

June 8, 1970

James B. Rhoads  
Archivist of the United States  
General Services Administration  
National Archives and Record Service  
Washington, D.C. 20408

Dear Dr. Rhoads:

I address this letter to you because it concerns a matter which I feel should be brought to your attention.

I have corresponded with a member of your staff, Mr. Mark G. Eckhoff, on matters germane to the records of the Warren Commission. Just recently, the Archives prepared for me an order of color slides made of certain ballistics specimens in the Commission's evidence. Please allow me to express my deepest gratitude to your staff for having followed the details of my request so closely.

There are, however, certain things about the slides which puzzle me and about which I seek your explanation. In particular, one slide does not appear at all consistent with the original exhibits introduced into evidence at the Commission hearings. The following anomalies are apparent:

- (1) CE 840 allegedly consists of 3 fragments of metal removed from the carpet beneath the left jump seat of the Presidential limousine during the early morning hours of November 23, 1963. FBI agent Robert Frazier testified to this fact before the Commission (see volume 5 of the hearings, page 66). The photograph of CE 840 printed by the Commission (volume 17, page 840) is somewhat inconsistent with this description. It shows three fragments of similar size plus an additional, although extremely small one at about 8 o'clock (see enclosed sketch). I do not know the origin of this additional minute fleck.

However, in the slide including CE 840 provided to me by the Archives, only 2 fragments are shown in addition to this tiny fleck (see sketch). The letter from Mr. Eckhoff which accompanied the slides did not explain this anomaly. I would therefore like to know: a) why the third fragment from CE 840 was not included in my picture; b) if that fragment is still in the possession of the Archives or its present whereabouts, and c) why a fourth fragment in the form of a tiny fleck appears in an exhibit which purports to show three fragments.

- (2) CE 843 allegedly consists of 2 metallic fragments removed from President Kennedy's head during the autopsy. Commander Humes testified that these two fragments measured 7 by 2mm and 3 by 1mm respectively (volume 2, page 354).

When introduced into evidence before the Commission, CE 843 was described by Agent Frazier as consisting of 2 fragments (volume 5, page 73). If you will consult the picture of CE 843 printed by the Commission (volume 17, page 841), you will see that it actually shows 3 pieces of metal, one appearing as a minute dot (see sketch).

The slide which includes CE 843 also portrays a metric scale by which the exhibits may be measured. While the disposition of the fragments in this photo appears consistent with those depicted in the Commission's photo, there is a definite inconsistency with the sworn descriptions of the fragments. By the scale in my picture, I can judge that the two measurable fragments are 3 by 1mm and 4 by 3mm in size respectively. No fragment depicted in my picture has a dimension of 7mm as described by Commander Humes. I would like to know: a) why three fragments appear in an exhibit which is sworn to consist of 2 fragments, and b) why one of those fragments is smaller (by about 3mm) than described in the hearings.

- (3) CE 857 consists of bullet fragments from an experiment in which a skull was fired upon in an effort to duplicate President Kennedy's head wounds; it consists of 2 large fragments and several minute ones. These several minute fragments are also depicted in CE 859. I had requested in my original order for the slides that the tiny particles from CE 857 be included in one of the pictures.

By letter of May 19, 1970, Mr. Eckhoff informed me that "We do not have the small bullet fragments shown in Commission Exhibits 859 and 857--The fragments in CE 859 are therefore not included in slide 'D'."

I am at a loss to understand how the Archives could not have these fragments. When CE 857 was described before the Commission by Dr. Oliver (who conducted the tests), it was said to contain these small fragments. In Dr. Oliver's own words, "... they are supposed to be all there." (see volume 5, page 88.)

Please explain to me why the Archives does not have the small fragments depicted in CE 857, which was introduced into the Commission's evidence.

I believe it is the duty of the Archives to insure the integrity of these vital pieces of evidence. In connection with the above mentioned, I am prompted to ask these additional questions.

- (4) Has any of the Commission's ballistics evidence been inadvertently damaged or mutilated since it came into possession of the National Archives? This includes not only loss of substance (as in the case of CE 399's base) but also change of form or shape, no matter how minute or seemingly insignificant. If any such changes have occurred, I would like to know under which circumstances they did occur.

- (5) Has any of the ballistics evidence ever been mounted in a pliable substance (such as clay) for the purpose of being photographed or examined since it came into possession of the Archives? If so, please inform me of the "mounting" substance, the particular exhibits and portions thereof which were contacted by this substance, and the residues, if any, which remained on the exhibit.
- (6) Has the base of CE 399 ever been photographed prior to the loss of a fragment during photographing for Professor Josiah Thompson? It is my understanding that Professor Thompson had a photo of the base prepared for him, although I am not sure of the exact date. Please prepare a list for me of any such photographs made prior to the loss of a fragment, including the exact date of each.

I would truly appreciate your assistance in these matters.

Sincerely,

Howard Roffman  
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