

## **Last post for Oswald**

### **Garrick Alder**

On the morning of 20 November 1963, something very ordinary happened in Texas. The mailman delivered a standard Postal Service slip to the Irving home of Ruth Paine. It stated that a package with 12 cents postage due was being held at the post office for Lee Oswald, the husband of her temporary lodger Marina Oswald. This form was found on 23 November, the day after the assassination of US President John Kennedy, during the Dallas Police Department's search of Mrs Paine's home.

On 6 December a parcel was found in the dead letter department of the Irving post office. It had 12 cents postage due and had a gummed label attached on which was the address 'Lee Oswald, 1602 West Nassaus Street, Dallas, Texas'. Dallas has no West Nassaus Street and the parcel gave no return address.

The Dallas post office's dead letter department was referred to as The Nixie Room, and so this package is referred to here as the Nixie parcel.

The address label appears to have been written by Lee Oswald himself, but someone had crossed out the word 'Dallas' and written 'Irving Texas' below the label in conspicuously different handwriting.<sup>1</sup>

When the Nixie parcel was eventually opened by investigators, it proved to contain a long handmade paper

<sup>1</sup> There appear to be just two websites that address this episode head-on. George Bailey, at <<http://oswaldsmother.blogspot.co.uk/2010/01/mysterious-package.html>> records his belief that the address label had been applied so as to partially obscure the intended destination. On the other hand, Gary Murr at <<http://www.jfkresearch.freehomepage.com/murr.htm>> is of the opinion that the writing was added below the address label after the 'West Nassaus' details had been scored through by someone unknown. Mr Murr is obviously correct, as an examination of the photographs on each site will demonstrate.

bag, open at one end, not unlike the paper bag, apparently made from rolls of paper used in the Book Depository, that was later produced as evidence of Oswald disguising his rifle in order to carry it into the building.<sup>2</sup>

This Nixie parcel and the paper bag were dusted for fingerprints and no prints suitable for identification purposes were found (not quite the same thing as no prints being found at all). The paper was analysed and found *not* to be identical to the paper used in the construction of the incriminating 'gun sack'. This is not actually proof of the Nixie parcel and its contents having originated from somewhere other than the Book Depository, since rolls of paper used on the sixth floor lasted an average of about three days, and varied in their composition. This meant that two samples of paper obtained from the same location but on different dates could and did show up under analysis as having two discrete chemical profiles.<sup>3</sup> However, this non-match was presented as an investigative dead end. The puzzle of the Nixie parcel was being left deliberately unsolved.

Something happened between the discovery of the Nixie parcel and the FBI's interviews with Ruth Paine and her housemate, Lee's wife Marina Oswald.

On 20 February 1964 Irving postal inspector Roy Armstrong told FBI interviewers that by inquiring in Irving and Dallas, he had somehow ascertained that the delivery slip of 20 November related to a magazine delivered to Mrs Paine's address on 21 or 22 November. When Marina Oswald was interviewed five days after Mr Armstrong, she obligingly told the FBI that the delivery slip was for one of her husband's magazines and that she had paid the 12 cents excess

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<sup>2</sup> According to both Mr Murr and Mr Bailey, Ruth Paine told the *Detroit Free Press* (07 December 1963) that when she found the delivery form she had telephoned Oswald at his boarding house to tell him about the Nixie parcel held at the post office. An archival copy of the final edition of the paper from that date has been examined and contains no such comments in its three lead pages of assassination reportage, although Mrs Paine is quoted extensively. The claim can therefore be dismissed as spurious or a misunderstanding.

<sup>3</sup> <<http://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/warren-commission-report/chapter-4.html>>

postage and accepted the parcel at Mrs Paine's home.

