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Alexandria, VA 22304

2/22/89

Dear Fletch,

What a pleasant surprise to get from Lud Arons a copy of your letter to Navasky!

I'll keep in confidential unless I hear otherwise from you. It is fine!

You haven't seen much of me because it has not been safe for me to drive to Washington since 1977 and I've not driven out of Frederick since then. It also is not easy for me to do much searching in my files. So, I cannot easily get a tape of my interview of General Gavin in I think 1967. However, since writing Navasky I realized that the interview was in no sense confidential because it was for broadcast. He confirmed the JFK order to withdraw from VN. The program was Author's "oundtable if it is still in business. I don't know if Gavin is.

I remember this pretty clearly because I had to improvise a series of interviews, all that program aired on the annual American Booksellers Association annual convention, then at the Shoreham. Gavin had a book out and I had to interview him. Along quite a few others. Even Art Buchwald. *all unread!!*

I thought Gavin might be reluctant to speak forthrightly so I threw him a curve, enlarging the 1,000 to 1700, probably with 17,000 in mind. I knew, and I'd get to this because it may obviate your using what you may think you should not, of both the order to withdraw and retracting it, about three days after JFK was assassinated. The Pentagon issued press releases. The copies I had were from the Wash. Post. I'm sure the Times and other papers carried them. *They also should be on file.*

After Gavin corrected 1700 to 1000, the rest of what he said that I can now recall is that JFK called his generals in one by one and told them that VN was a political, not a military problem, and that political problems are not susceptible of military solutions.

When you consider that he was assassinated very soon after the first announcement, that we had re-evaluated our involvement and found that we would begin to withdraw our people, and that the new new policy under LBJ was announced in just two or three days, it gets a little hairy in the mind.

If Navasky agrees for you to do a piece, you may want to recall something more on the Dominican Republic. It elected, for the first time in a free election, well, more or less free, considering that his honchos controlled the military and the police, a non-Trujillo president, Juan Bosch. The military threw him out. JFK stated US policy: to never recognize a military dictatorship that overthrew an elected government. Three weeks, about, after JFK was assassinated, LBJ began our costly and wrong intrusion when forces led by democrats in the army were about to throw the fascists, not a figure of speech, out of power.

By the way, you have a typo on page 3, there were 300 Cuban combatants by October 61. You mean 1960.

A quotable source on Dulles' threat to JFK, what will we do with 1500 armed Cubans in Guatemala, is Hanes Johnson's book, The Bay of Pigs.

I wrote Geyelin after the oped article to which you responded by letter. The Post forwarded ~~it~~ to an out-of-date or incorrect address, I sent it back to the Post asking that they forward it again and I've heard nothing since.

There is no end to the revisionism. Even those considering themselves liberals seem not to be able to abide the fact that we elected one who was turning out to be great so they join the reactionaries in clobbering him.

I'm glad Arons sent you a copy of what I wrote Navasky and very glad that you could address their prejudice so effectively. Best,

Harold

Lud Arons
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February 17, 1989

Dear Mr. Weiskopf -

Thank you for your kind note
and the copy of your latest rebuttal
which, of course, I enjoyed very much.

I have taken the liberty of making
a copy of it and sending it on to
Fletcher Prouty. Fletch's letter is
attached.

Yours sincerely,
Lud Arons

Mr. L. Fletcher Prouty
4201 Peachtree Place
Alexandria, VA 22304



LUD ARONS
1619 COMMONWEALTH AVE
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ENTERED FEB 14 1989

LUD ~~FEB 10th~~
YOU STARTED IT. HERE
ARE MY THOUGHTS. WHAT'DA
WE DO NOW? LET'S
CIRCULATE THIS
ANYHOW.
MORE LATER

Fletcher

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Feb 10, 1989

Victor Navasky, Editor
The Nation Company, Inc.
72 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10011

Dear Mr. Navasky, (This is not a "Letter to the Editor" and is not to be published in whole or in part without permission.)

