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Sept. 10...

Dear Harold:

Who is this David S. Lifton who has written, for Macmillan, BEST EVIDENCE, "deception and disguise in the assassination of JFK"? Ad for the book, coming in January, claims "it involved a plot that may have reached into the highest levels of the U.S. govt." (My ital.) It is called "the most painstaking study ever conducted of the murder and the cover-up."

Macmillan says it will not reveal any facts until the day of the book's release. "Then, finally, America will have the evidence it has needed for seventeen years."

I should like to know about this Lifton. And what do you think he has?

Of course, if he ^{has} real evidence that would hold up in court, he has an obligation to circulate ^{it} now rather than to wait four more months (i.e., until a book exists).

I believe CONSPIRACY, that big McGraw-Hill book, died.

How are you, Harold?

Sincerely,

*Sally lives still
in London.
Walter S. Agel hello.*

Dear Jerry,

9/12/80

"Who is this David S. Lifton who has written, for Mcmillan," the work of works on the JFK assassination, you ask.

A short answer is that he is the one person my wife has said may not set foot in our home. To fully appreciate this you should see some of those she has tolerated.

I first heard from Dave in 1966, after my first book began to attract attention. It was so long a phone call I wondered where the student got the money to pay for it, something well over an hour, maybe about 3 hours, daytime, from Los Angeles. (I was told he was then close to completing a master's in engineering at UCLA but had given this up to devote himself and his unique talents to the JFK assassination.)

That winter an article co-authored by him, appeared in Ramparts. I do not recall if he then informed me that he was working on that piece. My clear recollection - and I believe you will perceive how it impressed itself upon me - is of what he tried to convince me about: Brown & Root (read LBJ) had in deepest secrecy dug a ~~size~~ network of tunnels through Dealey Plaza and these tunnels and several papier mache trees, from which assassins apparently dangled in invisibility, are the means by which the job was done.

When his piece appeared, titled something like "A case for Three Assassins," I was impressed by his failure to credit original sources and his pretense that he did not draw upon some or that they did not exist.

I made my first trip west in mid-December 1966, at the behest of the wealthy Maggie Field (Marjorie Beauchamp), whose husband Joe was a partner in Hutton & Co., and Bill O'Connell, an actor, with whom I stayed. He persuaded me to see Lifton, who I did not want to meet, because he said Lifton had been pestering him to death and he feared a future of a denied Lifton so close by. My recollection is of a dark and brooding, nervous and intense man of whom I formed the impression that he needed psychiatric care. (Later I was told that in fact he required hospitalization from time to time.) Thereafter I avoided him to the degree he permitted.

You may recall that there was a period in which, while the Times pretended my books

did not exist in its book review department, was giving them considerable attention as news. This was through Harrison Salisbury, who put Peter ^{the} Libs on them. Until Lifton pulled what I later learned characterized him. Without mentioning anything to me or asking me any questions he wrote the Times a long so-called analysis of my supposed error in accurate reporting of an FBI report. How inaccurate I could have been you can imagine! I reproduced it in facsimile. It had to do with the speed at which Zapruder's camera was running. The camera was not available. The FBI reported that Zapruder said it was running at 24 frames per second and naturally the facsimile also said that. Lifton theorized that what the FBI meant was that this was the speed of the film, which it wasn't, and he built his entire, underhanded and factually baseless attack on my accuracy on this, as I didn't learn for another year or more so.

From the time I couldn't avoid meeting him I heard stories of his clear thievery, of how he conned people, how he stole their work and records, even how he had stolen an enormous amount from a Warren Commission counsel, Wesley Liebeler, by persuading Liebeler that he could help him against Lane, with whom L. was fighting. (L appears to have stolen an enormous amount of Commission records and Lifton is said to have stolen them long enough to make copies when Liebeler let he see them.)

In November 1967 or February 1968, when I was in New Orleans, and when Garrison knew that a number of witnesses, in fact the only two who saw the man who picked up the literature Oswald had printed, made independent confirmations of the fact that it was not Oswald and was another, Lifton again involved himself in my life through another insanity. This I ask that you preserve in confidence and not use in any way, only the identification. And for what I now recall it had to have been after 2/68, because I did not meet the commercial artist who figures in this until that month, in L.A.

In Oswald In New Orleans I reprint FBI reports that make it clear that the people at the Jones Printing Co., which printed the leaflet, both said that the man who picked the job up was not Oswald. For all the world as though he had no investigators - and except for one and a nincompoop Lane unloaded on him, Garrison's investigators were police detectives - I was asked to interview those two New Orleanians. The former CIA

man who used the name Boxley was sent with me, with an office tape recorder.

