

Agent Oswald

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I don't see how the country is ever going to be willing to accept it if we don't satisfy them on this particular issue, not only with them [FBI] but the CIA and every other agency.

Rankin on the "Agent Oswald" question, Executive Session,  
January 27, 1964

30

Whether Oswald had any connection with any U.S. government intelligence operation of any kind cannot be stated with certainty from the official records not still kept secret. But there was a basis, more than a suspicion, for the government to have investigated that possibility but never did. Senator Richard Russell's insistence at the Commission's last executive session on September 18 that Oswald had some assistance in carrying out the crime, forced Rankin and Warren to make a concession in its findings to the possibility of a conspiracy in the assassination.<sup>1</sup> The Warren Report concluded, in carefully crafted language, "Because of the difficulty of proving a negative to a certainty," the Commission "could not categorically reject the possibility that others were involved." But if there was any evidence to this effect, the text continued in McCloy's skillfully brokered wording, "it has been beyond the reach of all investigative agencies and resources of the United States and has not come to the attention of this Commission."<sup>2</sup>

On the issue of "Agent Oswald," however, the Commission left no room for speculation. The Report concluded with iron-jawed certainty, "All the evidence before the Commission established that there was nothing to support the speculation that Oswald was an agent, employee, or informant of the FBI, the CIA, or any other governmental agency." The Report went on to assure the American people that this categorical denial was based on a thorough investigation of "Oswald's relationships prior to the assassination with all agencies of the U.S. Government."<sup>3</sup>

So after the Commission's ten months of thorough investigation the Oswald the Report painted varied little, if at all, from the picture of the Oswald that became a household name the day of the assassination. If we recall, within a few hours after the assassination the suspected assailant who cruelly gunned down President Kennedy was identified by 112<sup>th</sup> Army Intelligence in San Antonio as a 20-year-old American who defected to the Soviet Union and was an active pro-Castro supporter after he returned to the United States. A few hours later that same day, FBI Director Hoover had satisfied himself that Oswald, a "nut" of the "extremist pro-Castro group," was almost certainly the lone assassin. The first news reports of the assassination carried accounts of Oswald's quirky political odyssey from former Marine to card-carrying member of the Fair Play for Castro Committee, that small, short-lived and ineffective collection of left-wing Americans who demanded that the government keep its hands off Cuba. There was nothing in the Warren Report to alter the first image the public had of Oswald as a former

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Based on the Commission’s refusal to launch a good-faith investigation into the “Agent Oswald” matter its assertion that Oswald had no relationship with any government agency colored the truth. When the Report dealt with Oswald’s Marine Corps records it suppressed facts and ignored circumstances that were inconvenient to the Commission’s prosecutorial case against the dead suspect.

Oswald was not a model Leatherneck. He was moody, disrespectful and occasionally insubordinate to those superiors he regarded as his intellectual inferiors. The Report covers these incidents and his two court-martials in sufficient detail. At the same time the Commission never attempts to explain why the Corps was so uncharacteristically tolerant of Oswald’s consuming and well-known interest in Marxism and the Soviet Union. While he was a Marine Oswald studied the Russian language, played Russian songs in the barracks, subscribed to Russian newspapers, and brushed up on his *Das Kapital* when free time permitted. By the time Oswald defected to the Soviet Union he was fluent in Russian. By any linguistic standards Russian is a difficult language to master. The Report leaves the impression that Oswald, a high school drop-out, learned the language on his own in his spare time. Oswald’s Marine Corps records simply noted that on February 25, 1959, he was tested in Russian language as though every Marine had to qualify in Russian just as they did on the rifle range. Most of Oswald’s state-side duty was in California where the government ran a foreign language school in Monterrey. If PFC Oswald was a star pupil of the school the Commission and the Marine Corps never saw fit to make the connection. Predictably, Oswald’s Russophilia drew attention from his fellow ‘gyrenes.” Some of them took to calling him “Oswaldovich” or addressed him as “Comrade,” usually to Oswald’s genuine delight.<sup>5</sup>