A coincidence, too important to ignore, happened. I went to the National Press Club, Feb 9th, to hear Congressman Rostenkowski speak at a Club Luncheon.

While waiting for the luncheon to begin, I came across the Feb 20th issue of "The NATION." On the LETTERS page I saw "On Cold War Camelot". It was written by a friend, Harold Weisberg.

After reading his letter, I noted "Kopkind Replies". By that time I realized there had been an earlier article by Kopkind, "J.F.K.'s Legacy", Dec 5th. I dug that out.

Kopkind's articles are preposterous. They are poorly researched and contain untrue and contrived statements. I have read the "NATION" for more than five decades. I have never seen anything in the "NATION" that repugnant.

You are the editor. I am certain that you would not wittingly permit gross errors and untrue statements to have been printed in a magazine of the "NATION's" reputation had you known they were wrong. This dishonest damage must be set right.

This unpleasantness bothered me all through the luncheon. Then on the way out I had to wait for some time to get an elevator to take me back to the street level. As I stood in the lobby I saw a large metal plaque on the wall, "The Journalistic Creed." I read it carefully. I was so impressed by its relevancy to "The NATION" that I copied it, see enclosed.

That was the coincidence. On the one hand are the Kopkind articles and on the other there is that magnificent Creed.

We who write, and who love our country can not permit such gross aberrations as this Kopkind work to go unchallenged in the NATION. I am writing to request of you equal space on the pages of the "NATION" for an honest accounting of the "JFK Legacy". "Request" is hardly the word in this case; in my heart I want to say, "I demand this opportunity." You may wonder at my qualifications.

In the Washington POST of Nov 29, 1988 Philip Geyelin wrote a

Kennedy item under the heading "Kennedy and the Revision of History", see enclosed. It too was a poor statement, but not malicious. On that date I wrote a response that the POST, quite properly, printed in its issue of Dec 13th, see enclosed. So there you have an example of my "top-of-the-head" work.

I have done a lot of writing: books (The Secret Team), encyclopedia (McGraw Hill Scientific Ency), magazines (many to include a cover article for The New Republic). But my strongest platform for this proposal is the fact that, during the 1000 days of Kennedy, I worked in the Office of the Secretary of Defense and in the Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In each position I performed essentially the same functions. I was Chief of the Office of Special Operations (JCS) and a member of that office in OSD...with General Ed Lansdale and Gen Graves Erskine. I know the business. I know what Kopkind wrote is wrong.

Kopkind writes:

"To pull out of Vietnam, Kennedy would have had to order a radical reversal of policy in 1963 or early 1964, which of course he did not do."

Have you never heard of Kennedy's National Security Action Memorandum #263 of Oct 11, 1963? This is one of the most powerful Presidential documents of the Vietnam War period.

This NSAM directed "a radical reversal of policy." It directed the "withdrawal of 1000 U.S. military personnel by the end of 1963."

Furthermore this NSAM authenticated the McNamara-Taylor Report of Oct 2, 1963 that included the words, "It should be possible to withdraw the bulk of U.S. personnel by that time." "By that time" is "by the end of 1965" in the previous sentence.

Note those lines with care. Kennedy was totally changing the Vietnam policies he inherited from Truman and Eisenhower and beginning the return of men "by the end of 1963" and then withdrawing the remainder by the end of 1965.

This latter phrase, "withdraw the bulk of U.S. personnel" had caused heated discussion during the period when the McNamara, Taylor Report was being written. The White House staff insisted that Kennedy meant "ALL U.S. personnel" and not just "U.S. military personnel." This was of great significance in terms of late 1963 because at that time the military personnel in Vietnam were serving under the operational control of the CIA, and this language was intended to include the CIA personnel as well as the Military personnel. This was a major policy item and subject of major debates...all highly classified.

It is hard to believe that Kopkind and the NATION were not aware of this important Presidential Directive.

