

pruning of all shrubbery in the background of pictures to the totally unnecessary removal and resetting of road signs. Both landmarks were required for orientation of the President's position at the time each shot was fired. The best pictures, taken by the late Abraham Zepf, were taken over those signs.

By another remarkable coincidence, this definition of the area of Commission interest - and even at that too-late date it was not an order for no changes - excluded both the location of the President when he was assassinated and the place from which the Commission claimed the shots were all fired by Oswald alone. The President was on Elm Street and the Texas School Book Depository was north of it.

Contacting Wade was especially interesting because the report did not originate with him and the Commission knew its sources.

If Rankin did not personally order the memory-holing of the transcript and all other records of that January 22 hour-and-a-half of what Ford called an "astounding problem" - and with his tight-fisted control nothing else seems possible - he was the boss. The buck stopped with him. Secure in this knowledge, he found space for a single paragraph on that dramatic event.

It says little, again too much. Knowing nothing, having none of the evidence about it, the Commission (McCloy and Russell were not present) decided "this allegation was probably not accurate," but "the matter had to be regarded seriously." Translation: Downgrade but play it safe.

(Ford quotes Rankin more pointedly from the January 27 session: "We do have a dirty rumor that is very bad for the Commission ... very damaging to the agencies that are involved in it and it must be wiped out ..," which is one way of conducting an investigation to discover

fact and truth, call it "dirty" and without investigation ordain "it must be wiped out.")

Having elected not to contact Wade directly, and insisting on the fiction that Wade had been the source of the report, Rankin quotes Carr as having "stated that District Attorney Wade had been unable or unwilling to specify the source of this allegation." This is a prejudicial formulation, considering that Wade was known not to be the source, to say a) that he was "unwilling," suggesting Wade was covering up, and b) that he was "unable" to "specify the source." It is even more prejudicial when what Wade really said is considered.

From Rankin's account, this took more than an hour and a half!

What follows is cute:

On Thursday, January 23, Secret Service Report No 767 was brought to my attention ... This report is dated January 23 ...

That report is dated January 3, 20 days earlier. The information is dated 37 days earlier and was immediately communicated to Washington by phone.

This is a lie, designed to make it seem that nothing had reached Washington about the Hudkins report until the day after Carr phoned Rankin, thus to buttress the pretenses that there was no knowledge prior to Carr's call and that the Commission had not overlooked its responsibilities to look into this "dirty rumor" that "must be wiped out."

How vigilantly did the executive agencies pursue this "dirty rumor?" Sweatt was given as its source, not Wade, and that Secret Service Report No. 767 had asked that Sweatt be interviewed - as of mid-December, already a late date, considering the earlier publication of what had to be "wiped out." By January 23 it had not yet been done. So, Rankin finally "requested that it be done immediately."

For the nitty-gritty, the super-super-secret meeting with the Texas Court of Inquiry and Wade and his assistant, Bill Alexander, the original source of the report, it was arranged that all the members of the Commission be absent. When Ford said the Texans "slipped into the nation's capital with complete anonymity," he did not exaggerate.

Rankin's version is that "The Chairman of the Commission and I" met with them. Ford's is, "They met with Lee Rankin and other members of the staff." Both agree, significant as this disagreement is for any real investigation ever to have been intended, that none of the members of the Commission, all of whom were saddled with responsibility, was present.

Ford had identified the Texas delegation as Carr, Wade and "any other Dallas officials [who had knowledge," leaving out those he knew were there and thus avoiding mention of the two with most responsibility and the CIA connection. Rankin identifies them as Carr, Wade, Alexander, Jaworski and Storey. In Rankin's version, it is "Wade and others of the Texas officials who stated that the rumors to the effect that Oswald was an undercover agent were widely held among representatives of the press in Dallas." This is the expurgated version, omitting any reference to the FBI and Rankin's friend, "Dear Edgar."

Rankin, too, is an expert at switching. Here, where in fact it referred only to the FBI rumors, he says that "Wade and Alexander" attributed all of this to the press. *Then:*

~~There follows the sentence with the alterations:~~

Wade stated he was also aware of an allegation to the effect that Oswald was an informant for the CIA and carried the number 110669.

