

RC 272
 Nelson Delgado
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What Oswald's Marine Buddy Told Probers

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WASHINGTON.

A verbatim interview between a Marine buddy of Lee Harvey Oswald and the Warren Commission relates that the suspected assassin had ties with the Castro regime while still in the military service—more than four years before the Nov. 22 slaying of President Kennedy.

A copy of the interview further discloses that the witness, Nelson Delgado, a Specialist Fourth Class now serving in the Army at a New Jersey missile site, told a commission staff counsel the FBI "badgered" him for what he believed was an attempt to distort the nature of his testimony. (The FBI refused to comment.)

The official transcript, obtained by The New York Herald Tribune, also brings to light other unsuspected and little known facets of Oswald's background, as told to the commission.

¶Oswald took lessons in Spanish from Delgado—who was born in Brooklyn of Puerto Rican parents—with the intention of going to Cuba to join the Castro revolution and was soon able to conduct a normal conversation in the language.

¶While a private in the Marine Corps, Oswald kept a copy of "Das Kapital," the Communist party gospel in his barracks quarters and regularly received a newspaper printed in Russian.

¶Despite previous reports to the contrary, during his Marine hitch Oswald was a poor rifle shot, was uninterested in gunnery and was frequently reprimanded for not keeping his weapon in good order.

Asked during the interview " . . . In your opinion Oswald was not a good rifle shot; is that correct?" Delgado replied it was.

The document adds new dimension to the complex character of Oswald. In it Delgado relates how Oswald, an avowed atheist, ridiculed Marines who attended church on Sunday, and how he irritated his officers by flaunting his knowledge of international affairs.

This testimony was given by Delgado, a former Marine corporal, while being interrogated on four separate occasions by the FBI and reiterated in an appearance before Wesley J. Liebeler, a staff counsel for the Warren Commission. The panel of inquiry, headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren, was appointed Nov. 29 by President Johnson to make a comprehensive investigation of the assassination.

Complying with orders sent him the previous day, Delgado met Mr. Liebeler on April 16 in Room 511A of the United States Courthouse in Foley Square, New York City. In essence, his testimony recapitulated, with clarification, what he had earlier told the FBI—plus the contention the agents sought to deflate his story, particularly his statements that he taught Oswald to speak adequate Spanish and that Oswald was not an expert marksman.

INTEREST IN CASTRO

During the lengthy question and answer session Delgado said he met Oswald at the Marine air control base at Santa Ana, Calif., in late 1958 and that the two struck up a close acquaintanceship over their common interest in the guerrilla campaign then being waged by Fidel Castro.

Handwritten notes:
 Delgado
 Oswald
 FBI
 Warren

New York Herald Tribune
 June 14, 1964

Handwritten notes:
 Oswald
 Warren

Delgado recalled, "He was commenting on the fight at Castro was having at Sierra Madres (sic) at the beginning, just about the turn of '59. When I went on leave, just so happened that my leave coincided with the Jan. 1, when Castro took over. So when I got back he was the first one to see me, and he said, 'Well, you took a leave and went there and helped them, and they all took over.' It was a big joke. So we got along pretty well. He had trouble in one of the huts and got transferred to mine."

-Delgado told of "dreams" he and Oswald shared of going to Cuba and becoming officers in Castro's army.

"... So we were all thinking, well, honorable discharge, and I speak Spanish and he's got his ideas of how a government should be run, you know, the same line as Castro did at that time."

Q. "Oswald."

A. "Right. So we could go over there and become officers and lead an expedition to some of these other islands and free them, too, you know, from—this was really weird, you know, but—"

Q. "That is what you and Oswald talked about?"

A. "Right... and we would talk about how we would do away with Trujillo, and things like that, but never got no farther than the speaking stage."

"But then when he started, you know, going along with this, he started actually making plans, he wanted to know, you know, how to get to Cuba and things like that. I was shying away from him. He kept on asking me questions like how can a person in his category, an English person, get with a Cuban, you know, people, be part of that revolution movement."

"I told him, to begin with, you have got to be trusted—right?—in any country you go to you have got to be trusted, so the best way to be trusted is to know their language, know their customs, you know; so he started applying himself to Spanish, he started studying. He bought himself a dictionary, a Spanish-American dictionary. He would come to me and we would speak Spanish. You know, not great sentences but enough. After a while he got to talk to me, you know, in Spanish."

