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The Mysterious Deletions of the Warren Commission's "TOP SECRET" Transcript of January 22, 1964

by Hal Verb

"We have not been told the truth about Oswald."

Warren Commission member, Senator Richard Russell

"I think this record ought to be destroyed."

Warren Commission member & former head of the CIA, Allen Dulles

Author's Note: The reader should be aware that when there is a deleted word, or words, there is a space before the first letter of the word, a space between words, and a space after the last letter of the last word. Thus, the total number of spaces deleted will be more than the actual letters in the "found" word(s).

Thanks to the brilliant, patient, audacious and exhaustive efforts of assassination researcher and writer Harold Weisberg, the once "top secret" transcripts of variously held Warren Commission meetings shortly after the Warren Commission was formed are in the public domain and can be examined more closely.

For over thirty years a transcript of one of those "top secret" executive session meetings (January 22, 1964) has been in existence. This particular transcript dealt principally with an alleged "dirty rumor" that Oswald had been an agent of some federal agency, notably the FBI. It was at the January 22nd executive meeting that Allen Dulles opined: "I think this record ought to be destroyed." Another Commission member, Hale Boggs, nervously restated the case when he said plaintively, "I don't even like to see this taken down."

Five days after these jarring sentiments were expressed another meeting was held (Jan. 27, 1964) expanding on the earlier meeting. This article, however, deals solely with the Jan. 22nd meeting. Those

interested in reading the contents of both the Jan. 22nd and the Jan. 27th meetings can refer to Weisberg's *Whitewash IV* and *Post Mortem*.

Weisberg reprints the text of the Jan. 27th meeting and the text is complete, but the earlier meeting on Jan. 22nd is complete except for a total of six redactions (deletions) in the text. The obvious intention by the censors was to see to it that these deleted words or group of words not be revealed. As will be seen from this article, both the deletions and the intentions of the censors can now be revealed and understood once the deletions are known. I believe I have "solved" these deletions and the "mystery" of that January 22nd document can be better understood. As I see it, the significance of this revelation is that it moves the entire JFK case a great step forward in demonstrating that Oswald, indeed, was an agent of the U.S. government.

It should be pointed out here that, as Weisberg notes, the thirteen-page January 22 transcript was not prepared until 1975 when the National Archives located the reporter's notes and sent these to the Pentagon for transcribing. Weisberg, in fact, discovered that all the records of the Jan. 22nd session were ordered destroyed at the Warren Commission's behest. Fortunately for all of us, Weisberg obtained a copy.

For those following the *Post Mortem* text of the Jan. 22nd meeting, refer to the following pages for the redactions: two on page 478; one on page 482; one on page 483, and finally, two on page 485. We will take each of these in order so that they can be readily followed.

The first of these is at the top of page 478 which contains the following:

A. (J. Lee Rankin, Warren Commission General Counsel): "And Mr. Carr said that they had used this saying before the Court that they knew why the FBI was **8 SPACES DELETED** ing to give some of these records to the Defense Counsel being able to get the records and asking the Court to rule that they couldn't get them."

The deleted word or group of words are: **so will** (=so willing) comprising a total of 8 spaces.

"The matter" is a reference to the alleged Oswald association with some federal agency."

Carr is Waggoner Carr, the Attorney General of Texas. What is being discussed here is the "will-iness" of the FBI to release its files to the Ruby defense. Those files would or would not contain information as to Oswald's alleged government connections. It appears that a kind of political gamesmanship is being played out here by the FBI, suggested by Rankin in the above statement. One might put it as: "Now you see it — now, you don't!"

The second redaction on the same page (478) occurs near the bottom and is more intriguing if not totally revealing:

A. (J. Lee Rankin): "...Now Mr. Jaworski, who is associated with the Attorney General working on this matter was reported to you before, and **12 SPACES DELETED**, story, I don't talk to Story about it but I did talk to Jaworski and he said he didn't think Wade would say anything like this unless he had some substantial information back of it, and thought he could prove it, because he thought it would ruin many in politics, in Texas, to be making such a claim, and then have it shown them that there was nothing to it."

Jaworski was the special counsel to Carr and "Story" (immediately after the deleted word) should be Storey (misspelled twice in this statement.) Storey is Robert G. Storey, dean emeritus of SMU Law School, assigned to Carr's staff as part of Carr's Texas Court of Inquiry studying the assassination. "The matter" is a reference to the

alleged Oswald association with some federal agency.

The deleted word here is most probably:
Shanklin.

