

MEMORANDUM

June 2, 1997

To: File

From: T. Jeremy Gunn

Subject: Gerald R. Ford "Desk Diaries" and Interview

On May 28, 1997, I visited the offices of former President Gerald R. Ford in Rancho, Mirage, California. The purpose of the visit was to review President Ford's desk diaries from 1963 and 1964 and to ask him questions related to his service on the Warren Commission. President Ford and his office were very cooperative and helpful. President Ford stipulated that I would be able to review the desk diaries on the condition that I not take any notes during my review. He stated that Mr. Lou Cannon was the only other person who had previously been given access to the desk diaries. During my review, I placed paper markers in a few pages and subsequently asked President Ford questions about entries on those pages. I had the clear impression that he was forthcoming in response to all of my questions.

Prior to my review, President Ford asked a few questions about the work of the Assassination Records Review Board, the kinds of information that we are releasing, and the general level of cooperation that we are receiving from the relevant Federal agencies. I answered his questions and provided some additional background information.

The two desk diaries I reviewed were leather-bound books dated "1963" and "1964" that appear to have served principally as appointment books for then-Congressman Ford. Typical entries included such information as the starting times for Congressional hearings, appointments, and the destinations for his travels. On occasion, some entries were crossed out -- suggesting that a meeting or event had been canceled or that the Congressman did not attend. Most of the entries that related to the Warren Commission were written in red ink. The typical entry would refer to an Executive Session or to the description of a witness who testified at a hearing. The Warren Commission notes were very brief. Sometimes they described the general subject matter of the witness's testimony. Some entries that listed witnesses included a notation to the effect of "I did not attend the hearing." One interesting entry was made on the testimony of John McVickar, whom Ford perceived as telling the Commissioners what the "higher-ups" [at State] wanted McVickar to say.

Although there were no startling entries, there were a few that were of interest. Because I did not take notes, per President Ford's request, my observations will not be as precise as I would have otherwise preferred.

There was one entry from January, 1964, that referred to a viewing of a motion picture of the

assassination. Although the entry was by no means clear, it appeared to suggest that the viewing of the film was held at the Treasury Department. The part that was the most curious was that the viewing was identified as happening in *January* of 1964 (I do not recall the exact date). When I asked President Ford about the entry, he said that he believed that it referred to a viewing of the Zapruder film. He did not recall where he had seen the film or whether he had seen it on more than one occasion. I saw no reference in the desk diaries referring to a showing of the Zapruder film in February, 1964. (Although it is pure speculation on my part, the entry and its timing suggests to me that he may have been shown a Secret Service copy of the film prior to the time the original was shown to the Commission.)

The desk diary included a typed, three or four page memorandum describing the Commission's trip to Dallas, the viewing of the Texas School Book Depository, and its interview with Jack Ruby. Although, once again, there is no startling information in the memorandum, it provides a useful look at his thoughts at the time.

I asked President Ford whether he, or any of the Warren Commission members or staff had seen the autopsy photographs or x-rays. He responded that he had no recollection of having seen any of them himself, although he has a vague recollection that one or two of the Commission members did see the material. He stressed, however, that he was not certain of this.

I also asked him about any meetings he might have had with FBI officials, particularly with J. Edgar Hoover. He responded that he was confident that he had no meetings with Hoover about the Warren Commission. The only meetings that he may have had at that time with Hoover were when the latter dropped into his office at the time the FBI's budget was under consideration by Congress. He did remember meeting with a person named "Deke," and, in response to my suggesting "DeLoach," agreed that that was the person. He said that DeLoach would come by his office on occasion during the time of the Warren Commission. DeLoach would ask general questions such as "is the FBI cooperating?" and "is there anything more that we can do?" President Ford has heard recently that DeLoach has reported that valuable information about Warren Commission events were discussed. President Ford stated that this was simply not true. He suggested that DeLoach may have exaggerated the information he obtained in order to curry favor with Hoover. In my review of the desk diaries, I saw no evidence of meetings between Ford and either Hoover or DeLoach. The absence of such entries certainly seems to support President Ford's version of these meetings.

There was an entry from (as I recall) March, 1964, that pertained to a Commission meeting about Norman Redlich. It appears that, following this meeting, Ford gave some consideration to resigning from the Commission. The day after the meeting, Allen Dulles called Ford and urged him not to resign. There was no subsequent evidence that any further consideration was given to resigning.

President Ford recounted that his considering resigning was motivated, at least in part, by his significant other duties to the House of Representatives and to his party.

I asked President Ford about the final Commission meeting on September 18, 1964. He remembered the meeting, but had no recollection as to whether there had been a court reporter transcribing the meeting. He did not recall ever having seen a transcript. It was his recollection that the principal subject of the meeting was Senator Richard Russell's concern that the Report include language saying that "the Commission had *found* no evidence of a conspiracy, foreign or domestic." President Ford stated that he has subsequently become aware of no evidence that points to a conspiracy.

The last question I asked pertained to a document from the Ford Library that currently is undergoing review at NSC. The document, from January, 1975, pertains to some statements made to President Ford by Henry Kissinger regarding some information that the latter had recently received from Richard Helms regarding Castro assassination attempts from the early 1960s. President Ford did not recall the conversation and suggested speaking to Henry Kissinger about it.

I concluded by urging President Ford to reconsider the possibility of his donating copies of the relevant portions of the desk diaries to the National Archives. Although I do not perceive that the desk diaries alter in any substantial way the story of the Warren Commission, I believe that they would be useful to help clarify and illuminate his experience as a Warren Commission member.

File no. 4.05 (Ford, Gerald R.)

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