Oswald’s self-professed Marxism and his avid interest in things Russian never interfered with his Marine Corps security clearances. The Report hinted around that Oswald had a clearance “above the ‘confidential’ level” with access to certain kinds of classified material. Actually, when he served overseas at Cubi Point, the Philippines and Atsugi, Japan, Oswald had “Crypto” clearance, which required “Top Secret” as a prerequisite. His Marine Corps MOS (Military Occupation Specialty) was Electronics Operator Airborne. Which meant he worked with rather sophisticated radar equipment and systems. In May 1958 his radar crew played some role in the CIA’s covert “Operation Strongback,” an abortive attempt to topple the leftward-leaning government of Indonesia’s President Achmed Sukarno.<sup>6</sup>

sessions. The Commission became intensely interested in Oswald's tour of duty in the Philippines when it learned that an 18-year-old Marine in Oswald's outfit died of a gunshot wound while guarding the crypto van at Cubi Point. The dead Marine was Pvt. Martin D. Schrand. Schrand and Oswald had attended the same advanced radar in Biloxi, Mississippi, before being posted overseas in the same radar unit assigned to the ultra-secret crypto van. All six Marines attached to the crypto van had to have Crypto clearance, and that included Lee Harvey Oswald.<sup>7</sup>

Soon after the assassination the FBI went over Oswald's Marine Corps records and came across reports on Schrand's death while on sentry duty in January 1958. The bureau's interest was peaked by the fact that Oswald served with the unfortunate Schrand and by rumors circulated by several Marines in Oswald's outfit that he may have been responsible for Schrand's death. After two criminal investigations into the case the Navy's official 1958 verdict was accidental death "with no other person or persons involved in the incident." After the FBI ran out its own investigation into the rumors to no avail, Rankin requested that the Judge Advocate General's (JAG) office review the record on the off chance that the facts of the case just might, upon reexamination, point to foul play. What better collateral evidence of Oswald's criminally violent nature to bolster the Commission's "reasonable" case than tying him to the "murder" of Pvt. Schrand. JAG forwarded to Rankin two copies of the Schrand investigation establishing beyond any doubt that Rankin was aware of the status of Oswald's security clearance. After a review of the facts and interviews with the Marines identified with the rumors of Oswald's involvement, JAG was satisfied with the correctness of the original verdict.<sup>8</sup>

The Commission's failure to make any mention of Oswald's Crypto clearance cannot be attributed, at least in any conventional understanding, to national security reasons. The U.S. Navy never classified its investigation into the Schrand case. This suppression conforms with the extraordinary circumstances surrounding Oswald's early discharge from the Marines and his subsequent defection to the Soviet Union.

With two months of his enlistment remaining, Oswald petitioned the Marine Corps' Dependency Discharge Board for a "hardship discharge." The reasons he gave the Board was that his mother had suffered an "industrial accident" and could no longer be gainfully employed. Since she had no other source of income, and no one at home to assist her, Oswald requested an early discharge in order to take care of his ailing mother. In August 1959 the Board agreed to release Oswald from active duty. This was a spurious request and the Marine Corps had to know it was a flat-out deception. His discharge was scheduled for 11 September 1959, a week earlier Oswald had applied for a passport from his state-side posting at Santa Ana, California.<sup>9</sup>

With full knowledge and support from the Marine Corps Oswald's passport was issued on September 10, 1959, just six days later. Along with his passport application there were standard Marine Corps forms he had to fill out. Oswald matter-of-factly noted on these forms that he intended to visit, among other countries, the Soviet Union and Cuba, before enrolling as a student at Albert Schweitzer College in Switzerland and the University of Turku in Finland.<sup>10</sup> How did the Corps think Oswald was going to support his invalided mother traipsing around communist countries and attending European institutions of higher learning? Why did alarm bells fail to go off when Marine PFC Oswald, with his un-revoked ultra-secret clearance, flatly reported that he was going to spend some time in Russia and Castro's Cuba—at the height of the Cold War—before

pursuing a university degree, and that with its knowledge that Oswald was a high school dropout?

While the Commission included all this in its 26 volumes of hearings and exhibits, it made no attempt to explain away these glaring suspicious circumstances overrunning Oswald's Marine Corps service records. It was all passed over and ignored as though it was an unremarkable as water running down hill. The Warren report failed to expend a word on his fraudulent discharge and treated the issuance of his passport as administratively routine.<sup>11</sup> The Commission could have gone a long way to alleviate suspicions if it could have documented just one other service man's record from any branch of the military as unconventional as Oswald's before he found his way to Russia and announced his intentions to U.S. Embassy officials in Moscow that he was going to seek Soviet citizenship.

