

3/31/70

Dick and Howard, re Dick's 3/19s

Given the fact that you know neither Lifton nor Newcomb, your explanation is logical as hell and is no less reasonable to you than it would be to anyone not knowing them. Lifton, especially, is much more devious than you will (perhaps ever) know. He is bright enough and capable of anticipating exactly what you figured. If you doubt this, ask Gary, who has had his own shocks. There is a strange love-hate feeling Fred has, but he always winds up doing Dave's bidding. I can show you letters in which he brags about throwing him out of the house- more than two years ago. They contrive and invent things together. And Fred, although a boxer in his younger day and still built like it (also as of two years ago), is basically cowardly.

However, this now seems to be as good as it can be. We'll just have to wait and see. Dave may give it up or he may let it wait a while.

I read the letter at the P.O. early this a.m., before going to DC. I read your memo to Howard at supper. It is excellent, really great, particularly the first two paragraphs, which I encourage Howard to reread. The distinction between knowledge of forensic pathology and knowledge of the basic fact is a quite important one, too.

Your comment on p. 7: If this aspect interests Howard, it seems to me a safe form is Frazier's, which I quote in BW and can be found via the index. He disputed Specter on this being a high-velocity bullet and said it was of medium velocity. For a military rifle, Dick, do they come much slower?

Comment on p. 11: Sorry I didn't show Howard the Remington-Peters catalogue when he was here. I once suggested he get one, as he can from any sporting good store.

Re 18FF. I'm the last guy to disagree, having decided not later than April 1966 there was a front shot (too an ACLU lawyer to see it, little goof that his state of shock did) and having said so in WWII. However, and this is in no way disagreement with you, Paul is working on the opposite, and he a) knows the evidence and b) is a physicist. We'll see.

26. This is a significant statement, at least partly garbled, for Humes did not dictate the autopsy report.

Your suggestion at the top of p.3 is very good advice.

Re p. 30, all the pieces are not lost. I've got some of them and I'm getting more. As Howard knows. And you should have some ideas by now.

Phone, p. 4: would you consider the possibility that he had been told this guff about the cramping helping by one or more he trusted and believed, not having any idea of those things that make it impossible. I don't think he is stupid.

PS also very good and important for Howard to understand. He has recently had personal experience with the press! We differ in degree. I blame all of them.

I haven't even read the motion we filed today.

Didn't have time even to phone Archives today.

Best,

for Weirby

19 March 1970

Howard Roffman
Philadelphia

Howard:

Fillinger interviews

I have a few comments to make about these, but first I want to say something about the limitations of your use of statements by Fillinger or an other expert in special fields. Fillinger is a genuine, hipsey-pipsy, expert in forensic pathology; you gave gold in him, and you mine it well. Add to that his integrity, and you have not just gold, but high quality gold. But even the best gold has to be purified after you have extracted it. You are obliged seriously to consider whatever F says, for he is wise in ways that we are not, and he is honest. But you must also interpret what he says in light of failure to know all that pertains to the assassination, and in the light of his unconscious bias in assuming the truth of certain things that may not in fact be so.

F is an expert in forensic pathology, and you must consider what he says in that regard, but he is not an expert on the assassination, and you are not obliged to accept all that he says in that regard. He does not have expert knowledge on the assassination as a whole; he has, as it were, a layman's knowledge, so his comments on things that do not pertain specifically to pathological aspects may be badly faulted without your realizing it. In some cases I think this is true-- I'll point a few of these out. In any case, understand that you can override his judgment on non-medical matters, especially in instances where the judgment stems from misconstrued data.

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p.5... we have already been over the matter concerning the fragmentation of military ammo when it strikes soft tissue only, so I won't go into detail. As those matters apply to the case of the assassination there is no possibility for a bullet like 399 losing any fragment if it passes only through soft tissue. It is Full Metal Case, and it moves too slowly to break up without striking hard bone.

p.7... F8s definition of "high velocity" is arbitrary; the term means different things to different people, and different things in different situations. I recommend that you not use it, because it is vague, and tells nothing. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ The on-target velocity of bullets has enormous bearing on whether they break up in soft tissue, but that is not the only factor that has bearing. I advise not using the term because there are pitfalls in it for people who don't know about firearms-- it's too vague, and just doesn't mean anything when applied generally. Fillinger knows this, as his words indicate, but you should know it too.

p11... The problem of thinking of "a lead projectile with no jacket leaving these fragments" is that cast bullets (unjacketed) normally cannot be accurately fired at a high enough velocity to go into the kind of "dust" depicted on the X-rays. Moving a bullet at great velocity requires great heat and great pressure-- both of which tend to melt cast bullets in the barrel, not a lot, but it softens them enough to upset accuracy so that you cannot count of the bullet

p .27... In the same vein as ~~xxx~~ my previous note, I believe:
 "Suppose he was ordered by his superior officer not to include or to include certain other things which might or might not fit the theory that was presumed by the government?"