HOW COULD HE HELP?

Delgado said that Oswald "kept on asking me about how about—how he could go about helping the Castro government. I didn't know what to tell him, so I told him the best thing that I know was to get in touch with the Cuban Embassy, you know... I told him to go see them. After a while he told me he was in contact with them."

Q. "With the Cuban Embassy?"

A. "Right. And I took it to be just a—one of his, you know, lies, you know, saying he was in contact with them, until one time I had the opportunity to go into his room, I was looking for—I was going out for the weekend, I needed a tie, he lent me the tie, and I seen this envelope in his foot-locker, wall-locker, and it was addressed to him, and they had an official seal on it, and as far as I could recollect that was mail from Los Angeles, and he was telling me there was a Cuban Consul. And just after he started receiving these letters..."

Delgado testified that once after Oswald had returned from a trip to Los Angeles he confided he had been to the Cuban Consulate there.

Delgado recalled that on another occasion he had to relieve Oswald from night guard duty to see a visitor who called at the base.

Q. "Did you connect this visit that Oswald had at that time with the Cuban Consulate?"

A. "Personally, I did, because I thought it funny for him to be receiving a caller at such a late date—time. Also, up to this time he hardly ever received mail; in fact he very seldom received mail from home, because I made it a policy, I used to pick up the mail for our hut and distribute it to the guys in there and very seldom did I see one for him. But every so often, after he started to get in contact with these Cuban people, he started getting little pamphlets and newspapers, and he always got a Russian paper, and I asked him if it was, you know, a Commie paper—they let you get away with this in the Marine Corps in a site like this—and he said, 'No, it's not Communist; it's White Russian'."

Mr. Liebler then asked if Delgado knew "for sure" whether the mail Oswald received was from the Cuban Consulate.

A. "No. But he had told me prior, just before I found that envelope in his wall-locker, that he was receiving mail from them, and one time he offered to show it to me, but I wasn't much interested because at the time we had work to do, and I never did ask to see that paper again, you know."

Q. "This conversation that you and Oswald had about going over in Cuba and helping Castro was just barracks talk."

A. "Right."

Q. "You didn't seriously consider—"

A. "No, but that's when I started getting scared. He started actually making plans, and how he would go about going to Cuba, you know, and where we would apply to go to Cuba, and the people to contact if we wanted to go, you know, but—"

Q. "So you got the impression that he started to get serious about going to Cuba?"

A. "Yes, and about this time Castro started changing colors, so I wasn't too keen on that idea, myself."

Q. "Did you talk to Oswald about this change in Castro's attitude and his approach?"

A. "Right. He said that was all due to mal—bad newspaper reporting, that we were distorting the true facts... because we were mad, because now we wasn't getting the money from Cuba that we were before."

Q. "So Oswald basically took the position that you were getting a distorted view of Cuba?"

CUBA NEWS DISTORTED

A. "Right, and we weren't getting the true facts of what was happening in Cuba. We were getting the distorted facts."

Delgado recalled once voicing criticism of the Castro regime because of the execution of an unimportant corporal in Batista's army and that Oswald had told him, "Well, in all new governments some errors have to occur..."

Throughout the interrogation the commission counsel would follow a line of inquiry, drop it and then return to it, a standard technique among investigators. He was particularly painstaking in his efforts to determine just how well Oswald spoke Spanish.

At one point, Delgado reported, "He (Oswald) could meet the average people from the streets and hold a conversation (in Spanish) with them. He could make himself understood and be understood."

Delgado also remembered that on one rare occasion Oswald joined some of his Marine buddies on a weekend leave to Tiajuana and that his grasp of the language was good enough to allow him to exchange light banter with the Mexican sporting girls who worked in the bars.

The witness readily conceded, none the less, that Oswald probably would have been unable to hold an involved political debate in Spanish.

Another ~~etal~~ section of the testimony concerned Oswald's ability to use a rifle.

Delgado told the commission counsel, "As I said to the men that interviewed me before, we went to the range one time, and he didn't show no particular aspects of being a sharpshooter at all."

Q. "He didn't seem to be particularly proficient with the rifle, is that correct?"

A. "That's right."

Mr. Liebelier asked if Oswald kept his rifle "in good shape, clean?"

