

Pat Lambert

Dear Paul,

11/21/79

Thanks for the mailing that included the Pat Lambery "The Secret Service at Dealey Plaza" and the Lifton Secret Service request related in the memo of transfer.

I'm sorry Lifton didn't see fit to provide Jim or me with copies of what he obtained for as he knew this was our project and the records are relevant. They have not been provided and I'm sending copies to Jim. The records are relevant to my memo of transfer request, discovery material not provided by the Archives (or given to Howard under his request with my waiver) and to my PA requests of all agencies involved.

The Lambert thing is an atrocity. It is not rational or reasonable, distorts, exaggerates, is ^{based} ~~based~~ on a known inaccuracy in what Clint Hill is quoted as having said, the impossible (like taking evasive action in a cul de sac, a la Manchester), and ignores all human considerations.

It is a grossly unfair attack on the Secret Service, which tends to exculpate it for its real sins, and defames us all.

I regret very much that people are impelled to such atrocities. Whatever their motives it is the kind of thing that I presume you know by now is used with great effectiveness throughout the Government to malign us all and as an excuse for non-disclosure of information. Alleged fear of the East is explicit in the records Lifton did get.

Evica reportedly obtained an FBI record allegedly connecting Ruby with Marcelllo. I have not seen it. I have asked DJ for it.

Best,

THE SECRET SERVICE AT DEALEY PLAZA

Another government report pulls its punches
by Pat Lambert

In an extraordinary public appearance in December 1975 on the television program 60 Minutes, Secret Service Agent Clint Hill broke down and cried. He had just told Mike Wallace how the Secret Service could have saved President Kennedy at Dealey Plaza. According to Clint Hill if he "had reacted about (5/10's) 3 of a second faster" he would have reached President Kennedy before the fatal shot and taken the bullet himself.(1) Since Hill was the only key agent who did his job that day, his unsparing personal assessment is ironic.¹ It is also the only entirely honest commentary on the Secret Service performance in Dallas to come out of Washington in the 15 years since President Kennedy's murder.

That performance fell dramatically short of the mark, yet two government investigations have managed to minimize its failure. The Warren Report tiptoed around the problem and finally concluded that the Secret Service agents themselves had "reacted promptly at the time the shots were fired," that it was the "configuration of the Presidential car and the seating arrangements" that prevented the agent nearest the President from reaching him in time.(2) A remarkable combination of newspeak

1. He probably saved Mrs. Kennedy's life by pushing her off the trunk into the back seat; and although two other agents were closer, Hill was the only one who made any real effort to reach the President.

and creative writing that the Report recently released by the House Select Committee on Assassinations could hardly equal. Still, in spirit and intent, this new evaluation is a chip off the same bureaucratic block.

It first raises our expectations by concluding that the Secret Service over-all "was deficient in the performance of its duties," then immediately lowers them again in its discussion of the evidence.(3) Most of that is devoted to how certain threats received by the Protective Research Section (the agency's memory bank) were handled before the assassination. What happened on Elm Street during the shooting, what the agents accompanying the President actually did, and why they did it is covered in one and one-half pages. Actually covered is an extravagant term for the skimpy assessment presented here.

Slapdash rundown is more precise, one that relies heavily on the old record assembled by the Warren Commission. That dependence on 15-year-old data suggests what the text confirms-- where the actions of the Secret Service at Dealey Plaza were concerned, this Committee was unwilling or unprepared to stake out any new ground, to confront any of the fundamental questions that were side-stepped by the Warren Commission originally and have persisted all these years.

It does give us a new alibi, however. Unlike the Warren Commission's inventive indictment of the Presidential car, the loophole it provides is straightforward and serviceable, one that's applicable across the board to all the agents concerned:

The Committee concluded that Secret Service agents in the motorcade were inadequately prepared for an attack by a concealed sniper.(4)

Training and regulations were at fault, not individual responses.

Driver William Greer, for instance, failed to take "evasive action" because his "instructions were to act only at the judgment of the agent in the right passenger seat (Roy Kellerman), who had general supervisory responsibilities..." Greer, the Report contends, "should have been given the responsibility to react instantaneously on his own initiative..."(5) What Greer would have done differently acting on his own we aren't told.

That doesn't really matter because the argument is specious, unsupported by Secret Service written guidelines, and contradicted by testimony from an agency spokesman. The relevant rule set forth in the Secret Service document outlining principles of Presidential protection states:

The driver of the President's car should be alert for dangers and be able to take instant action when instructed or otherwise made aware of an emergency. (emphasis added) (6)

There is no question that Greer was "made aware" of the emergency situation at Dealey Plaza. He told the Warren Commission that after the second shot he saw Governor Connally starting to fall and that he knew the President was "injured in some way."