On Saturday morning, October 31, 1959, two weeks after he arrived in Russia, Oswald entered the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. He strode up to the receptionist's desk, placed his passport on her desk and announced he had come to "dissolve his American citizenship." The receptionist turned him over to Richard E. Snyder, a senior consular official. Snyder was CIA, an intelligence operative posted to Moscow under State Department cover.<sup>12</sup> Oswald thumped his passport down on Snyder's desk along with a handwritten note laying out his decision to seek Soviet citizenship. According to Snyder, that while Oswald was visibly nervous he had carefully prepared for the encounter and gave every indication that he would not be dissuaded from following through with his decision. John McVickar, another consular official, was seated across the room and heard the Oswald-Snyder conversation. McVickar was left with the impression from Oswald's choice of language and "simple Marxist stereotypes" that he had been "tutored" before showing up at the embassy. In a sharp exchange with Snyder, Oswald let drop that he had told Soviet authorities he would furnish them with everything he knew about his military specialty, U.S. radar capabilities. Explaining that the renunciation of citizenship was a complicated and irrevocable action, Snyder asked Oswald to return to the embassy on Monday under the pretext that the consulate could not process his application on a Saturday. After Oswald left the embassy Snyder notified the State Department of Oswald's intentions to defect and to turn over to the Soviets information about US radar capabilities. In short order, a State Department telex on Oswald was sent to the CIA, FBI, and the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI).<sup>13</sup>

Oswald never returned to the consulate on Monday and never renounced his American citizenship. He remained in the Soviet Union as a stateless person. Some time in February 1961 Oswald wrote the US Embassy in Moscow from his residence in Minsk, alerting the consulate that he desired to return to the United States. But before he would even think of repatriating himself this American defector set down his own terms: Oswald wanted an iron-clad guarantee that he would not be prosecuted "under any circumstances" should he return. He also wanted assurances that Marina would be able to return with him and be admitted to the United States.<sup>14</sup>

The Warren Report spends more than 30 pages in tedious detail over the legal intricacies and financial arrangements involved in the State Department's efforts to return Oswald and his family to the United States. It is a classic example of the Report telling use too much about too little. To begin with the State Department could not have assured Oswald he would not have been prosecuted without having first cleared this with the

Justice Department and the U.S. Navy, especially the ONI, the Navy's counterintelligence branch. The State Department could have taken adverse action against Oswald by denying him any future passport. That it never did is suspicious. In fact, in June 1963 when Oswald applied for a passport for travel to, among other countries, the Soviet Union, the passport was granted the next day.<sup>15</sup> Shifting to the Navy's interest in Oswald, on two counts: His fraudulent "hardship discharge" and admission that he intended to compromise secrets about the Navy's radar capabilities as the quid pro quo for Soviet citizenship should have assured that the ONI would have, at least, debriefed Oswald once he returned home.

The news of Oswald's defection set off bells and whistles within the American intelligence community. As a former radar operator with Crypto clearance this 20-year-old former Marine was privy to some high-grade technical information that any foreign government would covet. The Warren Commission learned something about this sensitive information when it questioned John E. Donovan. Donovan was the officer in charge of Marine Air Control Squadron 9, the radar crew that Oswald served with in Santa Ana, California. As a crew member of Squadron 9, Oswald knew all the radar and radio frequencies, the location of all the military bases on the west coast area, all the squadrons and relative tactical strength of each squadron, and the names of their commanding officers. He was familiar with all the authentication codes for aircraft entering and exiting the ADIZ (Air Defense Identification Zone) for the entire west coast. When news of his defection reached the US all of these codes and signals had to be changed. Donovan allowed that it was Navy policy to routinely change these authentication codes and radio signals. But he also disclosed that PFC Oswald was knowledgeable about the Navy's MPS16, newly developed height-finder radar gear and the TPX-1 system used to transfer radio and radar signals over a long distance. The capabilities of these new on-line systems, Donovan stressed, could not be changed.<sup>16</sup>

