

Mr. James Greve
Richard B. Russell Memorial Library
The University Libraries
The University of Georgia
Athens, Ga. 30062

7627 Old Receiver Road
Frederick, Md. 21701
11/25/89

Dear Mr. Greve

I write to amplify Dave Wrone's letter of the 19th and the 11/9/89 story from the Athens Observer. But first my apologies for my typing. I must sit with my legs elevated, which has the typewriter to one side and my face too close to the keyboard.

Until his death Senator Russell encouraged my research and criticism of the Warren Report. He said several times he regretted not being able to find the time to help me. Our contact was by letters, visits to his office and by phone with his staff.

I'd known that he and Senator Cooper had raised questions about parts of the Report and that an executive session was convened to resolve those questions. When I was finally able to see a copy of the supposed transcript of that session, 9/18/64, I knew immediately that it was a phony. In time I was able to prove beyond question that no transcript had been made at all.

In the 1930s I'd been an investigator and then the editor of a subcommittee of what then was known as the Committee On Education and Labor. We used the court reporting firm of Ward & Paul. The Commission also used it. As soon as I looked at the first page I knew it had not been provided by that firm and I was reasonably certain that no such firm had. They all charge by the page, so they all use pica type and wide margins with double-spacing. This increases what they can charge for their services. There was no dialogue at all in the following pages. The result is that if any busy Senator or member of his staff glanced at the first page it would have been assumed that the document was a transcript of that session and without any interest in it when received it would merely have been filed. If any had been distributed and I have no reason to believe that any was. I am certain from his reaction that Senator Russell had never seen it.

My belief is that the whole thing was the contrivance of J. Lee Rankin, general counsel and formerly as I now recall Solicitor General of the U.S.

Knowing of the Senator's doubts I phoned his office and left a message and was phoned back and invited in. Senator Russell was quite disturbed because not having the transcript he believed had been made he had no record for history of the doubts he expressed and the reasons for them. He wanted me to be certain that there was no other version, no actual transcript. I obtained that proof from the National Archives, which had the Commission's records, and gave it to him. I then went farther and got both the Commission's records of its court-reporting services and the records of Ward & Paul, although the Senator had been led to believe that the court reporter was present and taking it all down, Ward & Paul had not been asked to provide one and none was present. Rankin had a staff member pretend to be the court reporter. I've published pretty much of this, including facsimiles of the Ward & Paul and Commission records.

One day as I walked with the Senator to the elevator and then rode with him to the Capitol on the subway he told me several things you may find of interest and I repeat for archival purposes. One is that "they," meaning, pretty clearly the FBI and CIA, had not told us all they know about Oswald." He was 100% correct in this.

Another is how LBJ placed him on the Commission and why. LBJ had phoned Russell about serving on it and I'm not now clear in my recollection but I think also asked him to come to the White House. As they discussed it the Senator came to believe that he had talked LBJ out of appointing him. But he learned from the next day's news that he had been appointed. He told me that LBJ had done this to keep him from leading the fight of the South against civil-rights legislation. "But I fooled him," the Senator told me, because he did lead that fight and gave less time to the Commission. In fact he was the

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least active member.

He also had had doubts about Marina Oswald's testimony and it is ^{he} who forced the final interrogation of her, about September 6, in Texas. What she then told him and the others about what the FBI had done to her, verbatim in my first book, also is 100% correct from the FBI's own records + obtained by Freedom of Information Act litigation.

In this regard those who use your archive may be interested in knowing that in all + obtained about a third of a million pages under FOIA, that they are available to anyone now at my home and eventually will be a public archive at ~~Local~~ Hood College.

I had to use FOIA to get most of them but I also got and make available all but one of the Commission's executive session transcripts. To any who want to get a clear picture of the Commission when it expected permanent secrecy the one I publish in Post mortem is by far the shortest and the most informative about the Commission and how it worked. Senator Russell was not present that day. The Commission decided to destroy all records of it, paid Ward & Paul the niggardly sum of \$25 for having a reporter present, but the stenotypist's tape escaped the ~~the~~ memory hole and under threat of another FOIA lawsuit had it transcribed not by War & Paul but at the Pentagon, where a few errors were made.

The Observer story is correct in reflecting his substantial doubts about the official version of the shooting. What the senator told me is that he did not demand any changes in the language. +nstead he asked for what he described as " a little footnote" saying only that he did not agree with that language. Because the Commission, and I am confident this means Warren and Rankin mostly, wanted unanimity the passage in the first chapter was rewritten and as explained to him with his objections in mind. In practise he was deceived and the conclusions remained essential as they were when he objected to them. That first chapter was written to serve also as the Commission's press release and it is, in fact, what AP used as its story on the Report.

There can be no doubt about the intent to deceive and mislead Senator Russell and I am convinced that after he had and read what I gave him he came to the same conclusion. I am not absolutely certain but it is my recollection that he at least in part attributed this to LBJ and I believe he never had any further contact with LBJ.

It was after he had the information + gave him and when he knew he was dying that he went public on Cox Broadcasting.

