

COPY

May 29, 1966

Mr. Larry Stern
Washington Post

Dear Larry,

If you recall the meeting you, Dan Kurzman and I had in the coffee shop, you spoke of the "confrontation" and asked my agreement. I did agree, if it would be restricted to fact and if I were given an opportunity to meet any factual challenge. Perhaps what I have prepared for Dick below for an appraisal of his source will tell you why.

On the reasons for the Commission's "uncertainty" about whether a single bullet had inflicted all the non-fatal injuries, which is pivotal but by no means the only question relating to more than one assassin:

"Two of the three pathologists who performed the autopsy ... testified that it was either 'unlikely' or 'impossible' ..." Actually, all three did.

"The FBI's principal ballistic expert, Robert Frazier ..." didn't "have any evidence ... one way or the other" to support the theory. Without going into any lengthy review of Frazier's testimony, he testified that this bullet would have been marked even by leather. It struck bone and remained unmutilated and undeformed - bone in the chest, wrist and thigh. It reached him wiped clean, but not so clean there were no foreign residues. No test was made to determine what these residues were, not even to see if they were human traces, and not to see if such information as blood types could be obtained. The FBI did not do it, and the Commission neither asked them to nor asked why they failed to. Frazier's answer to a theory is not applicable to a factual situation. And bearing very much on this is the total absence of any spectrographic analysis of this bullet and the fragments in the record or even in testimony. The spectrographer, Gallagher, was called as a witness. He was asked questions only about the paraffin test which, had the Commission not been able to cast doubt upon it, would have materially aided Oswald. As you know, I have demanded publication of this spectrographic analysis. Frazier, who had seen it, would say that it showed only the bullet and the fragments were of similar lead composition. Here he said nothing. Certainly no spectrographic analysis was required for such knowledge.

To say of the Parkland medical personnel that none had "any thorough knowledge of the President's wounds" is to fall into a carefully prepared booby-trap. It was carefully fashioned in an effort to avoid recognition of the probative value of the testimony about a single wound, that in the front of the neck. There are few hospitals anywhere that have the experience with gunshot wounds that all the people at Parkland have, including even the nurses. The number of daily cases there is as astounding as the light sentences for the frequent murders. It is all in the record. That single wound is the anterior neck wound. There is no question that the doctors and the nurses were convinced this was one of entrance. As late as the second draft of his autopsy report, Dr. Humes was quoting Dr. Perry as having so

~~INFORMED HIM~~. There is (and is referred to in my chapter on the autopsy) substantial evidence of both perjury and subornation of perjury on whether Dr. Perry said this wound was of entrance and whether Dr. Humes told him to shut up or not to say it was of entrance. The size of this wound, 3x5 mm (especially when compared with the size of alleged entrance, 4x7 mm) also bears on this point. Some of the medical personnel refused to yield on their statements that this was a wound of entrance, and they were subjected to some pressure. Whether this was identified as a wound of entrance has nothing at all to do with whether or not these people knew all they could of any other wounds, in the head, in the back or in the back of the neck. I do not recall that even after the great pressures that were applied, a single one said it was a wound of exit.

"Specter ... filled the record with testimony that supports his hypothesis." This is an interesting formulation. If whoever gave this ~~information~~ information to Dick was saying that Specter filled the record with testimony that the specific bullet, Exhibit 399, could have inflicted all the non-fatal injuries, it is false. Unless my recollection errs, it is not only false but totally false, for I do not recall a single witness who said this was even possible. The technique used was a different one. The witnesses were asked, "Not this bullet but any bullet - a bullet - could a bullet have inflicted the non-fatal injuries." This, of course, eliminated the necessity that the bullet inflicting the injuries remain almost intact and undeformed. A bullet, for example, might have fragmented. But this bullet shattered 10 inches of the Governor's fifth rib, smashed his wrist so badly no one knows how many breaks there were in bone or fragments of bullet were lost, and then lodged a fragment at a carefully unidentified place in his femur that at least as of the time of his testimony was still in the Governor's body. Further, because there is no question but that this bullet was tumbling, in order to have completed its imputed history, it would have had the capacity to cease its tumbling at the precisely required moment it was in bone and then to have gone only backward. It would have had to possess additional magical powers, such as an independent source of energy. Once it lodged a fragment in the femur, it had to propel itself out of the Governor's body (approximately three inches), to have separated itself from its fragment without dislodging the fragment, to have escaped the attention of all the medical personnel who tended and undressed the Governor, who handled his clothes, who handled and moved the stretcher, and to have unassisted found its way under the mattress of the stretcher. The misrepresentation of this bullet to the Commission ~~was~~ by the staff also bears on this point, for the Commission was falsely assured that the staff had proof this bullet was found on Governor Connally's stretcher. The "proof" was the testimony of the man who "found" it that he couldn't sleep if he said that. Further interesting is the failure to trace this bullet from the stretcher to the Commission, a normal requirement. That Specter failed to convince me had nothing to do with the truly scattered arrangement of the testimony that need not have been so scattered. I read all of it, carefully. It is not hard to piece together if one is willing to take the time. I was and I did.