Secret Service Inspector Thomas J. Kelley, in his testimony to this Committee, made it clear what Greer's "instant action" should have been. When asked about Greer's instructions, Kelley said:

...generally the instructions to the drivers of the cars are to be prepared to get the President away from any dangerous situation.(7)

"Evasive action" wasn't needed. All Greer had to do to get the President "away" from Dealey Plaza was step on the gas; but in fact the car slowed down.² Why? Did Greer receive "instructions" to slow it? Or did he do that on his own initiative?"

2. Exactly when this slowdown occurred is unclear. Some witnesses place it before the final shot, while others (including the Warren Report) say it happened after.(8)

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Anyone who doubts Greer was aware of the situation behind him should take a long hard look at the Zapruder film. It shows how Greer used those precious moments while he was supposedly waiting for Roy Kellerman to evaluate the situation and tell him what to do. Just before the fatal shot struck President Kennedy in the head, Greer turned full around in his seat and he was facing that direction when the fatal bullet found its mark. Just why Greer made that quick, complete turn to the rear and what he saw (it would appear he had a singular view of the shot that changed our political history) remains a mystery--Greer denies he did what the film indisputably shows him doing. He claims he only glanced over his shoulder and never turned around far enough to see the President.

Very unfair

The Report makes no effort to examine what Greer actually did at Dealey Plaza, but it would have us believe this: while the President was being assassinated a few feet away, as shots rang out, Governor Connally shouted, and spectators screamed, William Greer sat behind the wheel of the Presidential limousine for more than eight full seconds, his hands tied by the rules, waiting for instructions from his superior.

That interpretation of Greer's failure to react is at odds with common sense, the agency's own guidelines and the unambiguous statement of Inspector Kelley that in case of danger to the President the driver's instruction "is to get the President out of there..."(9)

Roy Kellerman, Senior Agent in Charge. This poor man has enough to answer for without being unfairly saddled with the responsibility for the driver's inaction as well. Sitting in the

How?

right front seat of the Presidential car, Kellerman represented Jack Kennedy's single best hope for survival.

Once the firing began, it was Kellerman's "primary function" to remain "in close proximity to the President," as this Report expresses it.(10) That means it was up to him to see that the so-called defense of last resort was carried out, to use his own body as a human shield, if necessary, to protect the President. Kellerman, of course, did no such thing and this Report is blunt about that, saying Kellerman took no action "to cover the President with his body, although it would have been consistent with Secret Service procedure for him to have done so."(11) Why he didn't the Report doesn't say, nor does it say what he did instead.

We know from the Zapruder film and Kellerman's own testimony that he turned around before the fatal shot and saw the President was wounded. At that moment if he had vaulted into the back seat and pushed the President down, out of the line of fire, Jack Kennedy probably would have survived. Instead Kellerman decided to radio for an escort to a hospital because the President "needed medical treatment."(12) An explanation so inane it would be laughable if the consequences of Kellerman's "decision" weren't so grim. Within seconds the fatal shot struck making any "medical treatment" superfluous.

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Did Kellerman really make a deliberate decision not to go to the President's aid? Did he really think it more important to make that radio call? Why is the testimony about that call so vague and contradictory? Why, for instance, does Greer's first FBI interview say he placed it?

Kellerman claimed he started the call before the fatal shot and that while he was talking the final "flurry of shells came into the

car."(13) Why, then, wasn't his transmission heard in the follow-up car? On the contrary, after the last shot was fired, the agent in charge of that car felt compelled to make precisely the same call himself; and he contacted the same agent Kellerman claims he called, Winston Lawson, the advance man riding in the lead car in front of the Presidential limousine.(14) Yet Lawson mentions only one radio message; it came after the shots were fired, exactly when is unclear, and the source isn't identified.(15) If two calls were made, why did Lawson receive only one? Did the call he receive come from Kellerman or from the follow-up car?