The Senator was in charge of intelligence oversight. My recollection of what he said about those agencies is not clear enough to even paraphrase but I am certain that he did not trust them at all, in general and with regard to the Commission's work.

Mr. Wilkes may or may not want to change the public record he made in saying that it was "loyalty" that led the Senator to sign the report and remain silent. I do think, if I may say so, that students in the future ought have access to the actualities. In this regard I note that + have not received any complaint about a word I published relating to this matter from anyone, including any official or former staff or Commission member.

The inventor of the so-called single-bullet theory that was intended to make it appear that there was only one shooter and no conspiracy, which is what Senator Russell objected of, is now a Senator, Arlen Specter.

I went into that theory in great detail in two FOIA lawsuits and the evidence I filed was not rebutted. No effort was made to rebut, in fact. FOIA was amended in 1974 to make FBI, CIA and similar files available under FOIA over the first of these lawsuits. This is explicit in the Senate part of the legislative history and is stated in the Congressional Record, where the suit is referred to as against the appeals court. My name is stated and I'd lost up to and including the Supreme Court. All the litigation records will be included in the archive I leave.

cc Wilkes

I had some conversations with Mr. Wilkes in 1984

Harold Weisberg

Best wishes,
Harold Weisberg



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November 19, 1989

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Dear Jim;

I can't thank you enough for sending me the clipping from the 11-9-89 Athens Observer with the Donald E. Wilkes, Jr., story "Russell disagreed with JFK death report." It is a significant story. Would it be possible to obtain a copy of the dissenting statement of Sept. 16, 1964, along with any other matter of a similar nature in the file, such as the Atlanta Constitution statement?

As you well know Harold Weisberg, critic, had a correspondence with Senator Russell over the question of the Report and its findings. While I years ago wrote someone in the Russell Library or associated with it about this significant relationship I would like you to leave a note or other memorandum of fact in the Russell JFK Assassination file to the effect that the Weisberg Archives, soon to be housed at Hood College, Frederick Maryland, just outside the District will contain this important information.

You might also wish to know that the triggering incident in Russell's decision to proclaim his doubts on the Warren Report in 1970 came from investigations by Weisberg who disclosed that the final (I believe it was the final session) session of the Warren Commission which contained verbatim recordings of the conversations of the members had been doctored to remove, modify or restate Russell's dissent. Weisberg goes into this in his Whitewash IV which should be in the Russell Library collection and filed under JFK.

In other words the story presented in the Observer, while significant, has a much more important dimension to it and a considerable history which in years to come will grow in importance.

I wrote the letter you requested to the west and trust that all goes well in that endeavor. Please give my best to Suzie. I could sure use you two up here in the battle against the forces of ignorance, but I am certain you are engaged in an exciting activity and keep well read on the developing world and national issues as always.

Regards


DAVID R. WRONE

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Russell disagreed with JFK death report

Papers show late senator doubted findings of Warren Commission

By DONALD E. WILKES JR.

Documents recently uncovered in the University of Georgia Library show Sen. Richard Russell, the only Georgian on the Warren Commission, had grave doubts about key aspects of the Warren Report on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, but kept silent about his reservations for two years. These documents, located by a university student doing research on the JFK assassination, also reveal Russell, apparently disgusted with Warren Commission procedures, prepared but never sent a letter resigning from the Commission three months after JFK's death.

The Warren Report was released 25 years ago, on Sept. 27, 1964.

President Kennedy died in a burst of sniper fire in Dealey Plaza in downtown Dallas, Texas, on Nov. 22, 1963. The Warren Report concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, shot JFK from the Texas School Book Depository, and that there was no conspiracy

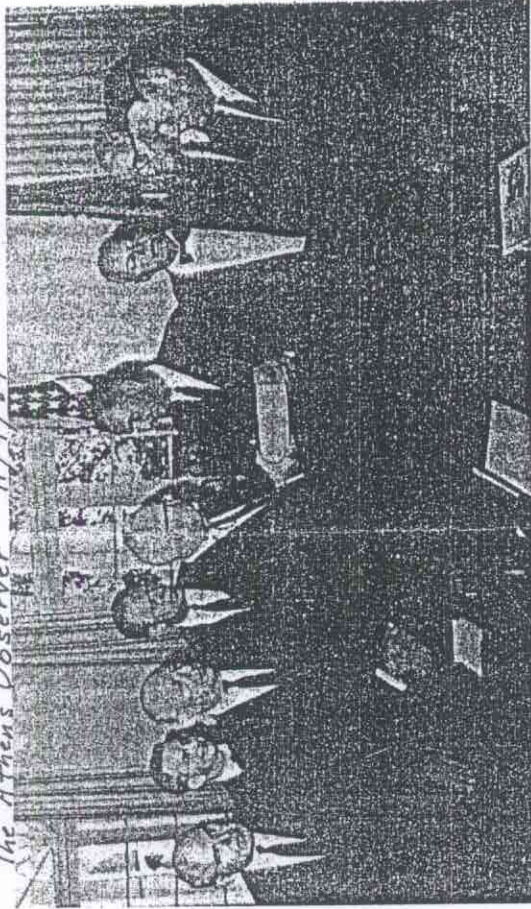
behind the assassination.