From the tenor of F's remarks generally, it appears that he prefers to be specific rather than to be vague. Keep an eye especially on those areas in which he is vague, for he seems to be talking in a way contrary to his nature.

p.29... You did not give F enough information regarding failure of autopsy docs to see front neck wound. The fault here is yours, for I think that F would not have considered it conceivable if you had emphasized what Fink said in L.O. about examining the margins of ~~xxxxxx~~ the traceotomy very carefully. You did not indicate that they saw the track, incision well enough to measure it within a half centimeter. You just did not give him all the information that is known. His answer is warranted on the basis of what you gave him, but you did not give him enough.

p30... among the best of all that F said is this: "you're stuck with a solution that you're not going to be able to find because the pieces are lost." There are gaps in information that render a final solution of the type you seek impossible. I say this not to discourage you, but just to emphasize the importance of knowing under what limitations you are working.

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Fillinger phone interview

p.1... I had regarded it so obvious that I ~~xxxxx~~ may never have mentioned it, but it seems impossible that JFM did not suffer rupture of a major artery in the neck. The Parkland docs describe great contusion and great hematoma; what else can it mean. Since there are several fragments in the neck, you must suppose that there are also several tracks emanating from the point where the bullet burst. I would be amazed if that kind of ballistic activity did not cause much contusion and bleeding.

p.2... what I now say does not apply to the assassination, but only to the question whether a 399 can lose fragments from the base. F is wrong when he asserts that it cannot. Lead is exposed there; if that lead brushes against anything hard, it may lose fragments from the base. This is perhaps more likely with a bullet like 399 than with other military rounds, for it is longer than most military rounds and is fired from a rifle with a relatively slow twist, so that the bullet spins a lot less rapidly than most other military rounds. The length of the bullet and its relatively slow rate of spin make it more unstable than others. When it enters flesh, the resistance further reduces the spin, and the 399 is three times more likely to tumble than other rounds which are shorter and spin faster. The gyroscopic effect of the spin keeps the bullet stable. When it loses spin it loses stability and may tumble. In tumbling, the base of the bullet may brush against something hard and deposit some of itself there.

p2... "Kennedy ballistics"? Surely F said "kinetic ballistics" and you transcribed incorrectly.

*agree
at what
what?*

p 4... In saying that cramped quarters work to a shooters advantage F is issuing a lot of crap which you should ignore. Nothing that he says in this passage makes any sense. I can't characterize it as anything but stupid. It may be that he had something else on his mind than what he says, but what he says is worse than ~~xxxxxxx~~ worthless. I won't try to speculate what he might have had in mind, for what he says is pur poppycock. From beginning to end.

p.5... Now, as (the bullet) strikes, it tends not only to throw the head forward, but to spin it to the left just like a cue shot, which can create the illusion of having the head thrown backward when in fact it is rotation." Illusion! You should have gone for the throat when you heard that word, for you and I and everyone who has seen Zapruder, Dix, and Buchare know that what happens is not illusion-- it is reality. In the films the head appears to move backward because in reality, the head did move backward. Illusion, my ass! Remember too what tink-tinks tend to forget (forget??), that it is not merely the head that moves backward, it is the whole torso, and that it moves back hard enough to cause that whole great weight to bounce off the back of the seat with about the same violence as it bounced into it. That is a lot of meat and bone to be pushed back a long distance simply by the rotation of a part of the moving unit-- and from a shot delivered from the rear, at that! You must forgive me if I regularly lapse into ridicule whenever I have thrust on me the consideration that that movement can have been caused by a shot from the rear-- under any circumstances. It's just that it seems to me to merit nothing but ridicule, and to consider it otherwise gives such notions a measure of credibility that is far in excess of what they deserve. My brother, who is learning Texan, passed me a Texan phrase that covers it: "They ain't no way".

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I have covered mostly matters of criticism here. When I re-read the interview I may write again to tell you what's good about the interview. Don't consider that these comments detract from my overall impression that you have struck a mother lode and are mining it well. The interview contains much that was previously known from others, but it's good to have fresh statements from an honest man. Congratulations on doing an excellent job. Keep Fillinger on your stringer, for he may help you in the future in ~~xxx~~ ways you may not now be able to imagine.

Still,

Dick

cc. Weisberg

P.S. You have Harold's comments on getting with Tom Kelly and others. Wasn't that a dandy? Do you remember that in my comments to you on Specter I said "whenever they push the panic button, we benefit"? Well, it looks like the SS is worried, for otherwise they would not have talked with Harold as they did. Worry them, worry them, worry them; the effect always brings us something good.