This is the magical number. All reference to it disappears - forever.

To this point, all Rankin has noted "for the files" is that Oswald has been reported (and this by Hudkins only) as a suspected FBI informant, "S172" and as a CIA informant, "Number 110669," which is far from complete.

Out of nowhere, there having been no earlier reference to either kind, Rankin then quotes Wade as saying that, "based on his experience as an FBI agent during the years 1939-43, he did not think that the number which number Rankin does not say would be either a payroll or voucher number carried on the Bureau records."

Even for Rankin, this is a pretty large non sequitur. With both numbers represented as identification numbers, he quotes Wade not on this but on "payroll or voucher" number." He quotes nobody on the possibility of either number being consistent with informant identification by the FBI, CIA or any other federal intelligence or police organization. A local phone call would have elicited that information.

Obviously, if a letter and three-digit combination would be consistent with FBI practice, as it is, the six-digit number would not be, so Rankin's imprecision and switching can serve to help "wipe out" that "dirty rumor." Wade is further quoted as saying what subsequently was confirmed when a robbery of FBI Media, Pennsylvania, offices turned up a large number of political ("security" to the FBI) reports, that informers "would probably be paid by the FBI agent in cash" and that "it was customary for the agent to carry the informer on his books as a number."

Having begun his memo pretending this was the first knowledge the Commission had of any report that Oswald had been a federal informant, Rankin next, forgetting this and his and the Commission's total silence about these reports, including those published, slipped a bit

and acknowledged their existence:

There was a general discussion regarding other information disclosed in the investigative reports which lend some degree of credibility to these allegations.

What "information" from what "investigative reports" tending to credit the belief that Oswald had been a federal informant was not worth mentioning in Rankin's memo. This is one of the better ways of avoiding resort to the memory-hole system of filing valuable information.

There follows, in the same paragraph, what is clearly indicated as not this confirmatory information from investigative files, a list of eight topics described as "Among the other (emphasis added) matters discussed at the meeting." Rankin is consistent. He attributes neither meaning nor interpretation to any one, restricting himself to the list. All, however, when understood, are additional confirmatory information:

- (1) the use by Oswald of Post Office boxes;
- (2) use by Oswald of aliases;
- (3) the lengthy 2-hour interview conducted by the FBI of Oswald in August of 1962 /or immediately before he is said to have become an FBI informant/;
- (4) interviews conducted by Special Agent Hosty in Dallas regarding Oswald's whereabouts /Hosty knew/ and the failure to notify Secret Service of this information;
- (5) the comment after the assassination of Special Agent Hosty that Oswald had contacted two known subversive agents about 15 days before the assassination;
- (6) Oswald had Special Agent Hosty's car licence and telephone numbers in his notebook;
- ☐(7) Oswald's mother has stated that her son was an agent ...
- (8) Special Agent Hosty was transferred from Dallas two weeks after the assassination.

Finally it turns out that the Secret Service filed an oral report with the staff - after the Texans left, naturally - that Sweatt had been interviewed about Secret Service Report No. 767. Sweatt's source? Assistant District Attorney Bill Alexander, who had just been there and, from Rankin's memo, had neither been questioned about this nor volunteered any information about it. The only other thing added is that Sweatt had agreed perhaps it "was 179 rather than 172."

Thus were two of the most dramatic and incredible moments in history - first official consideration of whether a President had been killed by a man working for an official intelligence agency - reduced to official nothingness. The first, providentially, was destroyed and the second, with even more foresight, arranged to have neither a record made nor a member of the Commission present.

Is there anything like this in American history? In the history of modern civilization?

By January 27, when the genteel old ladies were permitted their kaffee klatch on this, there had been much thinking and talking - and the added precaution of suppression. Ford's jaw, lubricated by expectations of profit, helps a bit with what we now know is this session whose transcript exists but is suppressed.

The others, he said, looked to Dulles for advice and counsel. Dulles had spent much of his life in intelligence and had long headed the CIA - at precisely the time it could have used Oswald. What better reason for turning to him for advice and recommendation than the fact that, if Oswald had been working for the CIA when he was in Russia, it would have been under Dulles!