The John F. Kennedy Collection Register at National Archives II in College Park, Maryland, lists four boxes of ONI materials. There is not a single piece of paper in the ONI files indicating that the Navy debriefed Oswald upon his return to the United States. Moreover, there are no ONI records on any background check on Oswald relating to his security clearances. There is no indication in the ONI files that the FBI, fully aware of Oswald's defection and admitted disclosure of military secrets, demanded any of the Navy's records for the bureau's pre-assassination file on the defecting ex-Marine. The ONI files devote more attention to the activities of Gerald Patrick Hemming, an ex-Marine and soldier of fortune who in 1963 was training anti-Castro Cubans in New Orleans than on Oswald. At the end of January 1964 Rankin requested the Navy's Oswald file. Captain Robert P. Jackson, assistant director of Naval Counterintelligence transmitted some 20 documents to the Commission. In his letter of transmittal he noted the "bulk of this file is comprised of reports from other agencies, copies of which the President's Commission undoubtedly has already." There was nothing in the folders sent to the Commission relating to an Oswald debriefing or any records pertaining to pertaining to his security clearances. In short, there was nothing in these 20 folders that indicated whether or not Oswald had some connection with the Navy's intelligence arm. The irresistible conclusion is that Oswald's ONI file was systematically purged. There is nothing in the Commission's record for history to indicate any protestation from Rankin

assassination file on Oswald was not an anomaly; rather, it was more akin to a carbon copy. In March 1964 the CIA turned over to the Commission what it reported to be the Agency's "official dossier" on Lee Harvey Oswald. Like the ONI file, the CIA's pre-assassination file comprised 30 documents, the great bulk of which, some 20 documents, originated from other government agencies and other departments. The rest of Oswald's 201 file (Oswald's Personality File was identified as 210-289248) was made up of four newspaper clippings and five internal CIA notes. The last item was a CIA report sent to the Commission after the assassination.<sup>19</sup>

Like the ONI, the CIA contended that it did not debrief him after he returned to the United States or even while the Oswalds ostensibly spent two days sightseeing in Holland before their ship left for America. The derivative nature of the Agency's 201 pre-assassination file on Oswald was to create the impression that Oswald was a security suspect and therefore the proper subject for handling by the ONI and the FBI and not the business of the CIA. Even more curious was the fact that the CIA did not open its 201 file on Oswald until a year after the CIA's Snyder notified the State Department of Oswald's Saturday visit to the US Embassy in Moscow and his declared intentions to seek Soviet citizenship and reveal everything he knew about the Navy's radar capabilities.

None of this stacks even if it were a story line in a pulp fiction spy novel. The CIA made it its business to debrief American servicemen going and returning from abroad. That certainly included defectors. The Agency's Office of Operations had a Contact Branch, a domestic contact branch, all across the United States whose sole function was to interview American citizens—businessmen, students, artists, and tourists—returning from the Soviet Union or Bloc countries. This was standard CIA operational procedure during the height of the Cold War.<sup>20</sup> Any intelligence agency in the world worth its keep would have debriefed their national if he had Oswald's credentials. If Oswald's defection was legitimate the CIA, as well as the ONI, needed to know what secrets Oswald had compromised. The CIA's Soviet branch of the Agency's Counterintelligence (CI) division would need to know if the re-defecting Oswald had been "turned" while in Russia and was returning as a KGB "sleeper" or dormant agent. The CIA's counterintelligence chief, James J. Angleton, who was famously ensnared in his own web of Cold War paranoia, would never have lost an opportunity to debrief Oswald if he had breached security as he was alleged to have done. Angleton's suspicions of the Soviet menace were so ingrained that he never retreated from his deep conviction that the KGB was behind the Kennedy assassination.<sup>21</sup> Even if Oswald was just an ordinary defector, a "small potato" in the eyes of American intelligence, the fact that most of his time in Russia was spent working in an electronics factory in Minsk would have aroused CIA interest. Oswald's intimate knowledge of the city, what the factory produced, its rate of production, and the number of employees, and other non-travelogue facts would be the kind of low-grade information that the CIA would find useful.

Oswald's return to US and to New Orleans.

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Nobody knew more about Oswald than the Navy. Whether or not he was the assassin as the official mythology contends, the fact that the government charged only him as Kennedy's killer meant that any detail about the only official candidate in the crime was essential to the investigation. It cannot be dismissed as simple bureaucratic oversight that the Navy suppressed all these critical details of Oswald's military career. That the Navy saw fit to do this and has still not disclosed any of it, even after the Congress passed the 1992 JFK Assassination Records Collection Act that required full disclosure places the Navy squarely in the dock. Either it was party to the assassination or to the cover-up. Can there be any other explanation?