Kopkind is not able to handle the "counterinsurgency" business either. He equates the "Kennedy's advisors...sophisticated era of counterinsurgency" with the "Eisenhower-Dulles era of massive retaliation." This frivolous equation is so far from reality that a brief response is hardly possible; but it is possible to clarify his misunderstanding.

Kennedy's advisors did bring in the era of counterinsurgency and in early 1962 McNamara and Gen Earl Wheeler (Director of the Joint Staff) did establish an office under the JCS, "Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities." Its best known incumbent was Gen. Victor H. Krulak. I worked under Krulak as Chief of the Special Operations Div. The enormous significance of this change goes back to the Bay of Pigs days.

As you may know, Eisenhower/Nixon approved a program against Castro in March 1960. By the end of October 1960 there were about 300 "potential" Cuban-exile combatants in that program. The administration, and the CIA, expected Nixon would win and that this program would continue on their planned time-table.

o/

With Kennedy's election they saw a possibility that this program would not be approved. During the week after the election of Kennedy, Dick Bissell, DDP/CIA, immediately began a hurried increase of this Cuban-exile group to 3,000 men. This was a shrewd move. When Allen Dulles briefed JFK later, he was able to make it sound that because so many Cubans were involved that the Bay of Pigs "invasion" it had to go ahead. As it turned out the men were on ships at sea, mid-April 1961, before JFK actually approved the invasion, April 17, 1961.

With the failure of the Bay of Pigs, JFK set up the Cuban Study Group (Gen Taylor, Adm Burke, Allen Dulles and Bobby Kennedy). The Report of this Study Group resulted in what is no doubt the strongest "Cold War" directive written by any President since WW II. This was NSAM #55. (The words of this directive were, for the most part, written by Max Taylor. The White House writers adapted them for NSAM #55 almost verbatim.)

(This is no place to go into detail, but I must cite some of these lines to show how far off base Kopkind is in his work.) JFK signed this NSAM personally and directed it to the Chairman of the JCS...only; a most rare procedure.

"I wish to inform the Joint Chiefs of Staff as follows with regard to my views of their relations to me in Cold War Operations: [Note use of the word Operations]

- 4 -
- " a. I regard the Joint Chiefs of Staff as my principal military advisor responsible both for initiating advice to me and for responding to my requests for advice. I expect their advice to come to me direct and unfiltered.
 - " b. The Joint Chiefs of Staff have a responsibility for the defense of the nation in the Cold War similar to that which they have in conventional hostilities."

What Kennedy had done with that directive, and the two that grew out of the same Taylor Report, NSAM #56 and NSAM #57, was to remove the CIA from its acquired, but not lawful, role in the "Cold War" and replaced them with the JCS, and the military.

This was the beginning of a monumental policy change. Had JFK lived to "break the CIA into 1000 pieces", as he had informed several of his closest confidants he would do, this would have been the biggest Cold War policy change of all. It is essential to understand the great significance of NSAM #55 and its impact on his Vietnam War plans as stated in NSAM #263, Oct 1963. He built NSAM #263 upon the foundation of NSAM #55.

Kopkind is so terribly wrong with his statement, "What Kennedy did better than any President since Roosevelt...was to mobilize a broad generational constituency--even though he was unable, by fate or his own limitations, to direct it to significant political change in his lifetime." What cruel ignorance!

Kennedy's NSAM #55 and his #263...just to cite a few... are more powerful Presidential directives than have been written since WW II. As Kennedy had told his confidants, during his second term he was going to see that this thrust was carried out...along with the many other noteworthy things that were achieved during the LBJ period.

Kopkind's misunderstanding of that era is astounding. It was in 1960, the Eisenhower era, that the U.S. Army Special Forces were resurrected as the gung-ho "Green Berets." This was not a Kennedy action. After a summer of planning and research, General Ed Lansdale, Gen Sam Wilson (formerly Defense Intelligence Agency chief) and myself flew to Ft Gordon, GA to acquire the curriculum of the Army's "Civil Affairs and Military Gov't" courses. During Oct 1960 we adapted them to a "Green Beret" format and hurriedly installed them in the Special Forces school at Ft. Bragg. Mr. James Douglas, Deputy Secretary of Defense traveled to Ft Bragg, in 1960, to inaugurate the first courses at the school. The school was open and producing graduates, foreign and domestic, for duty...mostly in Vietnam...under the operational control of the CIA. Kennedy did not do this. He inherited it.

