

Mr. Fletcher Prouty  
4201 Peachtree St Place  
Alexandria, VA 22304

5/20/91

Dear Felch,

Thanks for your valuable letter of the 17th and the enclosures I look forward to reading carefully. I respond in haste because I may in a few minutes have the help I need to get the daylilies off the top of the septic tank that urgently needs attention. I'm not able to do much work, none in any way heavy. Considering everything, I feel as well as it is possible for me to feel with all the things wrong. I'm glad you can do the lawn. I can use the riding mower about 20-30 minutes at a time but if any more it knocks me out. Can't use pushmowers at all and my, is some of the rougher ground on this mountainside getting lush!

I'm a bit older than you. Last month I was 78. And do I remember the years 1937-41 to which you refer! And a few before them! Yes, today's younger people missed a chance to learn much first-hand that we had.

Before I have a chance to forget, if I understand what you have in mind for your book, speak to The National Security Archive. They have much material that is relevant and they released some at one of the conferences between USSR people and some of ours relating to what I think of and refer to as the Cuba, not Cuban, Missile Crisis. I have some clippings and there have been published texts of some of those conferences.

I did confuse you, and I'm sorry. Aside from NSAMs, which were unknown to us at the time, I was referring to two stories I once had, both short and from the Washington Post.

Several days before the assassination the first said that our involvement in Vietnam had been re-evaluated and as a result we could begin to withdraw our "advisers." And about three days later there was the second short story, attributed to the Pentagon. That is what said that the re-evaluation had been re-evaluated and found to be optimistic. I do not know what the basis for that release was and in writing you I probably assumed it was another NSAM.

I had planned a book, Tiger to Ride. It would have said that by precipitating the Cuba Missile Crisis Khrushchev gave JFK his own tiger to ride. Would have given him the choice of avpiding or having another world war.

Che Guevara and Kaul Castro had gone to Moscow, June of July, 1962, and invoked the one-sided agreement they had, as we did with our puny client states, called "mutual assistance" by us. There was nothing the USSR could do to prevent the planned invasion of Cuba, nothing it could do to defend Cuba that would not have resulted in Cuba being wiped out. My belief was and is that Khrushchev took this way of passing the buck, the decision, to JFK. Who, along, belatedly, with Bobby, came to understand it. After it was over they began a lengthy correspondence, something like 40 letters. The USSR is willing to release them, our government opposes it, and there is a case in court on disclosing them now. Adlai Stevenson and initially McCone understood it correctly, but his people

turned McCone around. And was Stevenson, then at the UN, really clobbered for being right! By those who were so very wrong.

Most of the research I had is scattered. I loaned it to Howard Hoffman. He did return some. It included, and I know this seems like boasting, a contemporaneous and correct Tonkin ~~the~~ Gulf analysis. I add that there were then a few other things of similar character that did not take off, aimed at Cuba. Remember Barry Goldwater and the Guantanamo water? Followed out seizure of some Cuban fishing boats.

I did have what Hilsman, Scali and a few others wrote and if you do not recall, both Sorensen and Schlesinger<sup>books</sup> went into great detail about White House meetings on Cuba.

If the Hood College library does not have the Gravel edition of the Pentagon Papers I think they'll be able to borrow what you refer me to, thanks, and they may have Zapata.

Clearly, I misunderstood what # 283 is and I'm glad to be set straight, thanks.

By the way, I've started a NSAM file and I'll put an x-ref in it to your enclosures.

For your book, you may also want to keep in mind that before he was assassinated JFK had enunciated a policy of not recognizing military dictatorships that overthrew democratically-elected government. After JFK was killed the Dominican military overthrew Juan Bosch and then there was an attempt to kick the military out. LBJ sent the Marines in and the Navy down there. The only book I remember reading on this is Tad Sculc's and between that and his book on Cuba and his misidentifying "Eduardo" in the New York Times in the earliest Watergate days I've often wondered if he had been CIA. If you've forgotten, he misidentified Eduardo, who he knew was Hunt, as Barker. Soon he was no longer with the Times and I wondered if he'd been fired over that.

No help here yet and I'd better see if I can do a little mowing and then rest a bit. If I think of anything more I'll add it. I do hope you can keep going on that book! It can be so important! Especially with all the revisionism.

Thanks and best wishes,

*Harold*

Sorry I did not get to mail this promptly.  
The help came then the septic-tank man and  
all of this knocked me out. I'm still tired.



4201 Peachtree Place, Alexandria, VA 22304

May 17, 1991

Harold Weisberg  
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Dear Harry,

Just finished doing the lawn. The mail came, and with it your letter. So what better than take a break with a tall iced tea, and see if I can provide a reasonable response to your questions.

First of all, you describe your file system just about the same way I would have to describe mine. I have a pretty good idea where things are; but there are a lot that can get away. This computer is a big help; but it is built on my later work. I don't have the old stuff on it yet.

You are asking for two of the most important papers JFK issued. If he had lived to serve a second term, NSAM #55 and NSAM #263 would have changed the history of this century.