Dulles did acknowledge that, had this been the case, there would be "nothing in writing." The Commission immediately forgot that.

At this meeting, Rankin said what he did not in his memo, that Wade "was so troubled" because of his previous FBI experience, "He handled as much as \$2,000 a month during the war period in which he paid off informants and undercover agents in South America." In that part of the world and at that time, \$2,000 a month went very far.

Another quote from Wade (who had also made clear he was not familiar with any changes in FBI practice):

He thought that the postal box was an ideal way to handle such transactions and was a way he had used at various times in the past too (sic).

If Oswald ever had any other real use for post office boxes, it was never established.

At this juncture, Ford expressed the concern of the Commission that

it would not be justified in plunging into the matter in some irresponsible manner that might jeopardize the effectiveness of an important agency's operations.

How this might have been done Ford does not explain. How it could have been done, when the Commission did everything in complete secrecy, seems beyond explanation.

Ford's discussion has it that "Every intelligence agency of the Government also had to be scrutinized" in pursuance of the Commission's mandate. "The Commission would have to devise an approach that was independent of all these agencies." To do the job, true.

The Commission's "independence" of these agencies consisted in using them and nobody else for 100 percent of its investigation. Its "scrutiny" consisted of asking the agencies to deny the allegations, which each did.

No more.

Senator Russell, apparently, had been cued in on none of this, for he asked, "What steps, if any, have we taken to clear up this matter?" Rankin replied that he and Warren had "discussed various possibilities."

One was to ask the Attorney General "what he would say about whether Oswald was or was not an undercover agent." Picture of Bobby Kennedy combing the poorer sections of three southern cities looking for informants for the FBI! How else could he know? Orwell to Aesop, in desperation.

Another was Rankin's suggestion, that "I should go over and see Edger Hoover myself" and cajole him into understanding "this problem." Rankin added, "I would be frank to tell him" that "his statement ... would not be sufficient." Picture of Hoover breaking down and confessing all - assuming he had a better way of knowing than the Attorney General!

With Hoover's denial "not enough," it is what the Commission settled for.

When Boggs asked for other alternatives, Rankin suggested "examine Hudkins." Therefore, Hudkins was never "examined" by the Commission.

McCloy said that, if they got pro forma denials, "that probably stops us unless we run into something . . ." (excision in Ford).

Russell, first expressing admiration for Hoover, said, "We can get an affidavit from Mr. Hoover ... but if we didn't go any further (sic) than that, and we don't pursue it down to Hudkins, or whoever it is, there would still be thousands of Doubting Thomases ... and you just didn't try to clear it up and you just took Hoover's word." He was right on the "Doubting Thomases," right on doing nothing but taking Hoover's word, and right on that not clearing anything up. But he was wrong, and no effort was made to tell him the truth, in believing that Hudkins was the source. Rankin knew better and was silent. Hudkins did no more than report what he had been told and Alexander, according to Rankin, was one of the sources. His source is unknown.

Russell advised, "you can't base the conclusions of this Commission" on no more than Hoover's oath, unquestioningly as he would accept it.

Again the questioning of Hudkins by the Commission, this time described by Senator Cooper as their "duty."

McCloy reminded that the Department of Defense "has an intelligence unit, too." Many more than one. And they duplicate.

The Keffee Klatch soon got to the point where the eminent chairman knew the answer without any investigation - before it was decided whether or not there would be any kind of investigation:

We must go into this thing from both ends, ^{from} ~~for~~ the end of the rumormongers and from the end of the FBI ...

As Oswald's guilt was ordained in advance, so was it with the innocence of the FBI and its venerable overlord, of whom Mrs. Martha Mitchell, wife of the Nixon Attorney General, quipped, "If you've met one Director of the FBI, you've met them all."

Almost timidly, Rankin asked, "Would it be acceptable to go ahead and find out what we can about these -- " only to be interrupted by McCloy's interjection of "Hudkins' sources." Rankin picked it up by saying they could then see if Hoover "reacts."

To that hidden moment in history, for that tiny fragment of time, this is as close as anyone ever came to an official investigation of the first indispensable man in American government, J. Edgar Hoover.

