

Mark Crouch
420 Single ave., Collins Park
New Castle, DL 19720

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Dear Mark,

The package came today when we were not home. It arrived in good condition. Thanks for it. When I was resting I read you chapter 12 and tomorrow I'll try to find time to make a few comments.

I write now to explain something. We have to have a consistent policy on the books and I can think of few exceptions. So we try to treat everyone alike and that means no freebees. However, from time to time we have books that are slightly damaged. We do not knowingly sell them. I have a Post Mortem with slight damage of the kind that not infrequently soon develops with use. So, I'm sending it and returning your check. If this is not satisfactory let me know.

In your letter you say you were convinced that the autopsy photos were not retouched until 1988-9, after you read High Reason and saw the KRON-TV 25th anniversary show. (Which, by the way, began with a strong preconception and steadfastly ignored all not in accord with this preconception.) But you do not say what leads you to believe they may have been retouched and you do not address the "why?" question Harry has not yet faced.

What I think you are saying on page 2 is that there were two conspiracies that actually were one, a conspiracy to kill and one to cover up. I know you do not explain or justify this so I ~~use~~ use it to see if I can get you to focus on whether you are really making an investigation or just theorizing. What proof do you have of any connection between those responsible for the killing and those for the covering up? Now do not misunderstand me on this. You have every right to believe whatever you want to believe, but when you are writing non-fiction you have the obligation to prove what you state as fact. You also have every right to theorize, but again there should be some substantiation, not just a belief based on suspicion.

Without long and detailed study of records of which you know nothing or personal experience within the agencies it is difficult if not impossible to perceive what I believe is the actuality, that the initial coverup was spontaneous within the executive agencies and was not ordered from any central point.

What is there to rule out that your three groups, same page, were not in fact one? I am not saying they were or were not. My point is that you do not even suggest factual support for what you say. In the penult graf you say that those responsible for the crime, who could have been from the CIA to the mafia, which I question, "could ~~have~~ manage the coverup by paying on the (patriotic) motives of those employed by the government." I want to get you attention on this, so please excuse my bluntness. This is more like a novel than non-fiction. Can you imagine a conspiracy that requires a coverup proceeding without advance

assurance that there would be a coverup? Which would actually mean a fairly large number of agency employees willing to risk being charged with a felony to support the crime?

You can conjecture who provided the shooters but honesty and responsibility also requires that you establish at least a reasonable basis for the belief. I do not think you can, other than in theorizing as a novelist. My own belief is that there is not only no evidence of any mafia involvement, there is no reasonable basis for suspecting there was. People weave attractive fictions about the mafia without knowing anything at all about it. More, what basis do you have other than a willingness to believe it for saying that the CIA could have provided the shooters? Do you really know anything about the CIA or are you merely adopting what you have heard others say? There has been much loose and imaginative writing about both the CIA and the mafia all of which I know by people who pretended to knowledge and expertise they did not have.

I think you had for trouble at the top of page 3 in saying that your research had centered on McGeorge Bundy. What factual basis do you have for focusing on him? I do mean factual, not suspicions based for example on what Fletcher Prouty thinks? What I am again trying to do is get you to realize that you are theorizing not researching and that you are closer to preparing a novel than a work of non-fiction.

There are many, many people and forces who could have seen benefit for them or for their beliefs in killing JFK but they did not all do and I do not know of any basis you have for including or eliminating one of these people or forces.

I began with the belief that it might be possible to think this through to some kind of solution on the "who benefits?" line. This is what I called the epilogue I added to my second book toward the end of 1966. But as time went on I realize that there are just too many and the one thing that is possible from this approach might be eliminating some.

You conclude by asking if I "feel the evidence in the Archives has been tampered with since its deposit there?" and could Ramsey Clark have been involved. The latter a firm no. The first part is more complicated than you realize.

