

for Harold

Interview with Arlen Specter, 12/31/69

The following is being transcribed starting at 2 o'clock this day, immediately after arriving home from the interview. The recollections are as accurate as I can make them.

I arrived at the District Attorney's office at about 11:30a.m. on the morning of the 31st. My father and I watched Mr. Specter be filmed for a television interview on bail bonds. We then went into the District Attorney's private office to conduct the interview. I had with me questions typed in advance on 3 x 5 cards, a briefcase of related materials, and a tape recorder.

Upon entering the office, Mr. Specter told me that he would not permit our "conversation" to be recorded on tape because he has had many requests lately, one which he did grant a recorder to and he doesn't want tapes of his statements "flying all around the world." He also stated that his words are being twisted to say what he didn't want to.

At that point, I informed him that I had planned my whole interview with that one point in mind--not to distort what he had to say. I then went into my first question. I told him that I felt that the leading of interviewer's questions can distort what he has to say and that while his many interviews have been congenial to him, we don't know if they've been congenial to his position. Therefore, I said, I felt it important to get a statement of his beliefs on the Warren Commission, his work with the Commission and, to a certain extent, the criticisms of both. I added that he should do this with the benefit of hindsight. That, I believe, is the substance of my first statement.

He answered that all of his views and positions are "as set forth in the Warren Commission Report." He said that he still agrees with everything he has said in the report--that he has no reason to doubt it. He also indicated that he has constantly made this known, that his beliefs are now and have been a matter of public record and he has no changes.

Then, I told him that, quite frankly, from my examination of the record I have certain doubts and suspicions concerning President Kennedy's autopsy and that he as the Commission's investigator who handled this aspect of the case should be asked these questions and, in general, be given the chance to defend himself against the suspicions I had.

At this point, he interjected that there was no need to defend himself, that his remarks are available to the public and that he has already answered the charges.

I told him that valid questions still remained and that I wanted to put these to him. He consented.

I began by telling him that I'd start now with his USN&WR interview. I told him that the interview has him saying that he was shown a picture of what was supposedly the President's back. I asked if this was the only picture of a body he was shown. He said "Yes, that was the only picture I was shown." I then asked if he was shown any X-rays to which he said no, just that one picture. I then told him that he stated in the interview that the picture was

not "technically authenticated" and asked if it was not his job to authenticate it or why no effort was made to do so. My recollection here is somewhat vague but on my question card I have written the notation "Warren Commission refused." This jibes with basically what I recall him saying--that it was the Commission who didn't want these, not him. At some point during this line of questioning, Specter cautioned me that this was not his commission and that he had to do things as others above him wanted them done. He wanted the X-rays but the Warren Commission members did not; "I believe this was for reasons of taste," he added. He said that if he were to head a commission, he too would run it his way.

Then I said, "Could you tell me who showed you that picture?" He sort of pondered for a moment and said "I will have to say that I cannot answer that question. I was shown that picture in confidence by a Secret Service agent but that is all I can say." I went on, "Well I have reason to believe that is was Tom Kelly of the Secret Service who showed it to you." At this point, as I think my father will agree, Specter seemed quite taken back--at least momentarily stunned. "Is this true?" I added. "I told you that it was shown to me in confidence and I cannot tell you who it was," or something of that nature is what he answered. I told him then that I could not understand this: here is the investigator who is developing evidence on the autopsy and he is shown a picture which he had every right to see. Why should he have to keep it all so secret? He immediately came back that he "fought to see those X-rays" and that the Commission would not let him for "reasons of taste." He made it clear that he did want to see the pictures and X-rays.

Next I said, "In the USN&WR interview, you said that 'there is every reason to believe that we did get a comprehensive, thorough, professional autopsy report from trained skilled experts.' Could you substantiate for me how Drs. Boswell and Humes were trained skilled experts in forensic pathology?" He responded that the record was clear on the qualifications of Humes and Boswell and that they were extremely competent experts and he sees no reason to question them. I came back with the fact that two of the country's leading forensic pathologists, Wecht and Helpert, have stated publically that the autopsy doctors were hospital pathologists which is entirely different from forensic pathologists since hospital pathologists never deal with violent death. I added that both men have declared publically that Humes and Boswell were not qualified to conduct a medico-legal autopsy. I asked him if he thought this had any bearing on the autopsy. He said no, that there could be endless debate on whether these men were qualified and that no matter what, there would always be people who will say that a certain person is not qualified to do something. He added that even Dr. Helpert has been challenged at certain times.

I then said, as for the autopsy report itself, that the word "presumably" has been inserted in every instance in reference to wounds of entrance or exit, their evaluation. Now doesn't this shed any doubt on whether the doctors were certain of what they were reporting? He flatly answered "No."

