

FBI SPECULATION ON THE MANUFACTURE OF OSWALD'S AMMUNITION - BACKGROUND INFORMATION

[Rough notes]

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In a memo of December 2, 1963 to Mr. Conrad, (Serial 89H in the FBI file now being released), R. H. Jevons noted that the Western 6.5 mm Mannlicher-Carcano ammunition which was manufactured for the Marine Corps in 1954 "does not fit and cannot be fired in any of the USMC weapons. This gives rise to the obvious speculation that it is a contract for ammunition placed by CIA with Western under a USMC cover for concealment purposes."

Related FBI documents: The Jevons memo stated that "Attached in a two-page copy of the records of Western relating to the complete manufacture of this order of ammunition which was authorized under Government contract DA-23-196-ORD-27." There is no attachment to the document as provided to me.

My copy has a notation "Original filed in 62-[109060]-1429." (The file number is not legible on my copy, but is presumably the same as that on other documents in this batch. The serial number, 1429 or 1427 or something else, is uncertain.) This "62" file is an administrative file. Thus, the FBI should be able to locate a copy of this memo, with the attachment, immediately.

[Incidentally, I am very curious about the status of the relevant "62" files in general; I don't know if they are included in the forthcoming 80,000-page release. They may well contain very interesting internal memos which are not in the Oswald (105-82555) file.]

The next item in the Oswald file, #89I (my notation), is a teletype which was sent to Dallas and Chicago, evidently in response to this Jevons memo. It is not without interest, since it indicates that FBI headquarters knew that George Zucker had bought two million rounds of this ammunition in 1962, but it is certainly not the attachment mentioned in the Jevons memo. (See below for references to Zucker in connection with CD 1066.)

Jevons wrote that his memo of November 23 "set out additional information relating to the sale and distribution" of the ammunition. That memo is presumably item #49H, a two-page memo to Conrad, which was not released to me. When the first 40,000 pages are made public, someone should check to see if #49H is included. (I am sort of curious about the reasons for the initial non-release.)

Possibly related allegation provided to the Warren Commission: I know of only one document in the Warren Commission files which relates to the circumstances of the manufacture of this ammunition. (I am certainly not familiar enough with the files to claim that there is not more.)

On January 7, 1964, two high-ranking officials of the Office of Munitions Control in the State Department passed on to the FBI a report from a source of unconfirmed reliability. That source, an unnamed officer in a surplus small-arms company, claimed to have "firm evidence" that the ammunition had been illegally reimported into the U.S. via Canada. (Ammunition could be imported if it stayed in Canada for a year, but not if it had been originally sent to another country as part of any U.S. aid program.) The source's angle was that various dealers had been trying for some time to "get something done about trans-shipment of ammunition via Canada ... which adversely affects their business."

The source said "that the ammunition was manufactured by Winchester in 1951-2; and that it was furnished to the Government of Greece under the Greek Aid Program in 1952 or 1953." I don't know anything about this aid program, but there certainly could be some connection to Jevons' speculation that the ammunition was contracted for by the CIA.

What might this all mean? My initial reaction to the Jevons memo was that it was purely a curiosity - that someone in the FBI was so freaked out by the assassination, and/or hostile to the CIA, that he was finding a CIA link in this peculiar fashion.

I still have no feeling for what this might imply, if true. Since the ammunition was available through ordinary dealers in 1963, I don't see how it would matter what the original source was - that is, why Western manufactured it. (As discussed below, the Warren Commission was legitimately concerned about where Oswald might

have bought it, and about how old (and maybe unreliable) it was.)

I've now changed my opinion a bit - I think what might have happened is that the FBI ran across an irrelevant but perhaps still sensitive CIA operation, which as a matter of policy the FBI was not eager to tell the Warren Commission about. (That is, the CIA and the FBI generally agree to stay out of each other's way.) As discussed below, Western may have gone along with this little deception.

This interpretation would give us an interesting, but by no means unique, incident. (For another example of how the agencies handled such things: when the CIA noted that the name of Alexis Davison (the spy and Embassy doctor whose mother's name appears in Oswald's notebook) was in the Wise and Ross book on the CIA, they gave the FBI a blind memo pointing out this connection - but they apparently didn't point it out to the Warren Commission. The FBI did in fact investigate the Davison business very discreetly; if my recollection is correct, only the Secret Service even mentioned to the Commission that Davison had been accused of spying. [See my notes of 5/28/77 on CIA Item 1281-1024.] I'm not really very excited by this interpretation of the Jevons memo, but it does provide a legitimate handle to hang a story on, if desired.

By the way, the information provided by the State Department on January 7 was apparently not given to the Warren Commission until 5/28/64 (CD 1066, pp. 83-85.) This delay was fairly typical, but still suspicious.

Information apparently not provided to the Warren Commission:

The relevant Western records, which apparently give the contract number, were obtained by the Springfield (Illinois) office of the FBI sometime before December 2. I don't think I have ever seen those records.