To a degree I addressed this question in my second book but not in the sense you ask it, of altering the evidence. Some just disappeared and was not replaced. I regret to say that people who have access to my records and my copier also steal records here. It does happen, alas. As I think about this question and what you have in mind in it I think you lack the most basic understanding required for mature and responsible writing on this subject: the crime itself was never investigated officially, was never intended to be investigated officially, and thus there is no basis in fact in the official "investigation" for conducting any real investigation and there is no reason to believe that there are official "smoking gun" records that are hidden. Without doubt, much remains hidden. But I believe mostly if not entirely to avoid official embarrassment. Some maybe just to harass researchers.

I used a highlighter last evening when I read your "Reevaluation of Best Evidence."

Because I am not going to proceed with that at this moment I think perhaps an explanation of how I have to live now might be helpful and can explain what may be or appear to be jumping around. I do not have time to rewrite now. But since World War II I've been an early riser, even though I began working on a morning newspaper, and since the open-heart surgery I awaken wide awake too early. This morning about 1:45 (now two ~~hours~~ hours later) and there is nothing I can do about it. When I lay this aside I'll go out to the end of the lane for the morning papers and when I finish with them usually leave for early-morning walking, about 5 or a little earlier or later, howm every other day about 7. Three days a week, like this morning, I have blood tests from which I return about 8. I go there after walking. Assuming no weather problems. Today perhaps cold/

This is to say that as a practical matter I cannot work with real continuity and should interrupt it more often for medical reasons. I am to sit with my legs elevated but also to walk around a bit every 20 minutes or so. Today I have an additional chore, I'm wearing a Holter heart monitor and will be for 72 hours, returning to the cardiologists daily for a new tape be be inserted. This requires some note-~~mark~~ making and I think you can undertsnad, in its own kind of intrusion into concentration.

So, often there is jumping around. Sometimes this is from haste or my own lack of clarity. Some times it comes from my willingness to try to be helpful to others when I really do not have time for that. As in the time I'm taking for this because I would like to be able to be helpful to you. I do not promise always to take this time, as I think you can understand. I do not have time for the work I'd like to do when I have the energy.

The first sentence of the third graf of your chapter 12 reflects a lack of knowledge of the factual assassination writing as distinguished from theoretical works. So, you say that "...Lifton has made some significant contributions to the ongoing critics investigation..." I ask you to tell me a single fact that appears for the first time in Best Evidence. Unless you regard his untenable theory he presents as fact as really factual. Has he, on other than his own self-promotions, ever done any real work that brought what was factual and new to light since he first published this book?

What do you mean by what you do not define, and I mean this question for your own thinking: "ongoing critics investigation," you use the singular?

First who do you have in mind and second what are they really investigating, if they in fact are investigating at all? All the idle thinking about the writing of others, from the mafia exploited to the fine Fletch "routy, is not investigating at all. all the stuff that goes on at such conferences as Jerry Rose just held is not investigating.

Now in your letter you refer to the value and importance of the records I've forced the government to disgorge. If they are important, and I think they are, how is it that not a single one of the so-called critics has ever made any real search in any of them for anything at all and only a few had any interest at all in these documents? Critics are they?

the word is inappropriate and amounts to a mutual deception because people like you think that the others have done real research based on which you are justified in taking their word when there is no such basis for trust and confidence. Virtually without exception those you refer to as critics are not investigators but are theorists and when they do investigate it is to try to support their own preconceptions or destroy those of others with whom they disagree.

As I recall, your criticism of Lifton is more than justified and is rational and reasonable. It is far less than you could have said. I'll resume with that when I can.

Later, I think your first-person experiences and observations are worthwhile but if you had been in a position to make a real analysis of that dreadful book by that awful and unscrupulous person it would have been devastating. It is what I did on this that I think Rick stole for Lifton when the ~~MM~~ records disappeared. And by going into some of the details you do you in effect dignify the book and Lifton. The plain and simple truth is that he knew he was laying at each step as he made his theory up and willed it in his own mind into reality. I think that when we spoke and when I read the rest of the paragraph of the Sibert-O'Neill report that mentions surgery of the head I went into some of those areas so I won't repeat them.