I am enclosing a copy of an article I wrote back in 1986, "Building to the Final Confrontation" that contains a copy of NSAM # 55 with my explanation of it. The setting of this directive is important.

With the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion JFK immediately, April 22, 1961, wrote a letter to Gen Maxwell Taylor ( a man whom he had not yet met) and asked him to head up a group to come up with ideas about what this country should do to preclude such things as the Bay of Pigs failure, and to study that operation to see why it failed. He could not have come up with a better group for the job: Gen Taylor, Adm Arleigh Burke, Allen Dulles and Bobby Kennedy. Bobby was the scorpion in the bottle.

At the conclusion of their study Taylor wrote a Letter to the President, June 13, 1961, providing the findings of the group. This letter, in an almost verbatim transcript, was the foundation of NSAM #55, NSAM #56 and NSAM #57. (I have a copy of the original letter.)

NSAM #55 was the most important. It put the military in the "Cold War Operations" i.e. clandestine operations business. If you will note, the directive was sent directly to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and not to the CIA, not to the Dept of State and not even to the Sec Defense. This was a rare bit of administrative strategy. The CIA was boiling.

NSAM #56 was a more modest document, also taken from the Taylor letter to the President. Its functions were assigned to General Ed Lansdale.

NSAM #57 was much more complicated and the argument over just what it meant was still raging at the time of JFK's death. He wanted to be re-elected before he went to the mat on that one.

Your next request has to do with "the LBJ agenda of Nov 26." All I can think of for that date is that the Cabinet had been in Honolulu for a meeting on Nov 20 to discuss an agenda which they

then brought to the attention of LBJ on Nov 26th. This agenda was given the formal title of NSAM #273.

I wrote about NSAM #273 in another article, Feb/Mar 1987, "Setting the Stage for the Death of JFK". I do not have a separate copy of NSAM #273, although it is available in Vol II of the Gravel Edition of the Pentagon Papers.

NSAM #263 was the other "most important" JFK directive. Few people have studied this one carefully, and the Pentagon Papers did all they could to obfuscate the issue.

NSAM #263 may be found on Page 751, Vol II of the Gravel Edition of the Pentagon Papers and one must read on to Page 766 to get the whole weight of the JFK plan. What is called the McNamara/Taylor "Trip Report" was actually dictated in the White House, written and illustrated in the Pentagon and delivered to them in Hawaii so that they could "deliver it" to the President at the White House. Make no mistake--this was JFK doctrine all the way and this was the opening gun of his 1964 campaign. It was this paper more than any other that cost him his life.

I am enclosing another article I wrote, "JFK's Plan to End the War in Vietnam", Jan 1987, that discusses this NSAM 263 quite adequately.

I don't quite understand your next paragraph; but, if you are saying that the Pentagon thought that NSAM #263 was "optimistic", I would like to know your sources. As I said above, the body of NSAM #263 actually came out of a series of meetings in the White House. Senior officers who attended those meetings then returned to the Pentagon where NSAM #263 was drafted. When the final product was accepted by the White House, it was printed, illustrated and bound and flown to Hawaii for the review by McNamara and Taylor. They delivered it personally to JFK. It could not have been more a product of the Pentagon, and the opinion of the Pentagon did not change in one month.

During all of this process, both the White House and the Pentagon were in touch with McNamara and Taylor all the time. They knew exactly what was being written for their signatures.

Since McNamara was the Secretary of Defense and General Taylor was the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff there does not appear to be any way that "the Pentagon" would find that document to be overly "optimistic."

I worked on 263 myself and never do I recall any problems with it, nor have I ever heard any complaints from my associates. On the other hand, I have been stunned to learn that the agenda of the strange Honolulu Conference of Nov 20 appears to have been an agenda that differed with 263. This appears to introduce a faction that was "anti-JFK" before his death. Actually most people who are familiar with 273 are quick to state that they believe it was an inconsequential document. Sobeit; who would prepare an anti-JFK paper from a strange agenda in Honolulu before JFK's death? Is this the cabal?

Now on to your next paragraph. "ZAPATA" is a book that was printed by University Publications of America, Inc., Frederick,

MD. The entire book is nothing more than a verbatim transcript of the Maxwell Taylor "Letter to the President" of June 13, 1961. In other words it is a copy of that report that spawned NSAM 55/56 and 57. It is most important and ought to be on every serious student's desk. No other publication explains the Bay of Pigs operation so adequately and thoroughly.

Well, your letter has been most welcome. The air conditioner has cooled things off and your letter has provided the impetus to have me get back into some old files. I hope this all helps.

I trust you are feeling well. Us old birds have got to flock together. Isn't it interesting...perhaps a little sad...to see how the younger generation is having quite a time with the history of things from the Great Depression on. What would we ever have done without that send-off. I go back to my 50th class reunion in a few weeks; and I can't recall a better time than 1937-1941.

Ciao,

*Fletcher*

L. Fletcher Prouty

PS: These enclosures are the rough material I am using in an attempt to create a good book.