Georgia's Richard Russell, who represented this state in the U.S. Senate for 38 years, never wanted to serve on the Warren Commission. Appointed by President Lyndon Johnson anyway, Russell soon became known as the "Great Dissenter" on the Commission. The transcript of a Jan. 27, 1964, secret session of the Warren Commission, declassified and published in 1974, is typical. It shows Russell asking questions and making comments indicating that he was highly displeased with the quality of both the FBI's investigation and the information being fed the Commission by the FBI and CIA.

To prevent any embarrassment to President Johnson, the loyal Russell signed the Warren Report without publicly disagreeing with anything in it. But two years later the senator could restrain himself no longer. He publicly announced his "lingering dissatisfaction" with part of the report. In an interview published in the *Atlanta Constitution*,

See RUSSELL'S, page 7A.

The Athens Observer 11/9/89



Sen. Richard Russell (second from left, front) watches as Warren Commission chairman Earl Warren presents the report to Pres. Lyndon Johnson. Behind Russell and Warren stands then Rep. Gerald Ford, later to become president himself. Russell, who had serious doubts about the investigation of Kennedy's assassination, planned at one point to resign from the commission. (Photo courtesy of Richard B. Russell Collection, Richard B. Russell Memorial Library, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens)

• Russell's objections

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stitution Nov. 20, 1966, Russell explicitly stated he could not agree that Oswald acted alone. He could accept the conclusion that Oswald fired the shots that killed JFK, but he could not rule out the possibility that Oswald was part of a conspiracy.

In the interview Russell also disagreed with the report's single bullet theory: the theory that one of the bullets fired from behind the presidential limousine struck JFK in the back, exited the front of his neck, and then struck Texas Gov. John Connally.

The Warren Commission embraced the theory in its report to try to explain why films show JFK and Connally both reacting to wounds in less than the amount of time it takes to fire two shots from the rifle supposedly used by Oswald. Without the theory, the Commission would have been forced to acknowledge the existence of multiple gunmen.

On Jan. 19, 1970, less than a year before his death, Russell again proclaimed his doubts about the Warren Report, this time in a television interview. Although professing to have not "the slightest doubt" that Oswald fired the fatal shots, Russell went beyond his 1966 remarks and stated flatly that he "never believed that Lee Harvey Oswald assassinated President Kennedy without at least some encouragement from others."

Russell added: "I think someone else worked with him."

When the Warren Report was published other members of the Warren Commission also had silent doubts. Sen. John Sherman Cooper as well as Rep. Hale Boggs shared some of Russell's concerns, but, like Russell, did not speak out at the time.

The documents recently found in the UGA Library include a dissenting statement prepared by Russell but omitted from the Warren Report. Whether Russell intended to have his dissenting statement published in the report is unknown. Something that might throw light on the matter, the transcript of the final meeting of the Warren Commission held on Sept. 18, 1964, two days after Russell dictated his dissenting statement, disappeared (apparently from the National Archives) years ago.

The existence of the dissenting statement proves the doubts Russell first publicly voiced in 1966 dated back to even before the report was issued.

In his dissenting statement, dictated on Sept. 16, 1964, Russell disagreed with the Warren Report view that JFK and Connally were hit by the same bullet, and also disagreed with the report's conclusion of no conspiracy. In Russell's judgement, the insufficiency of the evidence gathered against Oswald "preclude(d) the conclusive determination that Oswald and Oswald alone, without the knowledge, encouragement or assistance of any other person, planned and perpetrated the assassination."

Russell's plan to resign from the Warren Commission is reflected in an entry on his desk calendar for Feb. 22/23, 1964: "write Pres J & Resign from Commission." In a two-page letter of resignation addressed to President Johnson dated Feb. 24, 1964, but never mailed, Russell complained the Commission was scheduling, holding, or cancelling meetings without notifying him. Why Russell changed his mind about resigning is unexplained.

The passage of a quarter-century has confirmed many of Sen. Russell's doubts about the Warren Report. Almost every major study of the JFK assassination since 1975 has rejected the single bullet theory, although there is disagreement as to whether this necessarily means more than one gunman shot at JFK.

A 1977-78 congressional reinvestigation of the assassination specifically found that the FBI and the Warren Commission failed to investigate adequately the possibility of a conspiracy to assassinate JFK and that the CIA was deficient in supplying information to the Commission. The congressional committee concluded, contrary to the Warren Report, that JFK probably was assassinated as a result of a conspiracy, although the committee did not know who the members of the conspiracy were. Where the Warren Commission found that Oswald fired all the shots at the president's limousine, the congressional committee found it highly probable that two gunmen did the shooting.

It is no wonder that the Warren Report has failed to withstand the test of time. As Sen. Russell's public pronouncements and his previously undisclosed papers show, even members of the Warren Commission didn't believe it.

Donald E. Wilkes Jr. is a professor at the University of Georgia Law School.