

1.15.59

Dear Paul,

As of now, if I had another month or six weeks to prepare for going to N.O., I'd probably get my files fairly well straightened out. That is, if there were not always other chores. One of this morning will, I think, interest you: I have arranged with them for the Phil Willises to testify in New Orleans. He will have his original pictures, including those unpublished, will testify as he was not asked to by Liebelar, and his wife will testify to seeing the President's head go backward. I will also have a chance to go over his unpublished pictures with him.

Somehow attached to the copy of the Oswald Dallas arrest report I found a copy of your very good 11/26/66 memo on Hoover's 11/24 statement, as it appeared in the NYTimes. I believe he is a bit touchy on this. He never did answer my request for a copy. It had been promised, by phone, and never arrived, so I wrote him. You see, I believe they intercepted a copy of WWII, in which, for the first time anywhere, the Z charges were contained, but not yet issued.

I think I put this aside intending it as a reminder of some kind or another. I have been aware of much if not all the contents, have and use the cited stories, I think in EM, and have often wondered (not as Thompson) on all this fudging. The necktie part is also interesting. I have not as yet reached any conclusion on what, if anything, all this means except they were all crooks.

I also think I forgot this in POST MORTEM. If I did, I'll have to add it and would prefer to do so separately, because that is and has been typed for the offset camera and indexed. Therefore, only the most urgent changes should be made. The purpose of this letter is to ask you when you have time (is it wrong to assume you ever do?), you reread and rething this, in the light of what we have since learned, and decide whether you have any new thoughts. Perhaps, as captions, I might find a place to include some of it under the appropriate documents in the appendix.

You may also want to reread the addition to WHITEWASH on what was omitted from the FBI reports, especially in the light of Hoover's testimony on what Johnson ordered him to do and the press accounts that his was to have been the definitive report.

I presume you know the Shaneyfelt copy of the Secret Service copy was substituted for it as Ex 904. I have all this confirmed, in writing, and that the Secret Service has not deposited its copies in the Archives, as I interpret Clark's order to require. I have this in writing, too.

Hurriedly,

Paul Hoch
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November 26, 1966

Mr. Hoover's statement of Nov. 25 does not, in my opinion, satisfactorily answer the critics' questions concerning the performance and reporting of the autopsy of President Kennedy.

First, let us examine Mr. Hoover's interpretation of the FBI Supplemental Report of Jan. 13, 1964. He states that the doctors' early observation that "the bullet had penetrated only a short distance into the President's back" was referred to "in conjunction with the laboratory findings" concerning the damage to the front of the President's clothing "to point up" the "probability" that this early observation was in error.

Frankly, I do not see how any such intention on the part of the FBI can be read into the relevant section of the Report, (entitled "Laboratory examinations ... President's clothing.") The first half appears primarily intended to show that traces of copper from the bullets allegedly used were found in the clothing at the back wound. The second paragraph deals with the throat wound. Since no bullet fragments were found in the clothing, why was the fragmentation of the bullet which struck the skull mentioned? The implication seems to be that a fragment of metal (or bone) from the last shot caused the exit wound in the throat.

It should be noted that the latter interpretation was common in news reports apparently based on the FBI version of the shooting. (E.g., Washington Post, Dec. 18, 1963; NYT, Jan. 26, 1964, p. 56)

Since the intent of the Jan. 13 report is not clear from its text, one may ask whether, in fact, the laboratory examination of the clothing did indicate that the bullet had passed through the body. The Warren Report, on the basis of the testimony of FBI agent Frazier, states that "although the characteristics of the slit established that the missile had exited to the front, the irregular nature of the slit precluded a positive determination that it was a bullet hole." (P. 92) As Frazier put it, "that [the shape] is not specifically characteristic of a bullethole to the extent that you could say it was to the exclusion of being a piece of bone or some other type of projectile." (5H61) Testifying on the basis of his examination of the clothing, he said, "I can say that this hole in the [front] collar area could have been made by this bullet but I cannot say that the bullet which entered the back actually came out here or at some other place because I am not aware of the autopsy information as to the path of the bullet through the body." (5H61)

This unusually careful testimony, plus the text of the report itself, suggests that the Jan. 13 report did not mean to imply (or at least should not have meant to imply) that the laboratory examination "clearly" indicated that the medical observations were "probably" in error.

Even if my analysis is incorrect, how is one to interpret Mr. Hoover's statement that "since the F.B.I. knew the commission had a copy of the official autopsy, its contents were not repeated in an F.B.I. report"?(Emph. added) The point at issue is not why there was no FBI Report specifically on the autopsy report, but why the Jan. 13 report did not reflect the autopsy report. At best, the Jan. 13 report is supposed to have pointed up the probability that the original observation was in error. Yet the autopsy report, which the FBI admittedly had in hand, seems to be a much stronger statement, precluding the possibility that the original observation was correct. Is it customary for the FBI to hint that an observation is in error (by putting it in the past perfect tense and "in conjunction with" a statement that may be a refutation) when it has solid evidence that it was in fact in error?

Mr. Hoover's statement is inadequate in other ways as a response to questions that have been raised. For example, it may well be that the FBI obtained a copy of the "original uncut" Zapruder film and "reproduced this for the commission, which since has turned it over to [the] national archives." However, FBI agent Shaneyfelt testified that he prepared Commission Exhibit 885, which he (incorrectly) described as the "majority" of the frames in the Zapruder film. As published by the Commission, four frames were spliced out, and two others were printed in reverse order. No explanation has ever been provided publicly. Also, Mr. Hoover's account of when and how the doctors decided that the bullet had gone through the body is inconsistent with the account on pp. 88-89 of the Warren Report, but that is another story altogether.

One would be much less suspicious of the entire investigation into the assassination if the FBI (or the Warren Report) had admitted, clearly and unequivocally, that they had made some mistakes. It is true that Commission staff members are now admitting that there were loose ends, contradictions, mistakes, and misstatements. (For example, Mr. Liebeler has advised that the Dec. 9 FBI report was not "of principal importance," as the Warren Report had claimed.) How many more "imprecise" statements are there in the Warren Report, which will be acknowledged only when the critics turn up irrefutable counter-evidence?

References: Statement by J. Edgar Hoover, New York Times, Nov. 26, 1966, p. 25.
FBI Supplemental Report, Jan 13, 1964 (See Appendix B of Incust.)

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" I, personally, feel that any finding of the Commission will not be accepted by everybody, because there are bound to be some extremists who have very pronounced views, without any foundation for them, who will disagree violently with whatever findings the Commission makes."

J. Edgar Hoover
May 14, 1964

Inquiries have been received concerning the handling and disposition by the Secret Service of certain X-ray and photographic films relating to the autopsy performed at the National Naval Medical Center, Bethesda, Maryland, in connection with the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

The X-ray films were used for the briefing of the Warren Commission's staff on the autopsy procedure and results. None of the films are presently in the possession of the Secret Service. Every item of tangible evidence which the Secret Service possessed relating to the assassination of President Kennedy was made available to the Warren Commission. All such evidence was either turned over to the Commission during its life, or turned over to the National Archives following the termination of the Commission's activities, or placed in the custody of individuals designated by the late President's family, as appropriate.

Official Secret Service
Statement, received from Jack
Warner, USSS, on Tuesday,
June 21, 1966, in Washington.
P. Hoch