Warren did not like the idea. He thought, "we ought to know what we are going to do, and do it, and take our chances one way or the other." He did not want to make the Commission look "apologetic" or "in any way reticent to make any investigation."

Brave talk for the mouse who never belled the cat. It encouraged Rankin to what, in Ford's copyrighted government (meaning public) property, is the last word:

"I don't think the country is going to be satisfied with the mere statement from, not to use Mr. Hoover's name /perish the thought - such a blasphemy!/, but just examine about any intelligence agency that Oswald wasn't hired, in the light of this kind of an accusation, a rumor."

After getting this off his chest, Rankin's words straightened

out a bit:

"I think that the country is going to expect this Commission to try to find out the facts as to how these things are handled (emphasis added) to such an extent that this Commission can fairly say, 'In our opinion he was or was not an employee of any intelligence agency of the United States.'"

The Commission may not have been "in any way reticent about making" that investigation, but it didn't. It may have understood that the unsubstantiated word of Hoover would not be acceptable to many, but that is what it got, no more, from him or CIA head McCone. It wound up as Rankin wound it up, without the pretense of any real inquiry into whether Oswald "was or was not an employee of any intelligence agency of the United States." It cannot with honesty be described as even a superficial, perfunctory look at "how those things are handled."

Is there any wonder, with these the words selected from those 85 pages to put the best possible face on the Commission and its investigation of Oswald as an agent, and the selection by a member of the Commission, the government refuses the transcript to me?

This record is so frightful that the government, meaning in this case the Department of Justice, of which, in theory, the FBI is part, would rather risk the attention a lawsuit might get than let those bones rattle off the skeleton with the opening of the closet door.

Compromised as they were by their connections, the Texans were less timid. Or, perhaps, instead of suggesting they were made of sterner stuff, which seems not to be the case, despite the vaunted Texas rep, it would be more precise to say they talked tougher.

It was almost as though Waggoner Carr had bugged that eight-foot Commission table. Two days later, on January 29, he sent the Commission a letter in which, without mention of the horrendous subject, Oswald as agent, he suggested:

(1) From the Director of both agencies involved there should be obtained the names of every agent and representative in service in the Dallas area between the months of August and December. This information must be complete so that every single representative who acted for these agencies in that area, whether for only a few days or for several months, is to be included.

(2) Each of the men on these two lists should be examined under oath to determine whether he has any knowledge of the subject matter under discussion.

(3) The director--the number one man of each agency--as well as the district director of each agency (being the district within which Dallas lies) each should similarly be examined to ascertain whether any of them has any knowledge of the matter under inquiry.

If there is any substance to the report under investigation, it is possible that knowledge of the matter rests with only one or two individuals and this makes it particularly important that every single person who was in the area during the months involved be available for interrogation.

Rankin fobbed him off with a polite letter dated February 4. He represented himself as impressed with Carr's suggestions and quoted Warren's opinion that they were "sound and thorough," recommendations that "certainly will be seriously considered by the Commission."

And thus it came to pass, no better reason being needed than that they were "sound and thorough," that the Commission followed not one of the Texas recommendations.

In the end, the Texans were satisfied. They sent copies of their report to the Commission, receiving proper thanks and praise. I tried my luck, asking Carr for whatever information he could provide. Nothing he said, after the first sentence of his single-paragraph response, is accurate:

For your information, during the course of the investigation, I heard the rumor that Oswald was employed by the FBI [or CIA at the time of the assassination. I forwarded this rumor to the Warren Commission and insisted that they check it out. I did not make a special or hurried trip to Washington for that purpose, but handled it on one of my numerous trips there during the Warren investigation. As you know, I, or my special counsels, sat in on almost all of the hearings

during the investigation. So far as anyone from Texas sitting in on the hearings was concerned, this rumor was explored and investigated and found to be false.

Texas was content - officially, at least, as was Washington and all its bureaucrats of all the agencies Oswald might have served. Only ordinary people were not. The suspicion lingers that Oswald had, in fact, been some kind of informant.

~~Strangely, the possibility seems to have been one of the fascinations of his mid-teen years.~~