From more than 100 pictures I showed him Douglas, ones picked four different ones of Kerry W. Thornley as the man who most closely resembled the one who picked the printing up. A year later, independently, in the presence of an assistant DA, he did exactly the same and I have the tape. So also did his woman assistant, in whose home I interviewed both.

In one of the pictures Thornley was even bearded. His haircut also had changed. But on two occasions three different selections of him were made by the only two people who had knowledge. Of course, they could have been wrong.

In an effort to determine for myself if alternation in the hair could have made Thornley look like Oswald I sent a picture of Thornley to Fred Newcomb, the commercial artist, and asked him to reverse the print to shift the part in the hair and to apply his art like makeup to see if Thornley could be made to look like Oswald. I discussed this with Louis Ivon, the chief investigator assigned to Garrison by the police. I had no typewriter with me, my handwriting is illegible, so he told me to dictate my letter to Newcomb to one of the stenos. I gave her his address and forgot about that until this new Lifton attack was launched on me, in conjunction with his then buddy, Thornley. Only then did I learn that the steno had used an office letterhead.

The basis for the attack is crazy, like all connected with Lifton and Thornley and their association is. Lifton was so far out he suborned perjury in a false affidavit provided to Garrison, who would have charged an innocent man if he had paid any attention to that affidavit.

At a time when Garrison's investigators received word that a hit would be made on me they delayed my checking in at the Fountainbleau until they could have the next room and wire it for sound, with my OK. One of the people I then interviewed was Barbara Reid, right-wing daughter or a former Chicago reporter. Those deemon investigators got so interested in the TV they did not check their equipment so they wound up with three hours of gibberish. However, my recollection is more than merely clear that Barbara wanted me very much to meet one Cliff Bolton, who she said was Thommady's best friend

When those flatheads (variant of flatfoot) finally tired of TV and has dispatched several hotel carts of food and drink and got around to phoning me it was late at night. They were to provide my transportation to return Barbara to her home. (I once arranged for David Ferris's godson to babysit for her so we could go off and talk in private.) So that Barbara could make the intro I got the detective to drive us to where he worked, selling records in Dixieland Hall. It was so unhidden they parked the unmarked police car on the sidewalk! Bolton was introduced to me by my right name, my writing was identified to him, and we talked. When he got around to mentioning his friend Thornley, who was then charged with perjury or about to be so charged, and asked my advice, it was that "Thornley agree to speak to me and let me then give Garrison a memo on our conversation. He was to convey that to Thornley, by then pumping gas in Tampa. What he wrote Thornley I don't know but he wrote a kooky column for the French Quarter Gazette in which he concluded with that recommendation from him to Thornley.

The next I heard was this series of crazy Lifton/Thornley articles in some since defunct and then nutty underground rag in LA, in which all of this was distorted and misrepresented as Lifton's analysis of me trying to frame Thornley. By not heeding me and going off on that insane Liftonism he did get himself in real and costly trouble he could have avoided, as did others who accepted the same offer and escaped any trouble at all.

So I am not impartial on Lifton. I think he is a very bright, entirely unscrupulous, unbalanced frustrated critic of the official mythology.

Until recent years the last time I heard from him was on my last trip to the west. I then left LA on election day 1968. He phoned me where I was staying and tried to sell me on a variant of his then current conspiracy theory. It was that LBJ was and either Dean Rusk or Richard Helms had the job done and to see that it was done right has spent the week before it in clandestine meetings throughout Texas. The confusion comes from my inability to recall which of the two Lifton had just abandoned in favor of the other. As of about a week earlier I had heard of that theory. He began with Rusk and switched to Helms or vice versa. LBJ was unchanged.

For years I'd heard of this great book he was writing. There must have been a number of versions for him to progress for his Jean Vladek/Papier Mache Trees/ Defense Contractor theory to the White House and State Department and/or CIA, but he is a capable man. Several critics told me they had been told in confidence and had been impressed. I figured he either stole something from Libelator and twisted it or came upon something the rest of us missed at the Archives and twisted it. I can't imagine that he got from the Archives what all others missed, although it might have happened.

I also believed that his book probably would not appear because when it did with its appearance his raison d'etre would disappear. We'll see.