Press coverage of Harold's suit seems lousy, but that was not unexpected, however much it may have been wished for. Whatever you may think of corruption elsewhere, the really basic responsibility for what has happened, both in regard to the assassinations and in other regards, rests with the press. We expect military men to be warlike, ~~but~~ but in a good system of checks and balances they can be controlled; they live up to what we expect of them-- indeed, we have no warrant to expect anything else because, generally we want them to be that way. We expect, too, that business men will be greedy for gain, and that politicians will grasp for power by any means-- that is all right, really, for as part of a good system of checks and balances they should and do act that way; they cause no trouble because we expect them to behave as they do; by behaving that way they fit properly into a system of rivalry and competition. We expect the press to be truthful, in their own interest, for the exposure of scandal and corruption sells papers; that's all in the best and justest journalistic tradition; that those who don't seek truth merely for the sake of justice and honor will seek truth anyway, for money or for other reasons. That is the way it should be.

But the press has not fulfilled what we expect of it, and this is precisely why the system no longer functions properly. The checks and balances are upset, a whole new set of circumstances prevail; in fact, we are living under a new system and merely applying to its parts the names that formerly we applied to the old. It's bad news, for we deceive ourselves badly.

When it comes right down the line to blaming who is responsible, I do not blame those who shot Kennedy, I do not blame Warren and the Commission, I do not blame Specter and his ilk, I do not even blame J. Edgar Hoover. I blame the press.

I have Howard's 15 March letter to you re Filkin, et al and concur with most of his comments.

I really have to stop now. I'll try to write again soon.

19 March 1970

Dear Harold:

Re: Lifton and Roffman: The situation is this:

I had not been in touch with Lifton for a long time, but have maintained steady, though not frequent, correspondence with Newcomb. I mentioned to Fred that Roffman had interviewed Specter, and I outlined the tone of the interview-- I did not send him or anybody a copy of Roffman's memo, but roughly described Specter's reaction to being interviewed by someone who knew the case. I believe that I wrote that letter in longhand and do not have a copy (at least a quick look through recent mail discloses none), so I cannot recall details. I had written to Fred previously about Howard, and Howard had previously written to Fred for a copy of Zapruder.

Fred discussed my account of Roffman/Specter with Dave, and Dave subsequently wrote to me asking for Howard's address and phone number. I do not know whether it was before or after he learned about Roffman, but Lifton-- a short time before writing to me about Howard-- wrote with inquiries about Shaneyfelt/Zapruder N.O. testimonies. I think now that that may have been a come-on, a way of resuming discontinued correspondence before he got around to questioning about Howard-- I am not sure about that, but in retrospect it seems possible.

Anyway, Dave wrote and asked for Howard's address and phone. I responded that I would first ask Howard if he wanted to get in touch ~~with~~ with Dave, and I told Dave to sit and wait. (I suspect, too, that he previously asked for the address from Newcomb, who had it, but that Newcomb did not give it, for reasons similar to mine) I wrote to Howard, told him that Dave wanted to get in touch, and strongly advised Howard against it, or at least to treat Lifton with extreme caution. I also told Howard why. My letters to Howard on this were-- I believe-- in longhand, and I did not make copies, but I told Howard it was all right for him to tell you what I said of Lifton if you asked. My advice and warning to Howard were not unlike yours; in some ways I was even more severe than you.

Given the knowledge that Lifton knew that Howard was working in the field, and that eventually he would learn of Howard through others, even if he did not hear of him through Newcomb or me, I thought it best to go ahead and tell Howard what Dave wanted. I still think that that was the best thing to do, for if Dave had gotten to Howard by any other means-- and I think eventually he would have-- then Howard might have suffered any number of irreparable disasters by not being properly cautioned. In the present circumstances Howard's information about Lifton is a shield that I think will guard him even against the inevitable blandishments.

Even in retrospect I think that the present situation is better than any which might have arisen if Dave had gotten to Howard by other means.

Howard knows how Lifton stands with Liebeler, but I do not think he knows of Lifton's relationship with Thornley. Nor does he know from me the nature and extent of Thornley's involvement in the assassination. If he wants it, I'll send Howard the States-Item account of Thornley's N.O. grand jury testimony, which expands the published record on Thornley. To me, ~~it is enough~~ what is published is sufficient to indicate Thornley's illicit involvement in the case. That and other things fully convince me that Thornley was involved, and I am not likely to be influenced by Lifton's irrational pleas otherwise, no matter what I may pretend in order to cause Lifton to believe that I am undecided. (The same applies to Newcomb and his relationship with Bradley.)

So much for that. If Howard thinks that it was rash of me to mention his Speceter ~~XXXXXX~~ interview to Newcom, then I sincerely regret it, and apologise.

Lifton pushes hard enough so that eventually he would have gotten in touch with Howard. No contact at all would be best, but since I believe it was inevitable, I do not regret that it happened in this way. I have told Howard what sort of treatment to expect from Dave (that Dave will try to get gold in return for asshole droppings, and that he will seek to create friction between Howard and others-- especially in his relationship with you and me); when Dave lives up to that expectation-- as I am sure he will, and as you know he will-- the Howard will know better how to treat Dave, and he will know better who is likely to serve his interest and who is likely to injure it.

The experience has to come, and it has to be lived-- it's inevitable; I think that it is best for it to happen in this way than in any other.

Still,

cc. Roffman