Mrs Paine herself wasn't interviewed about the delivery form until 31 July 1964, when she didn't actually address the matter at all, instead going off at a tangent about the delivery of various magazines to which Oswald subscribed. The FBI does not have appeared to have pressed the matter further.<sup>4</sup>

If Mrs Paine was avoiding the subject without telling a direct lie, Marina was lying.<sup>5</sup> No-one addressed the question of why a magazine for which Oswald had already paid a subscription was suddenly delivered with postage due; or the 'coincidence' of the timing and the amount of postage that was due being the same for the parcel as the alleged magazine; or the fact that the overweight Nixie parcel had been put through an unidentified metered posting system (what is known in the UK as 'mail franking', a business practice) rather than having standard postage stamps affixed as one might expect for personal mail.<sup>6</sup>

Quite plainly a lie was being established to separate the witnesses from the Nixie parcel, the Nixie parcel from the delivery slip, and the postal service from the entire episode. This is one of the instances in which it is possible to demonstrate beyond any doubt an outright fiction being created during the Warren Commission's investigation.

How Mrs Paine and Marina Oswald were cajoled into going along with this fake story seems likely to remain a mystery. Perhaps, once they knew Mr Armstrong's version of events, they simply felt it was easier to go along with the 'official line'. They may not have understood the significance of

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4 <<http://www.maryferrell.org/mffweb/archive/viewer/showDoc.do;jsessionid=32BC4AA9E6DD148F2A2511D6C6FCB7AA?docId=62240&relPageId=26>>

5 The Dallas Postal Service informed me that it was quite possible for a letter with a 20 November Dallas postmark to be delivered on one of the same day's delivery rounds in Irving, just 11 miles from Dallas. And swallowing Marina's lies would have meant accepting that no delivery slip existed corresponding to the Nixie parcel at all, despite her having supposedly been in contact with the local dead letter office to arrange re-delivery of the alleged magazine. This must have been obvious at the time but no-one pursued it.

6 You can see this on the photographs reproduced by Messrs Bailey and Murr.

the postal service, in the days before e-mail, the internet and bulk data collection of information. The FBI was operating a constitution-violating domestic mail interception program, and the CIA had its own version called HT/LINGUAL to monitor overseas mail (in which capacity the Agency was already well aware of Lee Oswald's letters to and from his mother while he was in the Soviet Union). These programs in themselves would have been enough to make the Bureau and Agency want to show a clean pair of hands with regard to the mysterious Nixie parcel. But there was more to it than that.

Lee Oswald had always been meticulous about receiving his mail during his previous movements between various rented homes. The Warren Commission received a statement from Dallas Postal Inspector Harry D Holmes detailing the various change of address notifications that Oswald had submitted to the US Postal Service during the months preceding his death. These record Oswald opening a Dallas PO Box in September 1962, shifting from Dallas to New Orleans in May 1963, and a new PO Box in Dallas being opened in his name at the start of November 1963.

However, what is conspicuously not shown is Oswald registering his address with the Post Office as Ruth Paine's, in Irving. This is at least part of the reason for the charade over the Nixie parcel: someone in the Dallas postal system had noticed Oswald's name on the wrongly-addressed parcel and had redirected it to Irving – and it nearly got delivered to Mrs Paine's Irving address despite the fact that the parcel did not even have a street address on it. Oswald's mail was being intercepted and his supposedly unknown address at Ruth Paine's was known to at least one person in the postal system.

A clue as to one reason for the cover-up of the failed delivery lies in Harry Holmes's affidavit to the FBI, which is at pains to state that Mr Holmes only provided the information about Oswald's changes of address when Holmes was served with a subpoena. This proves to be the key to understanding a substantial part of this episode. The FBI's mail interception program had to be kept hidden (in fact it did not come to light

until the 1970s); and doing so meant that the fact that the mis-addressed Nixie parcel had almost been delivered, to Oswald's unofficial post-restante at Mrs Paine's house, had to be avoided at all costs. It was an almighty cock-up.

With regard to Oswald himself, the Nixie parcel showed how he had managed to get his paper sack to his home without anyone noticing in order to carry his rifle to work on the day of the assassination: he had made it at the School Book Depository, wrapping it as a parcel and used the company's metered mail to send it via the postal service. The FBI never sought to ascertain whose metered mail Oswald had used, even though the answer was obvious.

But most important of all was the fact that Oswald had sent a duplicate sack to himself through the post with no intention of it being delivered, so that it would be found at a later date. This is shown by his use of a non-existent address, the deliberate underpayment of postage, and then his consequent failure to go to the post office to pick up the Nixie parcel.