Someone arranged for him to be used by public TV in commentary on the hearings of the House assassins committee. All those commentaries I caught had him in the role of advancing his own beliefs. In this and in his insistence on dominating interviews the press and critics had with witness after the hearings he turned a number of critics off. He blew many real opportunities. I don't know if this attention helped him get an agent and a publisher or not, but in this field irresponsibility and conspiracy theorizing are the open sesame.

The Lifton I know will do what Tony Summers did in the book Conspiracy, which you say died. He'll pretend to give credit and use that as cover for wholesale thievery. With a little embellishment much may appear to be original.

I have not seen the pious and puffery and would appreciate copies of what you have and what you get, not because I intend to do anything but for archival purpose and better to serve those who like you ask me questions. I understand it makes a big thing of the autopsy, to which I devoted the largest book on the subject plus much other writing. He can't do much with the autopsy without drawing extensively on my publication. He can twist some and I expect he will, including the claim that the fatal shot was at the base of the back of the skull. One can contrive a basis for this and it is not without its followers among the conspiracy theoreticians, but there is abundant evidence that it isn't so. In support of this theory Robert Gordon claims the pictures were faked. If you want more on this - or anything else- please phone me.

I'll be admitted to Georgetown Univ. Hospital on Monday for arterial surgery early Tuesday. I'm told I may not feel too chipper for the first two days and that I can be home after 8-9 days. If you are pressed for time, and you did not explain your interest, don't fear calling me at the hospital, where each patient has a phone, as long as you wait until the 18th.

The puffery also includes the size of the phone bills. I can't imagine his spending all that money in investigation and believe most of it was in his compulsive phoning and talking.

I'd heard that not only will Macmillan not disclose anything until the book is on the shelves, but that there will be no prior review copies and they even refused to identify his agent or give his phone to the reporter who asked me about a week ago. He lives with his parents, 140 Beach 135 Street, Rockaway Beach 11694. I understand his father is a successful medical man who has been carrying his son who must now be near 40. Peter Sheppard is the agent.

From the time of the Congressional hearings Lifton has asked for help and as I give it to all others with whom I disagree I've helped him, with records, at least one pictures, and much time on the phone. I'm in a public role and don't and can't limit myself to those with whom I do not disagree or of whom I do not approve.

It is a clever stunt to pretend that there are great secrets that have to be protected, and to make a play for news and TV coverage, and I think that is what is afoot. Of course it also prevents knocking down any of his theories, which could kill the book prepub. I agree with you that if he has such stuff it ought to be made available promptly. The first copies out of my first book went to the Commissioner and the FBI and Secret Service directors. I hope to get back to writing again soon, have information of the kind Macmillan claims Lifton has, and I expect to hand deliver a copy to the AG's office as soon as it is out together.

You ask how I am. This enables me to apologize for the typing and my failure to read and correct it. I suffered severe thrombophlebitis in both legs and thighs before

I was hospitalized five years ago. It imposes some limitations but I've been active enough to keep my five acres under control and acquire about 60 file cabinets of info, mostly formerly withheld official records obtained by litigation under FOIA. I can ride fairly well but can't drive very far because the blood puddles in the feet and legs. I'm able to continue what has permitted me to do the impossible and I look forward to writing I don't know what I'll be able to do about. But I intend to do it as soon as the requirements of the litigation ease.

You report that Sally is still living in London. When you are in touch with her please tell her that I recall her efforts to help me, regret I did not get to meet her earlier, and made my own effort to return her kindness. Her father wrote to ask me to join those who were appealing to the government to let him in when his bio came out. I knew they hatred I enjoy would not help him so I did what could- and did. Got a British reporter friend to ask the right questions and write the correct story. Presto! He was admitted. Government doesn't respond to considerations of fairness or justice or decency in political matters. But it does respond to self-interest.

Please say hello back to Walter and family.

My home phone is 301/475-8186. I don't know what hours I'll be keeping when I'm back from the hospital but now I try to get to bed by 9 so I can be asleep by 10 and get up at the former early hour I find most productive and least disturbed.

I'll be happy is Lifton has a solid work and if it also is honest. I do not expect either, although it would surprise me if he is not accurate for the most part.

To now all the theoretical works have ~~helped~~ helped those who, if you recall the words, applied the whitewash and engineered and persist in the coverup.

I expect Lifton to draw heavily on and credit the House committee. There is only one solid thing of which I am aware in its work that did not appear earlier in mine. So I'll be interested in knowing how much Lifton has that is new, not in my books or lawsuit records. Hope you are well and happy. Best,