Then I asked, "Well, how do you explain such things as Dr. Humes probing the back wound with his finger and his failure to make coronal sections of the brain. I mean, these are standard autopsy procedure which Humes violated." He answered that there is no such thing as "standard procedure" but this was after about half a minute of thinking with his head in his hands. He also asked me what was so abnormal about probing a wound with his finger. I responded that it could destroy the character of the wound or its depth and that the

standard method was to use a laboratory probe which Finck did only after Humes had used his finger. Specter still contended that there was no standard procedure. I could see that I was getting nowhere fast so I wanted to get off of this.

"Mr. Specter," I said, "would you as District Attorney be willing to get up in a murder case in court against a legal opponent--at any murder case, not of a President but of anyone--and introduce Commander Humes' report as a thorough, competent, comprehensive autopsy report?" He said "Yes, I would." I said, "Well then how would you explain its many omissions?" He came back, "I don't know that there are any omissions." I began to say that there was data on the face sheet which was not on the autopsy report but he said that he'd have to go back over everything again before he could comment. I then decided to drop that line.

I went on "In the USN&WR interview and at many other times, you have stated that the doctors didn't have complete information at the autopsy and that they were not aware of the front neck wound. ^{ARE YOU COMPLETELY SATISFIED THAT THEY} I said, "Now, in a published interview with Richard Levine of the Baltimore Sun, Dr. Boswell has stated that the doctors were informed of the probable extent of the wounds. Wouldn't this have alerted them to the anterior neck wound?" Specter came back after a half minute of thought, "Well, I am not familiar with that interview. You say that they had been told of the probable extent of the wounds. This doesn't mean anything. It could be nuts or soup. You see we don't know just how much they were told of." I continued, "How can you say that the doctors didn't know about this wound when Admiral Burkley, the President's personal physician who was with the President at Parkland was also in the autopsy room. It was Dr. Burkley's responsibility to find out the extent of the President's wounds and he would have known about the front neck." This was a mistake which I realized when Specter answered, "How can you say that Dr. Burkley knew about the neck wound? How much can he know about the extent of the wounds? Where was he in the motorcade, when did he arrive at Parkland, how much did he talk to the doctors? We don't know if he talked to the autopsy surgeons in the autopsy room." Specter had me here. I decided I had better get onto something else.

I said next, "Are the two pages of notes and sketches at the back of Commission Exhibit 397 the only ones which you have seen which were made during the autopsy?" He answered, "I don't recall if I saw any others." I pointed out to him that Dr. Humes testified before the Commission that CE397 contained notes which were made in part by him during the autopsy. Yet there are no such notes printed as CE397, just the face sheet which was done by Dr. Boswell. I asked if these notes were left out of CE397. Suddenly he forgot what 397 was and I gave him my copy of vol. 17 and showed him the notes to which I referred. I forget exactly what happened here but he hemmed and hawed so much that nothing came out of it. He kept asking me to repeat the question. He was successful in working me off this but quite frankly I was so frustrated that I left it myself for he was giving me too much trouble. He talks and says nothing and if you interrupt him he really puts you down.

So I said, "During Dr. Humes' testimony, you introduced CE 397 into evidence as being identical with what was identified for internal purposes as Commission #371. Now, I saw Commission #371 at the Archives and I know for a fact that there is at least one document in there which was not printed as CE 397. Can you tell me why?" Right away he asked what CE 371 was and I said that it was CD 371, document, not exhibit. He asked what was left out and I showed

him the Bouck letter as printed in Inquest, the paperback on p. 173, adding that this does not mean I subscribe to what was in that book. He looked at it and asked how I could tell it was left out of CE 397. I told him that it is not published in volume 17 with CE 397 to which he responded that it could have been a printers' error or that someone could have forgotten to send it with the rest of the documents or that someone felt that it was not relevant to the exhibit. He asked what was so important about it anyway, what is so sinister that I would be interested in it. I remarked that I hadn't accused it of being sinister and that the record stands that it should be a part of CE 397 and it was not printed that way and that I am asking him to explain if he knows why. He came back with, "How do I know that this is really from CD 371" although it is not clear on the Inquest copy." He said that unless he saw the document he has no way of knowing for sure but still insisted that he didn't see any significance in the document anyway. I could not take it any longer. I didn't want to say this but I did. I showed him that the letter lists a receipt for the FBI for a missile removed from the President's body during the autopsy. I said that this could not be the two fragments removed from the head and given to FBI agents Sibert and O'Neill because they were given two missiles while the receipt is for one. This quieted him down. He came back after much thought that he'd have to check Frazier's testimony on just what missiles he received from the body. I assured him that those two are the only ones that are on record as having been removed but he still said he'd have to check. I posed the original question again, why was it left out and he just said that he didn't know.