The implication appears to be is that Oswald was laying a trail pointing to himself, which would eventually fit into a narrative that would show him in the process of preparing to smuggle his rifle into the book depository.<sup>7</sup>

This explains why the FBI and then the Warren Commission did not seem to want to know how Oswald managed to get paper from the Book Depository to Ruth Paine's address in order to disguise his rifle as 'curtain rods' on the morning of the assassination: by demonstrating premeditation the sudden appearance of the TSBD paper in Oswald's hands contradicted the Warren story that Oswald was an unpredictable lone nut who decided to do the shooting

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<sup>7</sup> The US Postal Service informed me that metered first-class mail could be put into public mail collection boxes and that the postmark is consistent with the parcel having been deposited before 8:30 p.m. the previous day, the typical cut-off time of the last daily collection.

the night before JFK's arrival.<sup>8</sup>

This, however, does leave some questions unanswered: why did the post office redirect Oswald's Nixie parcel in the first place, and at whose behest? And most importantly, why was Oswald deliberately leaving clues that not only incriminated himself but explained how he had prepared for the murder of which he was eventually accused? For the answers to these questions we have to retrace the tracks left by Oswald as he and his mail moved through the US Postal Service.

### **Delivery in Dallas**

**B**etween his return to America from the Soviet Union in 1962 and his death in 1963, Lee Oswald left behind him a trail of postal redirections, sending his mail backwards and forwards across the US South. In October 1962 he had rented Dallas PO Box 2915 in his own name.<sup>9</sup> This was in order to receive any mail wrongly addressed to him at rented accommodation on Mercedes Street, Fort Worth, after he had moved elsewhere. Section three of his application form – which might have given the names of other people authorised to receive mail at Oswald's new PO Box – was missing by the time the form was produced before the Warren Commission by Post Office Inspector Harry Holmes on 23 July 1964. US Postal regulation 846.53b states:

'Part III of the box rental application, identifying persons other than the applicant authorized to receive mail must be retained for two years after the box is closed.'

The Commission ignored this inconvenient fact.

Warren Commission exhibit CE 2585 is an FBI report of 3 June 1964. In this, the Bureau stated unequivocally that Oswald did *not* list the Hidell alias on this PO Box

<sup>8</sup> 19 November 1963, the day of the Nixie parcel's posting, was the day on which details of Kennedy's forthcoming Dallas motorcade were published for the first time, in two local newspapers, specifically mentioning the turn onto Elm Street that would take the limousine into the School Book Depository's shadow.

<sup>9</sup> <[http://history-matters.com/archive/jfk/wc/wcvols/wh19/html/WH\\_Vol19\\_0152b.htm](http://history-matters.com/archive/jfk/wc/wcvols/wh19/html/WH_Vol19_0152b.htm)>

application.<sup>10</sup> Since the Bureau was able to state this without any doubt, it means that part three of the form disappeared between the Bureau's statement and Harry Holmes' testimony the following month. This presented a problem for any attempt to link the mail-order Mannlicher-Carcano rifle supposedly sent to the 'Hidell' alias at Lee Oswald's PO Box 2915, because Section 355.111b(4) of the US Postal Manual says:

'Mail addressed to a person at a post office box, who is not authorized to receive mail, shall be endorsed "addressee unknown", and returned to the sender where possible.'

The 'assassination rifle' could never have reached Oswald under the Hidell alias at Dallas PO Box 2915. Therefore, the non-incriminating part three of Oswald's PO Box application form had to disappear after his death for the entire 'lone assassin' story to work.

## **From Dallas to New Orleans**

In May 1963, Oswald filled out a form to redirect his mail from Dallas PO Box 2915 to his new Louisiana home address, given as 4907 Magazine Street, New Orleans.<sup>11</sup> This was false. Oswald had moved to 4905 Magazine Street. This form [then, as now, Postal Service Form 3575] was sent to the Dallas postmaster postmarked 9 May in Louisiana, with the change of address effective from the 12th.<sup>12</sup>

On 3 June 1963, Oswald opened Louisiana PO Box 30016, meaning that he now had two postal addresses in