- 5 -

This is why the "sophisticated" move to Counterinsurgency, cited by Kopkind, and recommended by McNamara/Taylor was so important. This calculated move from the CIA/Green Beret game to military control of such activities, directed by NSAM #55, was of major significance. JFK was getting the USA out of this "fun and games" business and putting things back under the military.

Now read Kopkind's confused work, "Turn then to Plan B, and enter the Green Berets and the CIA, which was hyperactive all during the Kennedy Administration both with its own institutional forces and its assets in student, labor and cultural organizations." The only reason any of this existed during the Kennedy 1000 days is that it takes time to make such major changes especially when they are covered in layers of secrecy. For example: it took over six months to get rid of Dulles, Cabell and Bissell after the Bay of Pigs, and McCone was an unskilled sleeper.

Even Kopkind's outside examples show a total lack of understanding. He cites Noam Chomsky for the following "Kennedy" quote, "...the United States would always prefer a democratic government in the Third World, but if forced to choose between an allied Trujillo and an independent Castro, it (the USA) would choose the former (Trujillo)."

It just so happens that Trujillo was assassinated, with the help of the USA, on May 30, 1961. Castro lives. "May 30, 1961" was one of the Kennedy 1000 days. Kopkind, Chomsky or both are absolutely confused. They have that backwards.

Nothing Kopkind writes in these two articles is more contrived and cruel than his, "The noble ideas... (were)... finally contradicted by the brutal and self-defeating devastation of Vietnam." Making "Vietnam" Kennedy's war just won't wash.

As John Foster Dulles said during a speech in September 1953, we had been involved in the Vietnam conflict for eight years, i.e. since Sept 2, 1945. The Kennedy era began in Jan 1961. By that time the CIA had been actively operating the Saigon Military Mission since 1954, i.e. Ed Lansdale and his crowd.

A massive helicopter infusion took place, for the CIA, in Dec 1960. It was essential to put thousands of helicopter maintenance and supporting people into Vietnam after that. As General Harkins complained, late in 1963, he had all kinds of supply and maintenance people; but he had almost none for the role of combat advisors. Out of some 16,000 there were about 800 or 900. (I was in the Joint Staff then and very close to those statistics). It was 1965 when the first U.S. Military forces landed in Vietnam to fight under military officers. JFK had nothing to do with that.

It is bad enough when the NATION prints all of the above but it is beyond belief and understanding to find that it is willing to publish such devastatingly untrue and contrived material as I have cited above.

I am assuming that you and your staff have been operating honestly and that you always want to do that. I am an old-time subscriber of the NATION. I read it frequently now. I get your circulation reminders asking me to subscribe. I am sure that my problem with the NATION is similar to that of others. We do not like to see a fine old publication getting caught so far off base as it has in this Kopkind situation on the Kennedy Legacy.

At this point I am willing to make a proposal. Let me know how many words you can use and on what date you would like to have them and I will sanitize the above to create an objective bit of work on the TRUE KENNEDY LEGACY. You owe that to your readers and you owe it to the fine old reputation of the magazine.

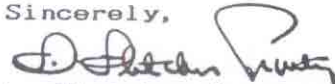
I need to tell you that I was the "responsible" officer with the Joint Staff for the briefing of the "Chiefs" on Kennedy's NSAM #55. I had to know it word by word and to assure that it was being carried out within the military.

Also, in Sept 1963, I was one of the writers, under General Krulak, of what became the McNamara/Taylor Report and NSAM #263. During that writing all of our thrust and direction came from the White House. Krulak was closer to the Kennedy's than any other military man...save Max Taylor. The direction we got for NSAM #263 was "Kennedy" direction. That makes this NSAM the absolutely most important policy statement of the Kennedy years...at least on the subject of Vietnam.