to which
I replied
that it
was marked
with a tape
that says
CD 371

I next said that Dr. Humes testified before the Commission that he burned the original draft of the autopsy report. I asked Specter if he knew why. He came back right away that this was all in Humes' testimony and is on the record and that he made comments about this to USN&WR which he also sticks to. This did not answer my question because in no instance does he tell WHY so I said this to him and again asked why. He became very indignant and said that he did not know and that I had already asked the question. He went on and on with this saying that I asked the question and he gave the answer that he intended and then I ask the question again. He tried to make me feel an inch high but I did not go for his cheap trick. I tried to back out of it as politely as I could. First I just said "OK" but he came right back, "What do you mean, OK?" and went through his whole shepel again. I finally told him that it was my fault and that I hadn't realized I had asked the question twice so it died off.

My next question was this. "Mr. Specter, you say in USN&WR that when Dr. Humes talked to Dr. Perry, he did not get specific information about the anterior neck wound, that he was not told if it were entrance or exit. Yet, in the autopsy draft in CE 397, Humes writes that Perry told him the wound was a "puncture" wound. Now, in speaking of wounds, puncture is defined as entrance. I have verified this with numerous forensic pathology sources. Doesn't this mean that Perry told Humes there was an entrance wound to the front neck?" Specter laughed and said "No." He went on that puncture does not mean anything, it could mean entrance or exit. He asked me my sources and I told him that besides the forensic pathology sources, Humes himself used puncture in the holograph in every reference to entrance although he later went over it and crossed it out. He asked me if it was used exclusively with entrance and not exit and I said yes. He said that it means nothing. In line with this, I asked if it was his responsibility to account for any changes between the holograph and the typed autopsy report. He said that it was the duty of the Warren Commission and not him specifically. Then I said, "Well then how come no attempt was made

to find out from Dr. Humes why the description of the anterior wound as 'puncture' in the holograph was changed with no apparent sanction, with no indication to change, in the typed version to 'second much smaller wound'?" He said that he was not aware that any changes were made and that he hasn't seen this stuff for quite some time and that he'd have to go over the documents himself. I offered to show him the change and told him that it has been out for some time and that it was first brought out by Harold Weisberg in Whitewash I. He would not acknowledge that there was a change and would not let me show him so I was forced to drop it since he refused to make comment unless he actually saw it himself.

By this time, he was really thinking before he answered the questions and he would take up a lot of time staring at the ceiling or putting his hands to his brow before he would answer the questions. He at this time told me that we didn't have much time since he had another appointment and asked how much longer I would need. Not to scare him and not to have him cut it off there, I said I might be able to finish in 5 minutes.

I went on that in UNS&WR as well as in other places he has said that the thinking of the Commission was that the photographs and X-rays would corroborate the autopsy doctors' testimony. I asked him if he's read the Panel report, the report of the Clark Panel, and I stated the members' names. He flatly replied, "No." This exasperated me so I began to ask if I could relay information to him about it and he interjected something like "Is that the report released by the Justice Department?" and I said yes, and he confirmed that he has not read it and that he could therefore make no comment on it. I was determined so I said, "Well, Mr. Specter, I feel that report contains some very important information which I think I should tell you to a certain extent. I don't know if you could comment on it." I then went on to tell him that the report states that the neck X-rays revealed the presence of several small metallic fragments and that Humes had testified under oath that there was no metal in the neck. He seemed taken back and I told him that although I did not have a great background in law, that it seemed to me that Humes could have committed perjury here. He said, "Oh, do you want me to tell you about perjury?" but I said no, that there still was this contradiction. He asked if the panel saw this on X-rays and he began to probe me. He asked if I'd ever seen two doctors quarrel over whether an X-ray shows a fracture and I answered that his was not a fracture, it was metal fragments in soft tissue and that three highly qualified forensic pathologists and one competent radiologist was on the Panel and they should know what they were talking about. He kept on that it may not be certain and asked me what it was about the X-ray which indicated that metal fragments were there. I said that a qualified radiologist had reported this and that I had correspondence from the Panel doctors which confirmed that there were fragments there. He went on that sometimes things can be confusing and started to give me the analogy to the fracture. I said that there are many things which can confuse with bone. I said that the suture lines of the skull could appear as fractures, that previous fractures of bones which have healed can be misleading but that this was radio-opaque material in soft tissue. He just wouldn't comment.

I went on to say that the Panel report also divulges the fact that on photographs of the tracheotomy incision it could see the anterior neck wound. I mentioned that Humes has constantly maintained that he could not see the wound and he testified that he could ascertain no traces of it. I asked him to explain this and he began to probe me, asking if the panel saw this on photos, etc. I was again getting nowhere fast and I was running out of time since he

guaranteed only five minutes more and I was a little pannicy. I decided to go to something which really affected him.