There is little in the rest of Kellerman's testimony to inspire confidence. In an early statement to the FBI (later denied) Kellerman claimed he saw the President reaching for his back, a movement that never occurred.(16) He also maintained the President spoke after the firing began, something else that never occurred.³

Just as President Kennedy had the right to expect Kellerman's help, we have the right to know why Kellerman failed him. Was it just a matter of poor judgment? Or a failure of will perhaps? Or was it something else? The Warren Commission understood the necessity of explaining Kellerman's inaction and went to some length to improve on his rationale. It claimed the design of the vehicle and the passengers in the jump seats prevented him from

3. Kellerman's first FBI interview has the President saying, "Get me to a hospital." Though ridiculously improbable, if the President had given such a verbal command, Kellerman could have claimed he was following an executive order when he turned away from the stricken President and reached for the radio. (Kellerman later claimed the President said, "My god, I've been hit," and denied giving the earlier version to the FBI.)(17)

going into the back, even though Kellerman, himself, categorically rejected that suggestion.(18)

This Committee gives us no reason at all, nor does it comment on the Warren Commission's invention, or Kellerman's own excuse; it ignores both equally. That may advance candor by one notch in this instance, but it still leaves the public with an important piece of the puzzle missing.

President Kennedy as scapegoat. The Report's effort to clear the agents of any individual responsibility produces one statement that can only be described as embarrassing:

Had the agents assigned to the motorcade been alert to the possibility of sniper fire they possibly could have convinced the President to allow them to maintain protective positions on the rear bumper of the Presidential limousine and both shielded the President and reacted more quickly when the attack began.(19)

The convoluted, subjunctive mood used here suggests that while the author was thinking about it, he was somewhat reluctant to blame President Kennedy for the way things turned out in Dallas; but the next sentence leaves no doubt about his real convictions:

The committee recognized, however, that President Kennedy consistently rejected the Secret Service's suggestions that he permit agents to ride on the rear bumper of the Presidential limousine...(20)

The message is clear--if only Kennedy had let the agents ride where they wanted to ride, they could have done their job that day.

The Report is certainly justified in pointing out why no agents were riding on the President's car; but it is deliberately misleading to imply that distance alone prevented the outside men on the follow-up car from reaching the President in time. That simply isn't the case.

Clint Hill estimated that after the turn onto Elm Street

only about five feet separated the Presidential limousine and the Secret Service follow-up car.(21) This Committee established that a full 8.3 seconds elapsed between the first shot and the fatal head shot. With that much time the Secret Service didn't need a Bruce Jenner on the outside of the follow-up car in order to reach the President before the fatal shot. Any one of the four men, reacting soon enough, might have made it; certainly the two on either side of the front could have. Why none of them did, why only one came close, is a question any examination of the Secret Service performance in Dallas must deal with. The awkward passage quoted above is this Committee's effort to do that.

The real answer lies in the way the scanning duties are compartmentalized and in the conduct of one particular agent. The outside men had specific areas they were supposed to watch and, as Inspector Kelley told this Committee, their assignments actually required them "to be looking away from" the President.(22) Only one agent was responsible for watching "straight ahead"--Shift Leader Emory Roberts, riding in the right front seat of the follow-up car, who was in charge of this group of men.(23)

Emory Roberts' written statement dated November 29, 1963, clearly states he saw the President's movement as he reacted to the first shot.(24) That movement was also noticed by Presidential Aide Dave Powers, who was directly behind Roberts, and it prompted Powers to tell Kenneth O'Donnell (sitting beside him) that he thought the President was hit; when Clint Hill caught the same movement an instant later, it caused him to break for the Presidential limousine.

Roberts, on the other hand, did nothing. He shouted no alarm, made no effort whatever to alert his outside men that the President might need their help until after the fatal head shot. That's why Clint Hill reacted 5/10's of a second too late; and why John Ready, who was right beside Roberts and closer to the President than Hill, only managed to take a few forward steps before the head shot impacted, making all effort an empty gesture.

The photographic analysis cited by the Committee that showed some agents "were beginning to react approximately 1.6 seconds after the first shot" obviously doesn't refer to Roberts.(25) For some reason, his reaction time was 8.3 seconds plus.

Instead of acknowledging the machinations of the scanning operation and Emory Robert's unfulfilled responsibility, this Report bemoans the fact that agents weren't permitted on the Presidential car, suggesting that Jack Kennedy was the real culprit.

