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THE MARXIST MARINE

Lee Harvey Oswald entered history in a sickening montage of bleeding flesh, fried-chicken scraps, elementary readers, Italian rifles, and cacophonous war movies. Dragged, battered and balking, from a Dallas theater about an hour after bullets tore fatally through President Kennedy's head, his shadowy identity was suddenly thrust into the shocked and bewildered faces of America. Analysis would come later. In the meantime, fragments of the dead assassin's character and history swirled about in the aftermath of the tragic explosion.

Who, or what, was Lee Harvey Oswald? Bit by bit, a pattern of lived fantasy began to develop as the details emerged. Oswald was 24 years old, an ordinary-size, ordinary-looking young man with thinning hair. He claimed he was the New Orleans chairman of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. But V.T. Lee, national director of the pro-Castro organization, said, in a broken, tear-strained voice: "Lee Harvey Oswald never was either secretary or chairman of any Fair Play for Cuba chapter in any city in the United States."

'I'm Through': In 1959 Oswald, a 20-year-old ex-Marine, went to Moscow as a tourist. One day he walked into the American Embassy, slammed his passport on a desk, and announced: "I've made up my mind. I'm through." He said he was renouncing his U.S. citizenship—"I affirm that my allegiance is to the Soviet Socialist Republic." Oswald told reporters that he had been a "Marxist" since he was 15, when "an old lady handed me a pamphlet about the Rosenbergs."

He got a factory job in Minsk, married a Russian hospital worker, Marina Nicholaevna, and, three years later, when she was pregnant, he decided that he wanted to return to the United States. "I beseech you," he wrote to Sen. John Tower of Texas, "to rise [sic] the question of holding by the Soviet Union of a citizen of the United States, against his expressed will and desires." The Embassy loaned Oswald \$435.71, and he and his wife and newborn child returned to the States in May 1962.

Oswald next appeared in New Orleans in the summer of 1963, when he was fined for disturbing the peace as he distributed pro-Castro leaflets. Here he displayed a compulsion to

ward intrigue and duplicity by approaching an anti-Castro organization and offering his services as a "fit and strong" ex-Marine to harass and overthrow Castro. On a discussion program in New Orleans, he spoke glibly and superficially about the differences between the "socialistic aspects" of various "Marxist" governments such as China, Russia, and "Guiana" (meaning Ghana).

Marksman: A Marxist Marine was one of the anomalies of Oswald's character. A buddy remembers him as a "lonely, introverted, aloof boy," who said that "he hated the outfit," and was bitter about the "tough time his mother had during the Depression." Oswald was twice given summary courts-martial in the Marines—for insubordination and for not registering a privately owned firearm. (Oswald's efficiency with government weapons earned him only the low "Marksman" rating.) He received a hardship release when his mother was injured working in a factory.

Later, in Russia, he wrote to the Marine Corps asking to be discharged from the reserve because of his Soviet allegiance. The Marines promptly issued him an undesirable discharge. Still later, when he decided that he didn't want to be a Soviet citizen after all, he wrote to former Secretary of the Navy John Connally (wounded last week at the President's side) and asked that his discharge be reviewed. He compared his residence in Russia with the "way E. Hemingway resided in Paris," and



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wrote: "I shall employ all means to correct this gross mistake or injustice to a boni-fied [sic] U.S. citizen and ex-serviceman." The discharge was upheld.

Oswald's semi-literacies and halting locutions betrayed his aborted education. "He loved to read and wanted to go to college," said his mother, now a practical nurse. "But we are poor people so he went in the Marines." The neat, graying woman spoke to reporters at times in a mixed key of mystery and confusion that sounded a good deal like her son. "I've been persecuted and he's been persecuted," she said. "They all turned their backs on me before and they'll do it again. But my faith will see me through."

On the Fringe: If Lee Harvey Oswald was guilty, his act was not governed by the logic of political extremism. Psychiatrist Dr. Fredric Wertham thinks Oswald belonged among what he calls fringe fanatics: "These are people on the fringes—they are not usually part of any specific political movement. Whether he belonged to one group or another doesn't really matter. Whether insane or not, he was a product of our time. There is violence everywhere."

But if the absurd and horrible deeds in Dallas have any lesson to teach, it is that extremes finally meet in the cloudy, nightmare zone of delusion. The paranoid, whether of the right or the left, finally loses all sense of the situation except as a gigantic, personalized wrong to be avenged. Lee Harvey Oswald insisted "I did not kill anyone." This was a lie, but it was not an ordinary lie; it was the key to the personality of a singular kind of assassin. As the diabolical psychologist in Richard Condon's "The Manchurian Candidate" says: "... The resenters, those men with cancer of the psyche, make the great assassins."