Shanklin occupies ten spaces and is the best candidate for this redaction for at least four possible reasons. (Shanklin's full name is J. Gordon Shanklin and he was Special Agent-in-Charge of the Dallas FBI office.)

The four principal reasons are:

1. Early on the afternoon of the assassination Shanklin received a call in his Dallas office from a Lt. Col. Robert Jones of the 112th Military Intelligence Group which assisted the Secret Service in security operations for the JFK visit. Jones offered information linking the name of the fictitious "A. J. Hidell" to Lee Harvey Oswald. The information included items on Oswald's "defection" to Russia and his Fair Play for Cuba activities in New Orleans. Note here that none of this is referred to by Rankin in the above statement.
2. As Weisberg also notes, Earl Warren, who headed the Warren Commission, said (see *Whitewash IV*, page 37): "We talked to the Texas people." Thus, if Storey, Carr and Jaworski make up some of these "Texas people" it would make Shanklin an obvious candidate for one of those "Texas people."

As to the significance of why Shanklin's name being deleted, consider this: the Jan. 22nd meeting was well before any testimony was taken of witnesses, but the Warren Commission was trying to maintain its posture as being free of any taint of dependency for its facts. True enough, the services of the FBI were called upon to help "investigate" the murder. But the "solution" of the crime had already been reached on the very day of the assassination by Hoover and the U.S. government through Katzenback, who agreed to this complicity. If there were any doubts that the Warren Commission members realized that their "independence" had been dealt a death blow, read the transcript of the once "top secret" Jan. 27th meeting. That sorry record proves once and for all that the

jittery, nervous and frightened Commission members were there to "rubber stamp" a solution which even the more conscience-bound members did not agree with but were forced to accept.

"...why...did the FBI and Katzenback go along with this from the very first day...?"

We now come to the third deletion which begins on page 481 and continues on page 482 of *Post Mortem*. While very simple to deduce, it does, however, offer its own puzzling aspects:

A . Rankin: "One of the strange things that happened and it may have no bearing on this at all, is the fact that this man who is a defector, and who was under observation at least by the FBI, they say they saw him frequently, could walk out of the Immigration Office in **5 SPACES DELETED** Orleans one day and come out the next day with a passport that permitted him to go to Russia. From my observations of the cases that have come to us, such passports are not passed out with that ease."

The deleted word here occupies five spaces and it is quite obviously: **New**.

Now why this one word was deleted could perhaps best be explained by human error in that the words "New Orleans" most likely should have been redacted entirely. The "strange" phenomenon alluded to by Rankin apparently refers to the ease and alacrity with which Oswald obtained his passport. In a footnote reference to this "strangeness" Weisberg comments: "The unmistakable implication is that Oswald's relationship with the government was such that his passport applications would receive special treatment."

The fourth redaction occurs on page 483 near the top:

Dulles: “But it don’t get **10 SPACES DELETED** passport files or the passport records. They are issuing hundreds and thousands of passports. *They have their own particular system.*” (author’s emphasis.)

The best candidate for this deleted word occupying ten spaces is: **assigned**.

The “it” in Dulles’ statement refers to the U.S. State Department, and Dulles virtually gives the game away on the matter of passport files when he remarks that “They have their own particular system.”

It was not too difficult to figure out what this deleted word (assigned) could be, because a little later on Dulles refers to the fact that the Passport Office will “wait until it is assigned there.”

One must be cautious and always weigh what



Senator Richard Russell

“We haven’t been told the truth about Oswald.”

Dulles says about anything in this entire case. One recalls, for instance, that in the January 27th meet-

ing Dulles uttered this real whopper: “We [CIA] couldn’t investigate the Fair Play for Cuba Committee in the United States.” (What about the CIA list I have in my hands giving all the members of the FPCC in 1962, Mr. Dulles?)

But there is an element of truth in Dulles’ statement. When Frances G. Knight, Director of the Passport Office in the Department of State, testified before the Warren Commission (WE5, 386) she stated when asked by Commission member Senator Cooper about what “division” in the Passport Office “cleared” Oswald for his return to the U.S. that she personally didn’t make that decision. Yet she was its director!

Knight said that a group made up of “experienced citizenship lawyers” reached that decision. Under further prodding from Senator Cooper, she revealed that these “citizenship lawyers” were “*in the Foreign Operations Division of the Passport Office*” (author’s emphasis). They approved it, she said, and she emphasized that “both the Consul (Richard Snyder)...and the citizenship lawyers...were in agreement.”

