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conspiracy at the Plaza."**

Canning's Letter to Blakey

by Kathleen Cunningham

The "not altogether complimentary letter" may prove to outline the reasons that the HSCA failed so miserably in their investigation of the John F. Kennedy assassination.

Following his shocking revelation that the photo evidence and the conclusions of the Warren Commission are not mutually supportive, Thomas Canning, author of the HSCA's trajectory analysis, offers us a brilliant outline of why the HSCA's investigation was doomed to fail. His allegations of evidence left compartmentalized, accusations of staff infighting, along with his assertion that the medical panel gave him conflicting data, confirm what many in our research community have suspected all along. For these reasons many have proposed that a special prosecutor someday be appointed to explore the assassination. †

January 5, 1978

Professor Robert Blakey [sic]
Chief Counsel,
House Select Committee on Assassinations
U.S. House of Representatives
House Office Bldg.
Annex No. 2
Washington D.C. 20515

Dear Professor Blakey: [sic]

When I was asked to participate in analysis of the physical evidence regarding the assassination of John Kennedy, I welcomed the opportunity to help set the record straight. I did not anticipate that study of the photographic record of itself would reveal major discrepancies in the Warren Commission findings. Such has turned out to be the case.

I have not set out to write this note to comment on results; my report does that. What I do wish to convey is my judgement [sic] of how the parts of the overall investigation which I could observe were conducted. The compartmentalization which you either fostered or permitted to develop in the technical investigations made it nearly impossible to do good work in reasonable time and at reasonable cost.

The staff lawyers clearly were working in the tradition of adversaries; this would be acceptable if the adversary were ignorance or deception. The adversaries I perceive were the staff lawyers themselves. Each seemed to "protect" his own assigned group at the expense of getting to the heart of the matter by encouraging — or even demanding cooperation with the other participants. The most frustrating problem for me was to get quantitative data — and even consistent descriptions — from the forensic pathologists.

Of somewhat less importance in gaining overall acceptance of what I consider to be a quite impressive improvement in understanding, was the manner in which the results of the investigation were conveyed in hearings. I don't propose to alter the trial-like atmosphere, but when long-winded engineers and Congressmen are allowed to waste literally hours on utter trivia, I do object.

I needn't remind you of the importance of managing time when many expensive people are participating and particularly when millions are watching. To allow staff and witnesses to overrun their planned allotments to the detriment of the whole planned presentation indicates that either the plan or its execution has been weak.

Clearly the participation of the Congressmen in subsequent questioning, though necessary, uses time somewhat inefficiently; even here enough experience must have accumulated to anticipate the problem and lead you and Chairman Stokes to deal with it.

Much of this rather negative reaction to the hearings themselves stems from my being strongly persuaded to rush through a difficult analysis at the last minute, abandon my regular pursuits for two days, try to boil down forty-five minutes of testimony to thirty, and then listen and watch while two hours' excellent testimony is allowed to dribble out over most of a day.

Permit me to end my not altogether complimentary letter by saying that it was for the most part an interesting and enjoyable experience. On balance, the entire effort would be justified solely by the strong indication of conspiracy at the Plaza. I particularly enjoyed working with Jane Downey and Mickey Goldsmith. Their help in piercing some of the partitions and their remarkably quick, intelligent response to my needs was exemplary. They also proved to be good critics in helping me make my results clear.

Sincerely,

Thomas N. Canning

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