You must recognize these truths. There can be no excuse for not setting the record straight unless you are telling us that you have revised the record the way you want it to read and you are willing to leave your sordid work that way.

Now read that National Press Club "Journalistic Creed" again. It is good for the soul...and incidently, quite good for business.

Sincerely,



L. Fletcher Prouty

NATIONAL PRESS NEWS
WASHINGTON, DC, USA

The Journalistic Creed

I believe in the profession of journalism.

I believe that the public journal is a public trust; that all connected to it are, to the full measure of their responsibility, trustees for the public; that acceptance of a lessor service than the public service is betrayal of this trust.

I believe that clear thinking and clear statement, accuracy, and fairness, are fundamental to good journalism.

I believe that a journalist should write only what he holds in his heart to be true.

I believe that suppression of the news, for any consideration other than the welfare of society, is indefensible.

I believe that no one should write as a journalist what he would not say as a gentleman; that bribery by one's own pocketbook is as much to be avoided as bribery by the pocketbook of another; that individual responsibility may not be escaped by pleading another's instructions or another's dividends.

I believe that advertising news and editorial columns should alike service the best interest of readers; that a single standard of helpful truth and cleanness should prevail for all; that the supreme test of good journalism is the measure of it's public service.

Philip Geyelin

Kennedy and the Revision of History

11/29/68

In last week's flickering flashbacks, we heard all over again that John F. Kennedy was witty, wicked, wise and ill-advised. Nothing beautiful or bad was left unsaid. And, yet, somehow nothing seemed to be settled.

It was as if after a quarter of a century the brutal, abrupt ending of the Kennedy presidency is still not accepted. Its historical significance, accordingly, is still not understood. Why this insistence on trying to give ever deeper sociological, political and historical meaning—well beyond what available evidence will sustain—to this one violent, hateful act? Why, indeed, do we celebrate the birth of two slain heroes, Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King, while commemorating the anniversary of the slaying of Kennedy?

Much of it, I think, has to do with what has befallen us since 1963 and with our freedom to wallow in contemplation of the alternatives history so conveniently cannot disclose. What if, we ask ourselves, Kennedy had served out two terms? Would we now be wringing our hands over an "America in decline?"

With no way of knowing, there's no harm in wistful conjecture—up to a point. But when it hardens into revisionist history, it badly serves not only the memory of John F. Kennedy, but our understanding of ourselves and of the assorted misadventures of the past tumultuous 25 years.

Surely something of consequence was lost in Dallas—a political golden age, for many, if not exactly a Camelot. But it was not the great historical "turning point" in the sense that many would have us believe. Kennedy's death, a single "random

event," did not "prove" that "a world we once thought manageable cannot be brought to order," as columnist Richard Cohen seemed to be arguing the other day—surely not when you think of what we were later put through: the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King and Lyndon Johnson's despairing of his own Vietnam strategy, all in 1968; Nixon driven from office in disgrace in 1974; the final Vietnam ignominy in 1975; America held hostage in 1979.

Still less can it be said that Kennedy, as Cohen puts it, "personified a self-deluded and self-intoxicated America." Or that one rhetorical flourish ("pay any price") in his inaugural address "could only resonate in a country that felt it was master of its fate."

To believe all that, you have to presume that Kennedy believed it. That means not hearing the rest of the inaugural address with its grim summons to "a long twilight struggle" in defense of freedom "in its hour of maximum danger." You have to forget how little mastery Kennedy had of the Bay of Pigs fiasco in the early months of his presidency and also his later powerlessness to do more than hurl eloquent words at the Berlin Wall: "You have to forget, as well, the sober restraint in what was to become by mid-1963 the dominant theme of his foreign policy: a world to be made safe not for freedom or democracy but for 'diversity.' Not to nit-pick, but Kennedy did not see the Peace Corps as 'bright and idealistic Dale Carnegies,' setting out to 'win friends and influence people in the Third World,' as Cohen seems to see it. Kennedy saw it as a modest effort to teach simple things to simple

people largely unreached by massive conventional U.S. economic and military aid.