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<sup>10</sup> Ironically, the FBI made this disclosure in an attempt to refute the claims of one of the first published JFK conspiracy theorists. See <://www.history-matters.com/archive/jfk/wc/wcvols/wh25/pdf/wh25\_ce\_2585.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> <http://history-matters.com/archive/jfk/wc/wcvols/wh19/html/WH\_Vol19\_0153a.htm>

<sup>12</sup> There is a rather furtive twist in his choice of apartment. 4905 Magazine Street is not a separate building, but a subdivision of 4911, with a second subdivision being 4907, both subdivisions sharing the same front door thereby allowing Oswald to inspect mail addressed to 4907. There was no 4909, and the existence of 4905 itself is not discernible from the street. See <http://www.history-matters.com/archive/jfk/wc/wcvols/wh10/pdf/WH10\_JesseGarner\_aff.pdf>

New Orleans. Testifying before the Warren Commission on 23 July 1964, Dallas Postal Inspector Harry Holmes said that part three of Oswald's application form had survived by fluke (unlike part three of his previous application in Dallas) and that Oswald had falsely given his home address as 657 French Street and identified Marina Oswald and A J Hidell as authorised to receive mail at this new box number. The form itself, supporting those claims, was entered into evidence.<sup>13</sup>

Holmes then told Commission assistant counsel Wesley Liebeler a flat-out lie, stating that it was lucky this section of Oswald's Louisiana application form had survived because postal regulations specified that part three of a PO Box application should be discarded once the box itself was closed, which, as we have seen, is the exact opposite of the truth. This lie indirectly explained the disappearance of part three of the vital Dallas form as normal post office procedure.

So Oswald provably identified himself with the Hidell alias for the first time as a recipient on his PO Box application in Louisiana. He was associated with the Hidell alias while in New Orleans, giving the name and PO Box number out as contact details on some of his 'Hands off Cuba!' recruitment leaflets. But he never gave his own name as Hidell, not even to his landlord on Magazine Street. Coupled with the missing part three of his previous PO Box application in Dallas, there was no evidence connecting the Hidell alias from Texas to Louisiana.

## **From New Orleans to Irving**

**O**n 25 September 1963 Oswald filled in a redirection form in Louisiana for PO Box 30016, giving Mrs Paine's correct address (2545 West Fifth Street, Irving, Texas) as the new destination for his mail. The Dallas post office therefore knew only that Oswald had gone to an address on Magazine Street in New Orleans in May 1963, while the Louisiana post office knew only that mail arriving for the holder of PO Box 30061 was being forwarded to Irving, commencing in September. His given New

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<sup>13</sup> <[http://history-matters.com/archive/jfk/wc/wcvols/wh19/html/WH\\_Vol19\\_0157a.htm](http://history-matters.com/archive/jfk/wc/wcvols/wh19/html/WH_Vol19_0157a.htm)>

Orleans home addresses (4905/4907 Magazine Street and 547 French Street) now become dead ends in the Oswald trail.<sup>14</sup>

On 3 October Oswald arrived in Irving in person. About a week later a change of redirection form in Oswald's name was *filled in by someone else* and posted from Louisiana to the Dallas postmaster (postmarked 11 October in New Orleans and then again on 16 October in Dallas). Despite the official purpose of this form [then, as now, Postal Service Form 3546] being to alter incorrect details on a change of address form, this new form in Oswald's name simply gave Mrs Paine's address correctly for the second time.

In other words, there was no alteration made to Oswald's redirection and the form need never have left Louisiana in any event; but the Dallas post office was now informed of Oswald's new address in Irving. Someone in the postal service in Louisiana had noticed Oswald's mail redirection and was now making sure that Oswald's new local post office knew exactly where he was picking up his mail. This is how someone in the Dallas post office miraculously knew where to deliver the Nixie parcel.

## **Dead end in Dallas**

**O**n 1 November 1963, Dallas PO Box 6225 was opened in the name 'Lee H Oswald', giving his address as the street on which he was indeed living (North Beckley) but the wrong house number (he was boarding at 1026 under the alias 'O H Lee', but the scribbled address on the application form definitely begins with a '3'.)<sup>15</sup> No mail redirections from anywhere at all pointed to this third PO Box and the Hidell alias did not appear on the application form. 'The Fair Play for Cuba Committee' was listed as an entitled business recipient, a fact which would of course become significant. The postal aspect of the Hidell alias seems therefore to have been

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<sup>14</sup> The US Census Bureau informs me that due to lack of record-keeping at the time, there is no way of knowing who lived at the two addresses falsely given by Oswald.

