

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ASSASSINATIONS

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Name Samuel Stern Date 8/22/78 Time \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address Wilmer, Cutler, & Pickering Place his law office  
D.C.

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Interview:

Former Warren Commission counsel Sam Stern was interviewed in his Washington law office on August 22, 1978. Mr. Stern stated that his duties on the Commission involved handling the investigation into Lee Oswald's background specifically, the intelligence agencies awareness of Oswald prior to the assassination. Secondly, Stern stated that he had been in charge of evaluating "the efficacy of Presidential protection," as well as preparing a history of American Presidential assassinations.

Mr. Stern stated that "at the outset we realized that there was no possible way to penetrate any official involvement in a cover-up or conspiracy if there was such complicity." Stern stated that he and several of his Commission colleagues discussed what they regarded as "the fact that the agencies - FBI and CIA - could formulate and maintain a cover-up which no one would ever penetrate. We of course did not believe that was so. And I still don't. But we realized what we were dealing with, in the power of these agencies. Fortunately, we believed they were on our side."

Mr. Stern stated that on one occasion he believed that the Commission was influenced in its investigation by what he regarded as "some type of pressure or fear of the FBI." Stern stated that this came about when he prepared a detailed letter to be sent to the FBI setting forth detailed questions about their past investigation and contacts with Lee Oswald. Stern stated that Earl Warren told him that the letter was too demanding and that it would cause problems vis a vis the Commission's relationship with Hoover. Stern stated that upon being told that the letter was "unacceptable" by Warren, he (Stern) met with John McCloy and explained the situation to him, hoping to gain his support. While McCloy did express agreement with Stern that the letter was necessary, Stern was once again told by Warren that "the letter went further than was desirable." Stern thereupon sent a less detailed request.

In connection with this episode, Stern stated that "one of my problems, a real difficulty, was having such limited contact with the Members of the Commission. It was all done through Rankin. And you never really knew if your viewpoint or arguments or whatever were being communicated."

Interviewer Signature *Mike Ewing*

Typed Signature Mike Ewing

Date transcribed \_\_\_\_\_

By: \_\_\_\_\_

Stern stated that had the Commission learned of the CIA-Mafia conspiracies to assassinate Fidel Castro, "we would have gone much more into Cuba, the CIA, and the Mafia. We would have had a whole host of new avenues calling for investigation. And we would have obviously had to develop some new sources of information - other than the agency."

Stern stated that he developed close relationships with other staff members in that they usually had at least two meals together, shared small cramped offices, and were away from their families. He stated that some senior counsel did not work as much as the juniors, and noted that "William Coleman, in particular, wasn't ever around that much." Stern stated that in conducting the investigation and writing the Report "I didn't feel rushed, though others did. And I never felt any outside pressure during that period."

Stern stated that he "felt that I knew the Oswald personality. I was comfortable with him acting alone. Oswald was incompatible with society - I think he was really striking down the king in his own mind. I also felt comfortable with the assumption that no foreign power would utilize Oswald; that any group would readily realize that Oswald was ineffective and unreliable, especially for something like that."

Speaking of the Dallas Police Department, Stern stated that "I had no problem believing the Dallas Police would let someone down in the basement. Not as a conspiracy, but as an incompetent operation in guarding Oswald. I had a very low opinion of them. They turned in a horrible performance with the actual motorcade, and then things like no tapes of Oswald's interrogation, and on and on."

Stern stated that "if there were a conspiracy, that would mean that Oswald was a consummate actor. I felt that one of the most significant signs that there was in fact no conspiracy was the absence of any early effort to take him out. Of other conspirators trying to kill him before he could really be interrogated at length."

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Stern briefly mentioned that he had been surprised, along with other Commission staffers, to learn that "Marina Oswald was sleeping with some guy within weeks of the assassination, when we were questioning her."

When shown the CIA memorandum of November 1963 in which a CIA officer wrote that the Agency had once considered using Oswald for intelligence purposes, Stern stated that "I have never seen this. I was never given this, and we had asked for and were supposed to be given anything of relevance like this." In reading the memo, Stern stated that "that would have definitely been relevant. If they (the CIA) were taking him that seriously, then you might think that others could or did also. If we found that had been withheld, that would have been a major explosion also."

When shown a copy of the 1960-1961 memos regarding "the possibility of an Oswald imposter," Stern stated that he had never seen those three memos either, despite the fact that "they would have certainly been relevant. I was supposed to have been given all relevant Bureau information and files on Oswald in the pre-assassination period. They said I had everything."