What you got from Terry Starr is quite interesting. I knew they had been a dispute over the payment for that casket and that payment or return had been delayed. There is a weakness in Starr's argument, however, when considered with what I think Lifton actually said, that the body bag was used at Walter Reed. If this is correct, and I'm not sure, then the casket would have been soiled when the body was placed in it at Parkland. However, the body never left that casket, except in Lifton's ~~delusional~~ fantasy.

Whatever Dennis David believes, the back fate was securely locked and the guard removed at about 4 p.m. as a crowd-control measure. Nobody could use it. Period.

On the next page you quote Lifton on "the time is critical." So critical he had to omit. He phoned me after I'd read the book. I did not want to get into details with him or waste time in any kind of argument so I said only that his reconstruction does not permit time for the taking of pictures and X-rays. He insisted it did. I asked him to explain that. He said the autopsy did not begin until about 10. I asked his source and he said Ebersole.

But the central point here is that all he says is impossible without going into the minutiae of his concoction. With good subject-matter knowledge of established fact rather than the theories often misunderstood and treated as fact the overwhelming nature of the total disproof is clear.

The absence of page number means I can't cite them. You refer to "a brief 8 minute window when the casket was unattended" on AF1. Not so. There was never a time it was unattended. While I have no reason to believe that all of those in the JFK party were at any time away from the body, there is no reference to the Secret Service. They were so intent

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on never leaving it even at Bethesda one agent was always with it.

You make it explicit a few pages later that it is either/or in saying that you found it hard to decide "whether the assassination was concealed by altering the body or by altering the photos." I challenge you to produce a single solid proof that there was either or that there was any need for either. There wasn't. Which gets back to the question Harry still has not been able to answer.

In the next graf on this page you refer to Moe Weitzman "who originally processed the photos from the film that appeared in Life magazine in late 1989." I did not see those still and I'm interested in anything you can let me have on this, for archival purposes. But at that time Life had reverted the film to the Xapruder heirs, who put it in the Archives. Of course, Life could have had access there but I think it not unlikely that Weitzman worked with what Life had on file, which is quite a bit. And if altering the X film is what Lifton has in mind, he'll get his head bashed in because there are too many copies kicking around and they'd all have to be doctored,

On next to the last page you say that "Paul O'Connor is a reliable source of information that the body comes out of the shipping coffin." "One of this is true and again you have been taking in by theories and induced lies in support of them. You'll get the Sibert-O'Neill report with this." And that "surgery" paragraph.

On the last page you say that "Best Evidence brings out some interesting points...." So I challenge you to come up with what I cannot remember, a single new fact as distinguished from his totally untenable theory.

Your next graf asys that "much" of what Lifton uses comes from normal anomalies. This is trivial compared with the truth: 100% of Best Evidence that was not previously published depends entirely on Lifton's fabrications not a single one of which is proven and all of which he knew could not be true.

Lifton was not even right on that one thing, that the body is the best evidence. I published that in 1976, he repeated it.

There is not much published that is other than theorizing but you need to become familiar with what has been published. Besides my work try to obtain copies of Meagher's magnificent "Accessories after the Fact" and Howard Roffman's "Presumed Guilty." It is not so much that either has much of what I'd not published as it is the excellent manner in which each of them handled the same info. You'll wind up with junk if you use any of the theories and you seem to have familiar with them and little or nothing else. So you first have to know what the established fact is and now you'll have trouble cleansing your mind from the theory infection. Much of what you treat as fact is theorized and isn't so.

Being able to distinguish fact from theory, which means fiction, is not easy in this field, particularly not after a heavy diet of this fiction/theorizing. But without do that responsible writing is impossible at book length dependable as your first-hand stuff is.

I've taken this time and length in the hope of being helpful. Ordinarily I can't. Thank, good luck and best wishes,