

6/9/69

Dear Dick,

Finally, after sleeping later than usual, I began rereading COUP this morning, preparatory to writing the addition. So, I'll be brief.

Your letter of 6/6 arrived this a.m. The first paragraph reads as though you had read my mind, of the letter I had just written you. On it and everything else about the cases, etc., we agree....And how I would love, in AGENT OSWALD, to say that one of the evidences he both offered and ignored of conspiracy show Hoover's incompetence or error and is not an evidence of conspiracy, although I, trusting him, had so said!

From what you say, one of the possible explanations of the absence of blowback marks on the test cases might be the absence of any propellant charge or the coincidence of what I'd not suspect, insufficient charge, old stuff.

I skip to your concluding paragraph, for it fascinates in its own way. I have forgotten who, but I think Paul Hoch or one of his friends, made a study that shows about six different versions of that issue of LIFE with the Oswald cover picture. Now I have one in which that figure in the background is very clear, in fact, this is clear past the second generation. Larry Schiller took a LIFE cover for Liebel, make a negative of it, blew that up almost to LIFE size, then a picture of that on display was taken, and then that was printed in the UCLA newspaper. Through all of this, that woman is clear. I also have official copies where she is. There is no doubt of the person. I have copies where the brushing also is clear. I'd like to borrow your cover sometime, for this would indicate that LIFE at one time also did some other touchingup.

Thompson is as he was from the first, a fink. He is not alone in an evil trading on Sylvia's name and a more-than-earned reputation for incorruptibility and painstaking accuracy. Epstein has done the same in "Counterplot". In my few letters to others on this, I've dubbed him Epsteink. In any event, this was an area in which she could not check his accuracy. On the other hand, Thompson from the first pretended he was something else, not a critic, that the critics and their work were wrong, etc. Sylvia has one of the best minds. That she was taken by both is, I think, a reflection of her denied maternal instincts. She might have made the Yiddische Mama to end all, which is neither adverse criticism nor a nasty creek. However, she should have detected some of the more open thieveries and dishonesties in his text. And it is true that they were close. Without intending to, I am certain, she leaked some of my unpublished material to him. She would never do this on purpose. It is, too, a burden to have to remember what can and cannot be said. I have invited her to come here when she has time. I did this in March. She indicated she might during the summer. If she wants, I will then show her other things in Thompson, where his dishonesty shows.

I caution you again Newcomb, as a person and his work. Last Train is horrible. Ask Gary, for I have reason to say so, he doesn't. It is my work that turned Fred on. He told me this in ~~7/8~~ 11/67, when I spent a week with him. And what he had done when he accurately detected my suspicions pleased and impressed me. I'll show it to you when you are next here. However, as time passed and I had

a chance to check it out, it collapsed. That is, some did. Some is solid. What he did for me (now part of his slides) on the Oswald-rifle picture is very solid. He has carried this forward well as far as he has gone but he and his photographer friend have missed the technical things you'd not have expected them to. Of course, we all miss things. Now, there is no doubt of the alteration of the Willis film and its misrepresentation. Both LIFE and ITEK confirm my original observation, that it shows a man on the knoll. But Fred's evidence is not good. That a train was there means nothing unless we have the whole story of the train. The tree was not altered as he says. He compares what cannot be, pictures taken from different positions, with different lenses. What had originally impressed me, his belief that the mullions on the pergola were altered, I now find simple explanation for (enlargement and sun and shadow). More than one train is known to have been there. I mention at least one in the first book. But to use this in connection with the walking-man pictures is unwarranted, especially because everything thus far said of them ~~is~~ does not make sense and is opposed to what we can establish. His attack on Sprague is not fair, especially because of the correspondence he was carrying on simultaneously. Why not check with Gary about this and the work itself, because Fred is carrying on a rotten, and dishonest campaign against me and I think it not best that you listen to me. I'd prefer that you not so that none of these poor souls can later torture it. They do this regularly. Gary recounts some in a letter also received today. Let me make this general observation: the only dependable work in Calif is by Paul, Hal and Jim in the Bay area. Paul is an ultraconservative scholar in his approach, Jim has brilliant suspicions and follows them solidly, and Hal, who is now busier than he was, combined elements of both and has been very helpful to me, as the others also have. I think you will be well advised to say nothing you wouldn't want proclaimed in Times Square to any of the others and would be better advised to give them as little as possible in writing for they have an inexhaustible capacity for twisting and misusing.

I've been phoning Tom for an hour. His line stays busy. If I hear that he hasn't sent the Archives pictures, I'll add a note. Sorry to inflict the typos on you. No time. One other thing on Fred: He tried to sell me on the idea that the entire Z film was remade immediately, and he believed it.