On the medical evidence behind the FBI report, December 9, "This report was based on the medical evidence at that time." Is there any subsequent medical evidence?

Bearing on the preceding paragraph about the neck wound, Kellerman testified that he was with the President constantly and that Dr. Perry did identify the anterior neck wound as one of entry, and in questioning him about the tracheotomy, even Specter asked if thereafter there was anything left of the original entry". This was one of the earliest hearings, March 9.

"Two FBI agents who were present overheard" the doctors "speculate about the President's shoulder wound. The doctors were confused because an incision ... obscured the exit wound," etc. The doctors were not confused because of the tracheotomy. It was "redundant", Humes said, for him to phone Dallas about the tracheotomy. What troubled the doctors was Finck's inability to probe the rear wound. Kellerman was standing there (2H93) and described it. He asked Finck, "Where did it go?" and quotes Finck's response, "There are no lanes for an outlet of this entry in this man's shoulder." ... "before they had traced the path of the bullet from the President's shoulder to his throat the FBI observers left the room ..." First, if this was ever traced, I am not aware of it and would very much appreciate it if Dick's source could refer me to the proof. Assuming both FBI agents left the autopsy room to make a single telephone call, did they never return? Colonel Finck could probe this rear wound to only such a shallow depth in the President's body that when Kellerman asked, "... would it have been possible ... that it works itself out?" Finck replied, "Yes." It wasn't until they heard about the "found" bullet at about 9 o'clock that a decision was made about what happened. Of the two FBI agents present, O'Neill and Sibert, they were apparently assigned to Kellerman who testified of them, "they were in the morgue with me," at Bethesda. When the Presidential plane landed at Andrews Rowley informed Kellerman "that Mr. Sibert and Mr. O'Neill of the FBI would join me at the Naval Hospital and to allow them in." Because Kellerman stayed all night, I presume without checking back that both FBI agents assigned to him did also. This means quite a few hours after the 11 o'clock completion of the autopsy examination. They were still with Kellerman at the hospital and with the autopsy doctors, for Kellerman testified that after the X-rays were developed, "we viewed them all together", and specified the agents were there (2H94).

"The bullet that caused these wounds was found and was virtually intact. It weighed about 158 grains as against an original weight of about 161 grains." None of this is fact. It is all presumption. Whether or not this bullet caused all the wounds - and not one of the experts said it did - it was possible to establish whether it could by spectrographic analysis of the residues on it. Frazier testified he did not do it and it wasn't done. Instead it was wiped clean. There are variations in the pristine weights of bullets that, while small, when only 3 grains are involved, are quite large.

"... Connally's principal surgeon, Dr. Robert Shaw, was convinced that the intact bullet did cause the wounds." Dr. Tom Shires was the doctor in charge. He remained in charge. He was never called before the Commission. Among the reasons, in my belief, that he was not, is the testimony he could have given and did in his deposition to the staff give about the manufacture of evidence by the Secret Service (not in the testimony of the other doctors and not given by any before the Commission members) and the presence of fragments other than those washed out of the wounds, revealed by the Governor's chest X-rays.

Obviously, to support his theory, Specter had to keep the fragments to a minimum. Dr. Shaw and others addressed themselves to both the hypothetical bullet and to this one. "Dr. Shaw was convinced that the intact bullet did cause the wound"? You'll find enough quotations from him ~~in~~ in my chapter on the Doctors and the Autopsy to prove this a not accidental lie. Page 170, he said it was not possible, and even "without respect to whether bullet 399 could have inflicted all of the wounds of the Governor, then, without respect at this point to the wound of the President's neck" there "would be some difficulty in explaining all the wounds ... without causing more in the way of loss of substance to the bullet or deformation of the bullet". On that page I quote his answer to Dulles that "we still do not know which bullet actually inflicted the wounds on Governor Connally" or, as he volunteered, there may have been three different bullets to cause them. Dick's informant sticks to the size of the fragments, the weight loss. Note Shaw, as did the others, referred also to the deformity, and also the damage done by the bullet(s). I quote Humes, confirmed by Boswell and Finck, on this point on page 165. At the top of page ~~174~~ 174 I quote Shaw further: "As far as the wounds of the chest are concerned, I feel that the bullet could have inflicted those wounds. But the the examination of the wrist both by X-ray and at the time of the surgery showed some fragments that make it difficult to believe that the same missile could have caused those two wounds. There seem to be more than three grains of metal missing as far as I mean in the wrist." Add to this the fragment in the thigh that remains, the fragment in the chest that remains, and any others washed out and - ? Remember, there are not even the tiniest, the most minute fragments missing from Bullet 399 any place except possibly from the back end, and the doctors also pointed this out. A tumbling bullet that flew only backwards while tumbling? There is more, if you want it.