A. "He kept it mediocre. He always got gigged for his rifle."

Q. "He did?"

A. "Yes. Very seldom did he pass an inspection without getting gigged for one thing or another . . . He didn't spend as much time as the rest of us did in the armory cleaning it up. He would when he was told to. Otherwise, he wouldn't come out by himself to clean it. He was basically a man that complained quite frequently."

Delgado next reconstructed an incident that occurred at the rifle range.

"We went out to the field, to the rifle range, and before we set out we had set up a pot. High score would get this money, second highest and so forth down to about the fifth man that was high."

Q. "How many men were there?"

A. ". . . About 40 of us were in the pot . . ."

Q. "And you say that Oswald finished fifth from the highest?"

A. "No. He didn't even place there. He didn't get any money at all. He just barely got his score, which I think was about 170, I think it was, just barely sharpshooter . . . no, pardon me, take that back, it's marksman is the lowest . . . Oswald had a marksman's badge, which was just a plain, little thing here which stated 'marksman' on it."

Delgado continued, "We were on line together, the same time, but not firing at the same position, but at the same time, and I remember seeing his. It was a pretty big joke, because he got a lot of 'Maggies' drawers, (a flag signaling a miss) you know, a lot of misses, but he didn't give a darn."

Q. "Missed the target completely?"

A. "He just qualified, that's it. He wasn't as enthusiastic as the rest of us. We all loved—liked, you know, going to the range."

It was later in the transcript, that Mr. Liebelier resumed the line of inquiry: "You told the FBI that in your opinion Oswald was not a good rifle shot, is that correct?"

A. "Yes."

Q. "And that he did not show any unusual interest in his rifle, and, in fact, appeared less interested in weapons than the average Marine?"

A. "Yes, he was mostly a thinker, a reader. He read quite a bit."

Turning to the apparent discrepancies in the FBI report and Delgado's story, Mr. Liebelier asked, "Did you get the impression that the agent was trying to get you to change your story?"

A. "Yes."

Q. "He was trying to get you to back away from the proposition that Oswald understood Spanish?"

A. "Well, am I allowed to say what I want to say?"

Q. "Yes, I want you to say exactly what you want to say."

A. "I had the impression now, wholeheartedly, I want to believe that Oswald did what he was supposed to have done, but I had the impression they weren't satisfied with my testimony of him not being an expert shot . . ."

Q. "First of all, you say you got the impression the FBI agents that talked to you didn't like the statement that you made about Oswald's inability to use the rifle well, is that right?"

A. "Right."

DESCRIBED ORWELL BOOK

Delgado also recalled how Oswald once described "The Animal Farm" by George Orwell.

"He told me that the farmer represented the imperialistic world and the animals were the workers, symbolizing that they are the Socialist people, you know, and that eventually it will come about that the Socialists will have the imperialists working for them . . ."

Mr. Liebelier then commented, "There is only one thing, Oswald did not mention apparently and that is that the pigs took over the farm, and then they got to be just like the capitalists were before, they got fighting among themselves, and there was one big pig who did just the same thing that the capitalist had done before. Didn't Oswald tell you about that?"

"No," Delgado answered, "just that the pigs and animals had revolted and made the farmer work for them . . ."

The witness said Oswald "didn't like the immediate people over him in this particular outfit. All of them weren't as intelligent as he was in his estimation."

Q. "What about your estimation, did you think that they were as smart as Oswald was?"

A. "Oswald, I remember, for instance, that Oswald used to get in heated discussions with a couple of the officers there."

Q. "The officers?"

A. "Right. And they'd be talking about, let's say, politics, which came up quite frequently during a break, let's say, and I would say out of the conversation Oswald had them stumped about four out of five times. They just ran out of words, they couldn't come back, you know. And every time this happened, it made him feel twice as good, you know. He thought himself quite proficient with current events and politics."

Q. "He used to enjoy doing this to the officers, I could imagine."

A. "He used to cut up anybody that was high ranking, he used to cut up and make himself come out top dog. That's why whenever he got in a conversation that wasn't going his way he would get mad, he'd just walk off, you know, and leave."

Asked if he and Oswald ever talked about religion, Delgado replied, "That's the only thing he and I didn't discuss because he knew I was religious . . . In one instance he told me that God was a myth or a legend, that basically our whole life is built around this one falsehood, and things like that. I didn't like that kind of talk . . . He used to laugh at Sunday school, you know, mimic the guys who fell out to go to church on Sundays. He himself never went."