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Subject: Your December letter

Dear Peter, Thanks for your December letter. Staff members of the Review Board are working on many of your suggestions, some of which are quite time consuming and involved. Although the substantive work is continuing, let me suggest some of my concerns on the issue of interviewing witnesses about records. As you know, I have now taken the depositions of several people involved in the autopsy and have interviewed a number of witnesses. The more that I do this, the more sceptical I become of 30-35 year old memories -- even when the subject is something as dramatic as the murder and autopsy of the President. Perhaps the most salient example I have is a statement made in an interview with one of the Parkland doctors. He recounted for me his surprise at seeing Jackie Kennedy in Trauma Room No. 1 wearing -- he said he would never forget it -- a white dress. Of course, everyone in the world knows that it was a pink dress. The doctor was mistaken. I personally cannot understand how he got that wrong. He had no interest in lying. He was not trying to deceive me (I assume). What are we to do with this "vivid" recollection? 1. Assume that there were two Jackies? 2. Assume that she actually had two dresses? 3. Assume that he was wrong on this detail, but he was right on his other statements? 4. Assume that he was deliberately lying? 5. Assume that he cannot be trusted on any of his observations? 6. Decide that if we don't like his medical observations, then we can prove that he is not reliable by pointing to the dress observation? Two of the people whom I deposed (Sibert and O'Neill) were together for much of the evening, yet their recollections differed on some of the events. The divergence of their recollections does not point necessarily towards (or away from) a conspiracy and did not obviously suggest that either one was being untruthful. The divergence of recollections -- when there is no obvious reason for deception -- undermines the value of eyewitness testimony. It is for this reason that I am, frankly, dubious about our ability to obtain valuable and reliable information (35 years after the fact) about "who put what into which file and why?" Many of the questions you pose are legitimate and I would very much like to know the answers. I have become, however, very sceptical of our ability to elicit accurate information on such matters from memories. That said, we have received some valuable leads that have been useful. The kind of information that we need, however, is suggestions as where to look for particular files rather than people's recollections regarding what may (or may not) have been in a particular file and why. I hope this is of some use. Best wishes for the holiday season, Jeremy

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