

INTERVIEW WITH WIDOW

Oswald's Brief Diary of Soviet Days Cut and Rewritten Later

BY HELEN YENNE

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The diary of Lee Harvey Oswald's stay in Russia from October, 1959 until early 1962 was only 12 pages long.

"Do you have any explanation for its relative brevity?" I asked Marina Oswald, the widow of the accused assassin of President Kennedy, during an exclusive interview in her Richardson, Tex., home.

"I am certain it was much longer originally," she said. "Lee must have rewritten it for the last time shortly before we left Minsk in May, 1962, and then destroyed the old pages."

Marina spoke of the diary and of many other things during an unusually frank four-hour conversation. She spoke in Russian, I spoke in English.

Languages she helped me meet Marina, translated for us.

The diary, now in the hands of Warren Commission investigators of the Presidential assassination, was "leaked" by someone to the Dallas Morning News, which published extensive excerpts last month.

was reluctant to talk about some of the personal passages in the diary, those telling of his supposed romance with other Russian girls and of his relationship with her.

The diary said she gave him her telephone number the first night they met. An obvious lie, retorted Marina.

"I gave it to him the second time we met, a week later," she insisted. "I had gone to the weekly trade union dance with another girl. Lee was there and I let him take me home. I introduced him to my aunt with whom I lived and gave him our phone number."

The diary mentioned a Dostoevski novel, "The Idiot," that Oswald found in a store. He traveled to Moscow and a small cloth figure given to him by another girl guide. Marina thought it significant that the diary ignored the fun that Intourist guides chipped in to buy for him. A fun that was a virtual necessity in winter, but Oswald didn't afford one when he was in Moscow.

Marina recalled. "He even brought it back with him to show off in America."

I asked Marina if she knew that many writers had described her husband as resenting anybody who tried to help him.

She thought a moment, then said:

"I know that Lee was grateful to people inside. I know he appreciated that hat, for instance. But he never wanted to show others that he was grateful."

"People are always asking me how I still feel any affection for Lee after the terrible thing he did. I knew a different Lee. I guess. He was one way with me, but another way with everybody else. I could see his face change the moment he went to our door to answer a knock."

We went back to the diary. It stops with an entry that appears to be March 27, 1962. Oswald noted the receipt of an affidavit of support for his family's necessary

together entry into the United States, which had been secured by his mother from an employer in Texas.

What finally influenced the Soviets to let her go? Marina reflected briefly, then said that perhaps they were resigned to the fact that she would never be politically motivated. "I used to oversleep and miss the young people's indoctrinating meetings. I was supposed to attend," she said with a smile.

Stories on Defection

Marina had brought along an Esquire article containing Oswald's letters to his mother and sister explaining them. I asked the interpreter to read them to Marina in Russian. She listened, fascinated.

Oswald pleaded with his mother in the letters to send him "literature," by which he meant magazines such as Time and Life. She obligingly sent him bundles from time to time.

"Yes, they arrived," said Marina. "And he read them. Lee was a great reader."

"Were the magazines cut up by Russian censors?"

"No, they weren't cut up, although they had been passed by the censors."

Marina verified that clippings from Fort Worth papers about Oswald's defection, which he requested from his mother, also passed Soviet censors. The clippings arrived in March, 1962. Oswald showed them to Marina briefly, but he did not translate them for her.

It had been Marina's contention at the start of our conversation that Oswald had written and rewritten his diary to improve his

image at home in America. She was interested in my notes on one of the newspaper stories about Oswald which I regarded as supporting her statement.

The story, an interview with Oswald by United Press International's Moscow correspondent, Aline Mosby, had been carried in both Fort Worth newspapers, the Star-Telegram and the Press, on Sunday, Nov. 15, 1959. "Lee Oswald," Miss Mosby wrote, "still sporting the close-top haircut he wore in the U.S. Marines, said Saturday that when he left America to seek citizenship in Russia, 'It was like getting out of prison.'"

Distortion Claimed

Oswald, in his diary entry for that same Nov. 15, told of phoning Miss Mosby and agreeing to the interview. "I give my story, allow pictures, later story is distorted sent without my permission, that is," Oswald wrote. But if, as he contended, the story was sent before he saw and approved it, how did he know in Moscow what Miss Mosby wrote about him on the same day that it appeared in Fort Worth newspapers?

Obviously he couldn't have known. The diary entry, dated Nov. 15, 1959, was not written in all likelihood until March, 1962, or later, after Oswald climbed at

hand, realized the necessity of divesting himself of the turncoat image.

Marina mentioned that Oswald, when he first told her about the diary, said he was writing parts of it from memory. On those rare occasions when he did let her see him work on it, she recalled, he would consult the calendar, letters, and documents for dates. He must not always have bothered to check the calendar, however, for he has entries dated

April 31.

Began to Worry

Before he married Marina, Oswald did not appear worried that she, a Russian, would hold him back in the United States. He did not even tell her of his dream of returning. The worry set in later. Marina could not pinpoint the time, but she listened closely as the interpreter read Oswald's mother's footnote to the letter in which he requested clippings about his defection.

Mrs. Oswald said she had written her son reminding him that he had a Russian wife and a job and that he

to think carefully whether he was doing the right thing in returning to Fort Worth where he was known as a defector.

Since Marina was certain the diary was written to counteract possible criticism of her husband in the United States, I asked her if he had ever discussed with her plans to publish it. She said no.

"Wasn't it fairly risky to attempt to bring such a manuscript out of the Soviet Union?"

"I suppose so," Marina said. "But Lee hid the diary under his shirt. The inspectors searched only our baggage, not our persons."

After painstakingly writing a diary and sneaking it out of Russia, why didn't he do something with it?

Marina didn't know.

Perhaps the answer died with her husband in Parkland Hospital, Dallas, on Nov. 21.

As I prepared to leave her, Marina said thoughtfully, "I didn't know Lee in the beginning, but I know him better now." She fetched a

book she had been reading, turned to a quotation at the head of a chapter, and asked me for my notebook. In it she wrote something in Russian. "It's from Tolstoy," she said.

The interpreter provided a quick translation of what

the novelist had written which Marina felt could be applied to her husband.

"We were born with kind instincts, but bad instincts we acquire."