Best,

6 June 1969

Harold Weisberg

Dear Harold:

I have your letters of 29 May to Schoener and 4 June to me and Nichols. My previous letter undoubtedly gave the impression of "bubble burst" attitude. Though true, that applies only to my initial notions about the significance of the dents, for I thought there was a solid and important case there. I have not at all lost interest, however, and plan to carry the matter as far as it will go. It is just that I feel uncomfortable writing about matters that I cannot definitely resolve. We have found serious discrepancies in Frazier's testimony and in his exhibits. It is of great value to know what they are, but it bothers me that I do not know what they mean. I agree, Frazier does not make mistakes without purpose, but I do not know what the purpose is. What we found out about CEs 562 and 564 in itself justifies our efforts, for it casts justifiable suspicion on all of his pictures of the microscopic marks, and should be a great help to Nichols, but it makes no sense to me-- I would like to know why he did this. I am learning things as I go along, and something may turn up in books that I shall soon get, but presently there is only confusion.

I was waiting for the archives photos before writing in detail about the cartridge cases, but I can now say something tentatively. Understand that the observation of photographs is the least suitable basis for making definite assertions-- there is no substitute for direct examination.

The three evidence cases seem to have marks on the brass that are the result of blow-back. I do not see such marks on the two test cases. Again, I can't imagine why. The marks on the primers of all the cases correspond well enough to indicate that they were all subjected to the same pressure. Supposing that Frazier was indeed hiding something, I can suggest but one possibility, something that cannot be determined except by direct microscopic examination of the evidence and test cases. It may be that the evidence cases were previously fired and reloaded-- i.e., that they were subjected to blow-back twice. That is a possibility, although I myself tend to doubt it. Reloading the cases involves replacing the fired primers with live primers. My recollection of the general nature of the primers on the evidence cases and the tests is that they are the same-- that is, of the same manufacture. These are Berdan primers which are no longer made, for they contain a corrosive priming mixture which can be very damaging to barrels if they are not cleaned soon after firing. It would be foolish to re-load cases with such primers, even dangerous, for the only way you can get such primers is to remove them from unfired cases. Reloads almost certainly would be primed with modern primers.

I gather from books that I have been reading that it is the normal procedure to base identifications on marks that occur on the primers, for the primer takes such marks more readily than the brass. But as far as I can determine, the brass of high powered rifle cases also is marked-- always, I think.

As I said, this stuff causes me nothing but confusion. I resist discussing it for fear of imparting my confusion to others. Let it go for a while, until I see the other pictures and think about it some more.

I already mentioned to you what I thought was the cause of the three sets of marks on the base of CE 543-- the marks that the FBI could not explain, and which Joseph Nicol said might have been caused by another rifle than CE 139. I'll write up a memo on this and explain the whole thing, for I think there was a legitimate source of error. It was only by accident that Nichols and I stumbled on what appeared to be the true cause. Criticism of Joseph Nicol is unjustified in this matter; he told as much about them as he could possibly know under the faulted conditions of his examination (he did not have access to the rifle, and could not run tests of his own). Nicol was right in asserting that they were made by the extractor, but wrong in his speculation why the marks do not appear on the other cases; he was wrong because he did not understand how cartridges are normally chambered in the ~~fi~~ rifle. Even though they had the rifle, I think the FBI can be partially excused, too. Your criticism of the Commission lawyer is justified, however, for he had no warrant to make it appear that the marks represent evidence of Oswald practicing rapid ~~throx~~ action with the bolt. Nor should he have ignored the marks.

In time I'll get out a memo on this matter, for otherwise we may linger under the mistaken notion that CE 543 came in contact with another rifle. If that is the situation, I think it will have to be proved by another means than these marks.

Josiah Thompson explained that he did not see the case mouth dent on Frazier's test. I sent him my memo and, later, a letter in response to his explanation (which I do not believe). His latest indicates that I have offended him-- not that anything in the memo is untrue, but the tone of my letter was ungentlemanly (I had tried to exercise restraint, but I guess the notion got through that I think he deserves a kick in the balls).

Sylvia Meagher is now concerned about Thompson's work. At her request, I sent her copies of Thompson's mail to me and mine to him, and a Xerox of Frazier's test. In his book Thompson indicated that she had checked the text for accuracy, which attributes to her more of an effort than she actually gave. This of course would not include checking his work on the cartridge cases, but she is concerned anyway.

I carefully read Newcomb's piece on the Last Train and ~~in~~ some preliminary work on the Z film. I found them both sound. The existence of the train and doctoring of Willis ~~5~~ seem~~e~~ proved; Newcomb himself acknowledges that the rest is speculation, but I consider it fully justified. I have not yet seen good enough pictures to allow me to determine for myself whether or not the train was moving, so I let that question go. I am convinced, however, that the train was there. The stuff on Bower's was interesting, too, and I think it worth casting a suspicious glance at him.

Go easy on the apparent figures in the background of the photos showing "Oswald" with rifle. I have LIFE's cover, and I don't see figures there. It is possible that figures were brushed out, but I ~~am~~ don't think the case is clear enough to merit comment.

cc. Nichols
Schosner

Still,
Dick
Bernabei