The first 3 volumes of the FBI file, as provided to me, do not contain any communication from Springfield with that information. That does not mean it is not in one of the later volumes of this file, since they do not seem to be in strict chronological order at all. It may also be that the message from Springfield is only in some other file, such as the "62-109060" file. In any case, it should be easy to find. (As I have mentioned elsewhere, my impression is that there are many documents referred to in what has been given to me, and in the Schweiker Report, which are not in the first 3 volumes, even though I would expect them to be there. The whole question of the extent of the FBI release should be examined, and may turn out to be the most interesting story relating to the release. Of course, no conclusions can be reached without examining the entire 80,000 page release, and asking the FBI about the other relevant files.) [This paragraph belongs under "Related FBI documents" on page 1; sorry!] (P.S.: on the basis of a quick review, I don't think there are any documents in the 600 pages I have which relate to the ammunition, except the ones discussed above.)

On the basis of a quick check of the list of CD's, the only FBI report from Springfield up to CD 400 is CD 72, dated December 4; it does not mention the ammunition at all, but deals only with the allegation that Oswald had visited the University of Illinois. (That allegation is also the subject of FBI Item #50CC, dated November 27, which is the only teletype from Springfield in the first three volumes.) It is not paranoid to suspect that the ammunition information should have been in CD 72 and may have been left out for some reason, but I certainly haven't checked this out carefully enough to conclude that the records with the date and contract number were in fact not forwarded to the Warren Commission.

(Incidentally, the first Chicago CD [CD 47, 12/2/63, does not mention the ammunition, at least in the table of contents.]

In CD 1066, the FBI did tell the Warren Commission that 4 million rounds of the ammunition were manufactured in 1954. (Page 83) This fact, which the Commission could have used (as explained below), evidently didn't make its way into the 26 volumes.

In testimony, FBI SA Frazier mentioned that 2 million rounds were "reimported" into the U.S. (3H400), but apparently he didn't say anything about the date of manufacture.



Extent of Warren Commission interest in the ammunition:

Sylvia Meagher's book, naturally, has a good summary of the two issues that did concern the Commission. (Accessories, p. 112) Much effort was put into an unsuccessful search for a gunshop which may have sold ammunition to Oswald. (As Meagher pointed out, one problem for the Commission was that no 'extra' ammunition was found among Oswald's possessions.) Also, the Commission was concerned with allegations made by Mark Lane and others that the ammunition was old and unreliable.

As detailed by Meagher, and on pp. 121-2 of Lane's "Rush to Judgment," the "Speculations and Rumors" appendix of the Warren Report falsely and without any documentary citation claimed that the ammunition was made "recently," and that "such ammunition" was manufactured "currently." There are many items in this "Speculations and Rumors" appendix which are inaccurately or carelessly stated, and in fact this appendix is generally much worse than the rest of the Report, but this false refutation was one of the most obvious errors.

The FBI seems to have been sure that the ammunition was manufactured (or could have been manufactured) as late as 1951-1954. As noted, page 83 of CD 1066 did give this information to the Warren Commission. Had anyone on the staff noted this evidence that the ammunition could have been only 9 years old, this fact could have been used to rebut the claim that it was very old.

Possible intent by Western to mislead people about the date of the ammo:

As far as I know, the only reference in the 26 volumes to the age of the ammunition is in CE 2694 (26H62). A Dallas official of Western, R. W. Botts, told the FBI that Western had manufactured a quantity of this ammunition "for the Italian government during World War II."

Quite a few of the early Warren Report critics wrote to Western to check out this contradiction. Sylvia Meagher was told it was once produced under a government contract (Accessories, p. 113); I don't know if she was given any date. Mark Lane's associate Stewart Galanor was told on July 14, 1965 that the ammunition "is not being produced commercially by our company at this time." [My emphasis; there are all sorts of innocent explanations and I'm certainly not pushing a sinister one.] Galanor was told that "Any previous production on this cartridge was made against government contracts which were completed in 1944." I was told that "The ammunition you have was manufactured by our company during and immediately after World War II. All production was of military type and produced at the request of the Government." (Letter of 2/15/65. The Galanor letter is on p. 411 of "Rush to Judgment.")

I guess the simplest explanation is that most of the people at Western didn't know about the 1951-54 production, which isn't surprising if it was a CIA contract.

Some interesting and indirectly related matters:

[In summary:] In the course of checking out Dallas gun shops, the FBI ran across John Thomas Masen, who had some of the Mannlicher-Carcano ammunition in his gun shop. He was apparently linked to some Cuban gun-running operation involving Alpha-66 people, and (to top it off) may have been an Oswald look-alike. Fascinating stuff. See the article by Dick Russell in the Village Voice of August 23, 1976, page 23.

The story in CD 1066, suggesting that Oswald's ammunition may have been involved in illegal traffic, reminded me of a favorite speculative story of mine (discovered by Fred Newcomb). It turns out that the companies from which Oswald allegedly bought the rifle and the pistol were both under investigation by Sen. Dodd's committee. The committee was particularly concerned with mail-order sales to kids, people with criminal records, etc. I think it is quite possible that Oswald thought he was placing the gun orders as part of this effort, on the instructions of whoever he was working for. This would explain why Oswald left such obvious tracks in his purchases, and why he (allegedly) had a draft card with Hidell's name and his photo - a card which was obviously phony and which had no known use.