I said, "Now, Mr. Specter, you adduced testimony from Dr. Akin of the Parkland staff that the wound was visible after the incision had been made-- this was five days after you took Humes' testimony. Now, even though you didn't have the Panel report then, you had evidence that the wound was visible. Were you aware of this contradiction in the record?" I cited the Akin testimony and he rushed over to see it. He read me the passage at the top of 6H65 and began to stall. He kept asking me things like, "Now you say that this Dr. Akin was able to see a 1.5cm. arc above the incision and Dr. Humes said he couldn't see the arc. What is your question? Are you asking if I knew this or why I didn't correct the record and how was I to correct the record?" I said that I first wanted to know if he was aware of this and then I wanted to know why he didn't correct the record. He said that, "Well, these men actually just didn't see the same extent of the same thing. Let me see, Humes did the autopsy in November and testified in March, that is five months and it is possible that his recollection was not right....." He went on like this--I thought it would last forever. Finally, I said, "here we have Dr. Humes whose story is that he seriously entertained the belief at the autopsy that a bullet passed through the neck but he was puzzled because there was no exit wound on the front of the body. Are you saying that his recollection would fail him? I don't understand how you can say that. This man was supposedly looking out for that wound." Specter here seemed really shaken up. He said that we don't know if the doctors examined the incision closely. I could not resist it. I told him that Finck testified in N.O. that he had examined both edges of the incision very closely. Immediately, Specter started asking what Finck said in N.O., especially about all this that the Panel says. I told him that Finck mostly answered, "I don't know." But I added that Dr. Humes had to get close enough to measure the incision to be 6.5cm. We went around in circles, he seeming shook up and me extremely frustrated.

If I'm not mistaken, I think this is where he terminated the interview. He said to me that we'd gone over the five minute limit and that he had another appointment. Once he stopped the interview, he began talking to me, probably for over 10 minutes. He said that he was amazed that people have delved into it so minutely and that he didn't mind and that he thought that was good. He told me that before he came to work for the Commission this was actually his job, to delve into testimony. He added that "You all seem to have this Weisberg conspiracy attitude where you have the Chief Justice suppressing all the evidence and making all his staff doctors, everything, and suppress the evidence and do the dirty work." I stopped him and said that that was an exaggeration. "An exaggeration?" he said. "Yes," I replied, rather worked up. I added that I happen to believe in most of the things that Mr. Weisberg says. Immediately Specter said, "Well how about this guy Lane?" I answered that I did not have any faith in Lane and that I had found many errors in his work. But, I was sure to add, I have checked out what Mr. Weisbergsays and I found all of his major and substantial criticisms are correct as far as I could tell. He shut up on that. I stuck in, referring to what we ended on, that I was not an experienced attorney but that the matter with the front neck wound certainly did seem suspicious to me because according to his story, Humes was on the alert for such a wound and he should have noted it for it was there, it was not a matter of recollection.

We all shook hands and left the office. The time was about 1:00p.m.

Comments:

I went to Arlen Specter with many doubts and suspicions which I felt should be put to him and against which he should be given the chance to defend himself. When Mr. Specter would not let me record the interview because many of his statements have been misused, I assured him, as was entirely true, that I had planned the interview against this and that this was why I wanted to tape it; I had told him this in a letter also. I tried as best as I could to convey to him that I wanted to be fair and I wanted to give him a chance. However, he was constantly jumping on me, asking me why I asked a certain question, why I thought it was so sinister or suspicious. I assured him that I never stated that and that I was just asking him to explain it so that I wouldn't have to think it that way. After a short time, it was also obvious that he became more concerned about the questions I was asking, thinking longer before answering, trying to find out more about the things I knew. He seemed troubled although I could be mistaken. I am at a loss to understand why he had to halt the interview for another appointment, for when I arrived at the office, I saw a memorandum for that day which had on it only five appointments. My name was the last on the list and the rest of the paper was blank after that. Again, I could be wrong, but these are just things which struck me. I definitely think that Mr. Specter evaded my questions and if all of his answers were sincere, then he was revealing just how inefficient and incomplete the Warren Commission's work was. I tend to think that his answers were not all sincere for I attribute more competence and intelligence to him especially in the field of law than he displayed during the interview. I left his office more confused than when I had entered it and it is my strong feeling that if the Warren Commission did tell the whole story behind the assassination and was absolutely sincere in its work, that he should have been able to answer my questions and allay my doubts.

I have tried to make this synopsis as objective as possible. For this reason, the emotional aspect of the interview has in effect been neglected since it could only be related as I, and not Mr. Specter, saw things.

Howard Roffman