Who were these “citizenship lawyers?” If my reading of all the books and articles on the assassination is any guide, these have never been identified!

The fifth deletion in the transcript appears on page 485 of *Post Mortem* and is at the top of that page:

A. (Rankin): “Secondly, there is this factor too that a **10 SPACES DELETED** consideration, that is somewhat an issue in this case, and I supposed you are all aware of it.”

Here the most appropriate word that would fit the ten spaces would be: **security**.

“Security” as a “factor” covers a wide range of “consideration,” of course, but one such concern could be Oswald’s ties to the U.S. government as a agent. To reveal this would obviously be a *strict* question of security and this would have to be *avoided* at all costs. The Warren Commission members were “well aware” of this political fact

— all you have to do is look at the political and career backgrounds of some of the ones appointed by President Johnson to serve on the Commission.

As to the sixth (and final) redaction in the transcript there is this on page 485, about two-thirds of the way down:

“What “pattern” for the future was being set by the example of the Warren Commission in conducting its sorry spectacle?”

A. (Rankin): “But they are concluding that there can’t be a conspiracy without those being run out. Now that is not **13 SPACES DELETED** from my experience with the FBI.”

Here, Rankin’s reference to “they” is the FBI and his mention of “those being run out” is to the “leads” they (the FBI) had that weren’t being followed through on as the skeptical Rankin notes.

My choice of words for this deletion for the thirteen spaces is: **the pattern**.

One can easily figure this out by noting that on the very same page Rankin comments about his experience with the FBI that “they don’t do that.” As he points out, the FBI doesn’t “*evaluate*” and this is “*uniform prior experience*” (author’s emphasis). Indeed, “pattern” is virtually a synonym for “uniform prior experience.”

Why, then, did the FBI (with Hoover as its’ head) and Katzenback (representing the U.S. government as its’ backup man) go along with this *from the very first day*? Why did they “buy” this “no conspiracy” story and, thus, break the FBI’s long-standing “pattern” of behavior?

Why indeed? Could it be because we really never found out, as Senator Russell noted to Weisberg, who Oswald really represented or that the assassination event itself never happened the way the Warren Commission (and other investigations) determined? What “pattern” for the future was being set by the example of the Warren Commission in conducting its sorry spectacle? And is that “pattern” continuing in other areas of political life, even today?

Just before Senator Russell died (he had come

to the conclusion, as Weisberg proved for him, that his own role on the Warren Commission had been lied about) he made some revealing statements to Weisberg. As Weisberg notes (see *Whitewash IV*, page 209), “Privately Senator Russell told me that he was convinced that there were two areas in which Warren Commission members had been deceived by the Federal agencies responsible for investigating the assassination of President Kennedy. These two areas were: (1) Oswald’s background; and (2) the ballistics evidence. The first of these two areas was the principal subject discussed at the January 27, 1964 Executive Session.”

On the second point raised by Russell, we now have confirmation of Russell’s suspicions: the record now shows that both LBJ and Russell did not believe the single bullet theory. A copy of the transcript of their discussion is available. There can be no doubt that demolishing the single bullet theory destroys the Warren Commission’s case of no conspiracy and a single assassin. Thus, both Weisberg and Russell have been confirmed and vindicated in their evidence certainly with respect to the ballistics evidence.

That Russell’s expression of his views on the ballistics evidence would come before Weisberg had access to the documented record should make it clear that when it comes to Russell’s first point: Oswald’s intelligence connections, we now have a powerful argument that we never did find out “the truth about Oswald.”

HAROLD WEISBERG RESPONDS:

By way of comment, perhaps the most interesting one would be to quote from Senator Russell’s assistant’s letter to him of June 14, 1968, after reading the first of the *Whitewash* series and skimming the next two of that series and then *Oswald in New Orleans*. His assistant, C. E. Campbell, said, that we agree with him [Russell], (not that he agrees with me and others), that the single bullet theory is impossible:

“He [Weisberg] completely agrees with your thesis, that no one shot hit both the President and the Governor.”

Campbell said of my books and work,

“His work is scholarly and evidences a tremendous amount of research. His basic approach is not to try to prove that Oswald was innocent, although acceptance of his inferences, etc., lead to that conclusion.”

Campbell noted what must have been a sore point for Russell in saying that I was critical of the Commission members because, *“it delegated too heavily to the staff.”*

I think it is obvious that not a single one of these redactions was justified and, with both releases to me under FOIA, those redactions are outside the exemptions of that Act. Glad to see that Hal has raised these questions and that you are calling them to public attention.

Harold Weisberg