Again not to quibble, Kennedy did not think the Green Berets by themselves could "set things right in Vietnam." On the contrary he said in September 1963 that "in the final analysis it is their war. . . . We can send our men out there to advise them, but they have to win it, the people of Vietnam. More than once, he rejected recommendations from trusted advisers to commit organized U.S. combat forces to the war.

What Kennedy would have done about Vietnam is unknowable. What we know is that in the year after his death, Congress rushed through, with only two dissenting Senate votes, a Tonkin Gulf Resolution that Lyndon Johnson later used as a blank check to expand our Vietnam involvement beyond Kennedy's wildest imaginings. Years later it was hardly noticed at first when Ronald Reagan led us into another quagmire in Lebanon. If you doubt our continuing capacity for self-intoxication, consider the chest-thumping, flag-waving popular response to the Libyan raid and the assault on Grenada, and the absence of any public clamor for serious debate in last fall's campaign on the budgetary crisis.

If American was "self-deluded" in the Kennedy years, in short, it was not of Kennedy's doing—and it did not end in Dallas. Far from exemplifying a nation that thought itself "master of its fate," Kennedy had come painfully to realize by November 1963 what Cohen suggests we have only lately come to realize—that "our reach has exceeded our grasp."

The Washington Post

AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

JFK and Vietnam: The Record

Among the tidal wave of material that flooded the media on this 25th memorial of the murder of President John F. Kennedy, it is absolutely appalling to read this work on "Kennedy and the Revision of History" by Philip Geyelin [op-ed, Nov. 29]. He writes trivia and then says "somehow nothing seemed to be settled." He adds that the historical significance of the Kennedy presidency "is still not understood." Why does he exploit trivia to make his point? Why does he avoid the record available? In passing he talks of "the Bay of Pigs fiasco" and says "what Kennedy would have done about Vietnam is unknowable."

President Kennedy realized he had been seriously ill-informed and misled before and during the Bay of Pigs operation. That was April 18-19, 1961. On June 28, 1961, barely two months later, President Kennedy signed and sent National Security Action Memorandum #55 directly to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, saying, among other things of great importance:

"I wish to inform the Joint Chiefs of Staff as follows with regard to my

views of their relations to me in Cold War Operations [e.g., clandestine activities]. The Joint Chiefs of Staff have a responsibility for the defense of the nation in the Cold War similar to that which they have in conventional hostilities."

In other words, the JCS, who are by law predominantly in charge during a declared war, were being directed by the president to be responsible for similar activities during the Cold War.

This action alone set in motion administrative machinery that would guard against another Bay of Pigs and significantly reduce the "rogue elephant" role of the CIA.

With respect to Indochina and military activities that had ensued there since the time of presidents Truman and Eisenhower, President Kennedy had made up his mind about the way to go. To set this up he sent the secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, and the chairman of the JCS, Gen. Maxwell Taylor, to Vietnam. They returned with a report (written in Washington under close White House scrutiny), which they gave to

President Kennedy on Oct. 2, 1963. Its main thrust had been designed to completely change the course of the war and to get all U.S. personnel out of Vietnam by the end of 1965.

The president used material from that report to create the National Security Action Memorandum #263, which decreed "the implementation of plans to withdraw 1,000 U.S. military personnel by the end of 1963." The rest is on the record.

These excerpts of the true record are not the frothy "witty, wicked, wise and ill-advised" amalgam that Philip Geyelin, Richard Cohen et al. have tossed our way during this memorial period. John Kennedy was a president of substance. His work is on the record, and it behooves all of us who were close to the activities of his 1,000-day administration to keep the record straight, and the would-be revisionists at bay.

L. FLETCHER PROUTY
Alexandria

The writer was chief of special operations for the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 1955 to 1964.