<sup>15</sup> <[http://www.history-matters.com/archive/jfk/wc/wcvols/wh20/html/WH\\_Vol20\\_0096b.ht](http://www.history-matters.com/archive/jfk/wc/wcvols/wh20/html/WH_Vol20_0096b.ht)>

brought into existence purely for Oswald's pro-Cuba campaigning in New Orleans and then abandoned on his return to Dallas. The forged 'Hidell' ID found on Oswald when he was arrested is another matter altogether.

According to Dallas Postal Inspector Harry Holmes, he ended up taking part in Oswald's interrogation on the morning of Sunday 24 November 1963 purely by happenstance. He supposedly changed his mind about going to church at 9.30am and made his way to Dallas Police HQ instead, where Captain Will Fritz unexpectedly invited him into the interrogation room.

According to an FBI report, a confidential source within the postal system ('Informant T-7') claimed he saw the key to Dallas PO Box 6225 among Oswald's possessions during his questioning on Friday 22 November 1963.<sup>16</sup> In CE 1152 Harry Holmes states that the key was found on Oswald's person after his arrest.<sup>17</sup>

Harry Holmes made the following statement before the Commission on 2 April 1964:

'Well, throughout the entire period [of Oswald's interrogation] I was feeding change of addresses as bits of information to the FBI and Secret Service, and sort of a co-ordinating deal on it, but then about Sunday morning about 9.20 -'

At this point, the Commission's assistant counsel David Belin cut him off in mid-sentence. There was an off-the-record discussion and when questioning resumed the subject of Holmes's role as FBI informant had been dropped.

In his subpoenaed statement to the FBI of 27 November 1963, Harry Holmes had listed the evidence available to him in Dallas concerning Oswald's use of the postal system.<sup>18</sup> The anonymous redirection form sent from Louisiana to the Dallas postmaster on 11 October was not mentioned, and nor was the Louisiana box application itself. Testifying before the

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16 <[http://www.history-matters.com/archive/jfk/wc/wcvols/wh22/pdf/WH22\\_CE\\_1152.pdf](http://www.history-matters.com/archive/jfk/wc/wcvols/wh22/pdf/WH22_CE_1152.pdf)>

17 <[http://www.history-matters.com/archive/jfk/wc/wcvols/wh22/pdf/WH22\\_CE\\_1152.pdf](http://www.history-matters.com/archive/jfk/wc/wcvols/wh22/pdf/WH22_CE_1152.pdf)>

18 <[http://www.history-matters.com/archive/jfk/wc/wcvols/wh22/pdf/WH22\\_CE\\_1390.pdf](http://www.history-matters.com/archive/jfk/wc/wcvols/wh22/pdf/WH22_CE_1390.pdf)>.

Warren Commission in July 1964, Holmes said, untruthfully, that he had confronted Oswald with the original application form for the Louisiana PO Box that gave the Hidell alias.

Chapter VI of the Warren Report report states: 'The single outstanding key [to Dallas PO Box 6225] was recovered from Oswald immediately after he was taken into custody.' But the items found on Oswald's person at the time of his arrest are listed on pages 614-7 of the Warren Report<sup>19</sup> and the key to PO Box 6225 is not among them; nor does any other witness refer to it, nor does it appear among the Commission's exhibits. The crucial evidence supposedly linking Oswald to the Dallas PO Box and the Fair Play for Cuba Committee had simply disappeared. It had never existed at all.