Carrying on the tradition. Fifteen years ago the Warren Commission was determined to reassure the American people about everything, including the Secret Service; and this Report carries on that paternalistic tradition like a kindly uncle obligated to say something comforting to the children at graveside. Just listen:

The Committee found that, consistent with the protective procedures and instructions they had been given, the Secret Service agents performed professionally and reacted quickly to danger...(26)

Professionally? Quickly? Who? The Report doesn't say; the words are meant to sooth, not to inform. And that's not the end of it; there's more:

Although the conduct of the agents was without firm direction and evidenced a lack of preparedness, the Committee found that many of the agents reacted in a positive, protective manner.(27)

Positive? Protective? Many? That fanciful claim is supported by a recitation of the actions of two agents, neither of whom was assigned to President Kennedy (Clint Hill, assigned to Mrs. Kennedy and Thomas Lem Johns, assigned to Lyndon Johnson). What about the agents guarding the President that day? Where were

they when the guns went off? What did they do that was "positive" or "protective"?

Tucked away in one of its footnotes is a sweet bit of wisdom the Committee should have applied to its text on the Secret Service: "There is virtue in seeing something for what it is, even if the plain truth causes discomfort."(28) If there's one thing we've all gotten use to in recent years its the "discomfort" of unpleasant facts. The plain truth is just what we're asking for; and it seems to be about time someone realized we're up to it.

In the Introduction he wrote for the Bantam edition of this Report, Committee Chief Counsel, G. Robert Blakey, made the following remark:

It was a sobering experience for me to discover failures by our government to the degree that we set out in this Report. The failures were so sobering that some members of the Committee were not willing to carry the conclusions out to the full force of the evidence.(29)

It's impossible to know what government "failures" Mr. Blakey had in mind when he wrote those lines, but the shoe does seem to fit the Secret Service--it certainly failed at Dealey Plaza. The Report acknowledges that much. Yet the real case is never developed. The record is not presented, the obvious questions are not asked, and the conclusion reached--that the agents were merely inadequately prepared for sniper fire--in no way represents the "full force of the evidence."

Conspiracy. This Report's analysis of the JFK assassination communicates a double message throughout. It cries wolf but in a muffled voice hoping not to disturb anyone. It presents acoustical evidence implicating a second shooter that leads to a finding of conspiracy, then it dismisses that conspiracy as politically and socially unimportant (Oswald and friend(s) got lucky). A strange tactic

this unflagging effort to belittle its own findings. Strange, and in the long run, unsuccessful. For despite all its caution, its understatement, its obvious reluctance to do so, this Committee has jarred the ugly conspiratorial door. And who can say where the conspiracy to murder President Kennedy left off?

The Report seems to exonerate everyone, naming and acquitting them, one after another--the Soviet Government; the Cuban Government; anti-Castro Cuban groups; and the national syndicate of organized crime. But don't miss the small print. In the case of the last two, the vindication applies only to the group as a unit and "does not preclude the possibility that individual members may have been involved."

Of course, the clean bill of health extended to the Secret Service, the FBI and the CIA that proclaims they "were not involved in the assassination" stands alone, without that qualifying tag line. But isn't it there anyway, an unstated but obvious fact of life? How can anyone vouch for all the individuals employed by those agencies?

In the discussion absolving the Secret Service of involvement, no mention is made of the performance of the White House Detail during the shooting. Why not? What difference does it make how clean the agency's hands are regarding trip planning and the route taken by the motorcade if we are left with unresolved questions about the non-reaction of the three key agents who were charged with the President's protection that day?

Isn't it reasonable to wonder whether a sophisticated plot to assassinate President Kennedy could have penetrated that circle of men who guarded his life? Doesn't the ubiquitous passivity

that seems to have paralyzed the Secret Service during those crucial 8.3 seconds give us cause to wonder?

References

1. 60 Minutes transcript, December 8, 1975
2. Warren Report, pp24-25; 452-453.
3. HSCA Report, p 227
4. Id, p 234
5. Id, p 235
6. III HSCA 452
7. Id, p 328
8. Warren Report, p641;19H467;22H838;6H233;22H845;3H266;24H533;22H641;CD897p20;6H294;6H309;CD897p35;Taped interview 4/65(Holland);22H838;6H209;7H291;18H750;CD205p26;CD206p9;3H221;CD1245p44;2H43,45;
9. III HSCA 328
10. HSCA Report, p 235
11. Id, p 234,235
12. 2H104
13. Id, p 74
14. 18H735
15. 4H353
16. Warren CD 7, p 7
17. Id, pp3,7; 2H92,93
18. Warren Report, pp 24-25, 452-453; and 2H104
19. HSCA Report, p 235
20. Ibid
21. 2H138
22. HSCA III 338
23. 5H453
24. 18H734-735
25. HSCA Report, p 235
26. Id, p 234
27. Id, p 235
28. Id, p 95
29. HSCA Report, Bantam edition, Introduction (unnumbered)

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