"Dr. Shaw had an explanation ... It is not uncommon, he testified, for people to suffer a wound without knowing it immediately." With respect to the Governor, Dr. Shaw and the other doctors questioned said exactly the opposite. Page 174, quoting Dr. Shaw, "in the case of a wound which strikes a body substance such as a rib, usually the reaction is quite prompt." Dr. Humes said, "I am sure he would have known something happened to him." It is interesting, however, that Dick's informants do not apply this theory to the President's non-fatal wound, which the autopsy and the Commission say struck no bone. Could he not have been hit much earlier and not know what hit him, and reacted much later?

In short, there is no support for Specter's single-shot theory and the citations given Dick do not say what he was told they say. I did not cite "apparent inconsistencies in the record". I cited the evidence. There is no evidence the other way. Please bear in mind that above I have addressed myself to only what someone told Dick, not to what I present in my book.

With regard to the FBI report it is not in my "mind" the "perhaps greatest source of controversy and doubt over the integrity of the Report." It contains nothing not already in my book, and I treated it as a Postscript. My book was done in mid-February 1965. I saw the FBI report on March 30, 1966. The real importance of the FBI report, to me, is what it says of the FBI and its director. If you or Dick will just glance at the exhibits, you will see that Hoover personally handled everything that went to the Commission. This, in

itself, would at the very least cast doubt on the haphazard representation of the FBI's functioning given Dick. But if it doesn't, what does it say of Hoover.

With Dick's own description of what the FEI did, "incredible", as distinguished from what his informants told him about the FBI, I am in complete accord. I think it might be helpful to an understanding of any motive this informant, unknown to me, may have had, to consider the function of the FBI, and especially its mission in preparing this report for the Commission. Your morgue should be quite helpful on this. It was to be a definitive thing. You should also find that about four days after the assassination, it was either announced or let out that the report was to be made public.

As the FBI report relates to the assassination, it has three volumes of appendix and one of text, mostly a prosecution case against Oswald. Part 1, on the Assassination, has but about 500 words. The fifth volume is still classified. It is on Jack Ruby.

If you want amplification on any of this please let me know. I do believe the Post and all of you people were imposed upon by someone you had reason to trust.

Neither O'Neill nor Sibert was a Commission witness. Kellerman's memo to his chief on 11/30/65 (18H72809) does bear on the explanation of the "error" in the information given Dick. In it he says both FBI agents remained in the morgue at Bethesda, through the embalming. This is the second paragraph on 18H729: "S.A. Greer and myself remained with the body in the U.S. Naval Hospital along with Agents Francis O'Neill, Jr., and James Siebert (sic) of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, witnessing the autopsy performed by members of the US Navy Medical Corps, and the embalming services done by the staff of Joseph Gawlers, Funderal Directors, Washington, D.C."

I do not say that Kellerman could not have been wrong but I do suggest that it was the function of the FBI agents to be there. This statement is consistent with Kellerman's later testimony, and the indications are that whether or not either or both of these FBI agents left the room for the telephone call they were at the hospital through the autopsy and were familiar with what the doctors found, said and reported. I shall in the future be looking into this and, if I learn anything further, will let you know.

Aside from whether this imposition on Dick's trust was hurtful to the Washington Post, there remains the question was it hurtful to me. In my opinion, it definitely was, as it was to any effort to clean up the mess of the assassination and its investigation.

Sincerely,

/s/

Harold Weisberg

P.S. The more I think of this, the more I marvel that anyone would so ~~in~~ misinform a major newspaper. Assuming as I do that the entire matter will before too long be thoroughly aired, when that happens, this might be a considerable embarrassment for the Washington Post.

Therefore, if the Post would like, I could prepare the contents of this letter in publishable form and from the record alone answer each and every one of the misstatements. This would also be very much in my interest, and I believe it would serve other worthwhile purposes.

Although by now perhaps I should not easily be shocked, I nonetheless am that testimony should be so totally and so brazenly misrepresented, for it in some cases is exactly the opposite of what was actually said.

Mr. Bradless is a very busy man, and I shall not try and see him. But because the integrity of the Post is involved and because of his personal friendship with the late President, since this might also become a personal embarrassment for him, I hope you will if you feel you should.

In any event, should the Post desire to set the record straight, as I sincerely hope it will, it may depend upon me for whatever I may be able to do in helping it, for I do not think such a prominent error should be uncorrected.