Harry Holmes, FBI informant T-7, had doctored evidence and lied his head off from start to finish in order to incriminate Oswald. He repeated those lies till the end of his life.<sup>20</sup>

## **Postscript**

**W**hy did the Nixie parcel not come before the Warren Commission? One clue is the 'West Nassaus St' address in Oswald's handwriting. There is no such street in Texas, never mind Dallas. However, there is a West Nassau St in Tampa, Florida, Zip Code 33607, although there is no block numbered 1602. It was in Tampa that an apparent assassination attempt on Kennedy's life was thwarted on 18 November 1963, just four days before the president was killed in Dallas. The would-be assassin was one Gilberto Policarpo Lopez – like Oswald, a member of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. On 20 November 1963, Lopez obtained a tourist visa and shortly after the assassination he flew to Cuba from Mexico City.<sup>21</sup> A

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19 <[http://history-matters.com/archive/jfk/wc/wr/html/WCReport\\_0320a.htm](http://history-matters.com/archive/jfk/wc/wr/html/WCReport_0320a.htm)>

20 Harry Holmes died in 1989. The last recorded version of his stories was published in 1998, and that version can be read at <[http://www.kenrahn.com/JFK/History/The\\_deed/Sneed/Holmes.html](http://www.kenrahn.com/JFK/History/The_deed/Sneed/Holmes.html)>. Fittingly, the *canard* of the key to box 6225 is swallowed by Vincent Bugliosi in his enormous book on Oswald's lone guilt, *Reclaiming History*.

21 <<http://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1c.html>> See page 118.

John Kaylock claimed to have met Oswald in Punta Gorda, Florida, shortly before the assassination.<sup>22</sup> A week after the assassination, CIA hand and future Watergate burglar Frank (Fiorini) Sturgis alleged that he had met Oswald in Florida in the days prior to the assassination itself, a claim that is surely a flashing red warning light indicating something highly suspicious being spun.

And then there was Chicago. A JFK motorcade there had been called off after the discovery of an apparent assassination plot there on 2 November, a fortnight before Tampa. This time, there appeared to be a 'lone nut' set up in advance, in the form of Thomas Arthur Vallee who worked at a printing company whose offices overlooked an awkward left-hand turn (like the Elm Street turn on the Dallas motorcade route) that would have taken Kennedy right past any waiting sniper in that building. But if Vallee was the designated patsy, the plan was a dud because Vallee had a holiday booked on the day of the Chicago motorcade and was not at work. The question then is whether the plan was ever meant to succeed at all, unless one assumes highly incompetent conspirators who couldn't even get their fall guy into place on the right day.<sup>23</sup>

Oswald is also connected to Chicago, and not only because of his supposed purchase of a rifle from that city's Klein's store. Shortly after the assassination, an FBI memo recorded an allegation that Oswald was connected to a car registered in Vallee's name.<sup>24</sup> And on 25 November, the FBI received information that explicitly linked the 'Chicago Plot' to the assassination in Dallas. An informant gave information pre-dating the assassination that linked Cuban-Texan businessman Homer Echevarria to the sale of weapons to an anti-Kennedy Cubans in Chicago and quoted Echevarria as

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22 <<http://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=59624&relPageId=24&search=kaylock>>

23 A useful précis of the discovery of the 'Chicago Plot' was made by the House Select Committee on Assassinations. See pages 230-232 at <<http://www.archives.gov/research/jfk/select-committee-report/part-1d.html>>.

24 <<http://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=62272&relPageId=50>>

saying that Kennedy's murder was imminent.<sup>25</sup> By December, an anonymous whisper had reached the FBI alleging that Oswald had actually been arrested and appeared in Court in Chicago on 2 November, the day of the 'plot' itself.<sup>26</sup> A few days after the rumour of Oswald's arrest, the Warren Commission received an FBI report concerning Vallee and his time in the US Marine Corps which discussed similarities in Vallee's and Oswald's choice of ammunition.<sup>27</sup>

Lines were being sketched between the Chicago and Tampa 'plots' and the eventual murder in Dallas. If these threads had been uncovered by the Warren Commission, they would have given the unmistakable impression of Cuban involvement in a sprawling cross-America assassination plot that got lucky on the third attempt. It would have been curtains for Castro, at the very least. Oswald's Nixie parcel was one loose end that, when tugged at, would have unraveled an assassination conspiracy on a national scale. However, as Warren Commission counsel J Lee Rankin told frustrated staffers: 'We're supposed to be closing doors, not opening them.'

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25 <<https://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=10490#relPageId=364&tab=page>>

26 <<http://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=10448&search=vallee#relPageId=10&tab=page>>

27 <<https://www.maryferrell.org/showDoc.html?docId=10510#relPageId=2&tab=page>>