Compared to the ONI files turned over to the Commission the CIA's pre-assassination file on Oswald was not an anomaly; rather, it was more akin to a carbon copy. In March 1964 the CIA turned over to the Commission what it reported to be the Agency's "official dossier" on Lee Harvey Oswald. Like the ONI file, the CIA's pre-assassination file comprised 30 documents, the great bulk of which, some 20 documents, originated from other government agencies and other departments. The rest of Oswald's 201 file (Oswald's Personality File was identified as 210-289248) was made up of four newspaper clippings and five internal CIA notes. The last item was a CIA report sent to the Commission after the assassination.<sup>18</sup>

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Save?

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#4

~~File CD-1~~

leaking of

TD-File #18  
CO-1

Mr. Alex Charis  
P.O. Box 949  
Durham, N.C. 27702

11/12/85

Dear Alex,

I've gone over the selection of FBIHQ Earl Warren main file records that came today. In a short while my wife will see if she can make the first of what you sent, NR of 12/14/63 more legible and if she can I may have more comment. The record copy is in a kidnapping file. That is what the number 7 represents.

As I believe I told you, in his later days the FBI hierarchy pretty much manipulated Hoover. I believe that he was not aware of its leaking of the contents of the JFK assassination report prepared at LBJ's order prior to his appointment of the Warren Commission. To indicate that, as I told you Katzenbach told the Commission on 12/5/63, only the FBI was able to do the leaking, I enclose an extra copy from my file on its leaking. Another of the records of this period has Hoover's note, I thought this was not known outside the FBI? It wasn't. The FBI did not forward any copy to the Commission until 12/9/63, and as of the time of this and a number of other stories, no copy was out of its hands. DeLoach above all knew the truth because the leaking was under him, and he knew that. The name I could not recall, in addition to the name I gave you, Tom Bishop, is R.E. Wick, who was "Number One Man" under DeLoach.

Dave Carrow may be interested in Hoover's 2/6/64 if he doesn't have this version. The record copy is in the FBIHQ main King security file. While he pretends otherwise here, as I recall it, it is Hoover himself who gave that stuff to Rooney. That the FBI had nothing to do with Pearson is cute. It dealt instead with Jack Anderson and - have many records reflecting this. I'm sure also with other of Pearson's associates. That nothing was leaked until after the report in the JFK case left the Bureau is a large lie, of course, whatever Hoover may have known or believed.

For the completeness of this part of that file I'd appreciate a copy of the record you did not have with you. At some time in the future someone going over the archive I'll leave might want to see it. I now have no personal interest in it.

It is just about certain that at FBIHQ there are many more records relating to Warren, and I mean more than in the several main assassination files. These are referred to as "see" references, and they are card indexed. If you asked for the main file, you have that. If you asked for all the Warren info, you don't have it. I have no idea whether these references to Warren in other files would be of any interest to you.

Stapling a graf from another record on a piece of paper and taking all the time to write the basic information identifying it out is somewhat usual. The usual practice is to use a copy of the entire record, so there was, apparently, some reason for not doing that with this particular record.

72-1459 is the FBIHQ main Hoffa Obstruction of Justice file.

The brazenness of the FBI's lying is something. Everybody knew it was lying, it knew it was lying, albeit with great blister of innocence, and it and the others all knew it would get away with its lying. Its files are full of self-serving paper to cover its lies. Right now, in a case in which the FBI has a judgement against me I've charged it with fraud and perjury, which the courts always have and probably will still again ignore. Unfortunately, I'm pro se in this case, but as soon as the fink district court judge flails his rubberstamp again, it'll go up on appeal - to the Reaganized appeals court.

Best wishes,

Harold

RFD

city, what the factory produced, its rate of production, and the number of employees, and other non-travelogue facts would be the kind of low-grade information that the CIA would find useful. (add here Cubans in Minsk. And Oswald's so-called "Historic Diary."<sup>23</sup>)

The CIA's attempts to create an impression for the official record that it had only a casual interest in the defecting and re-defecting Oswald failed to satisfy other elements of the American intelligence establishment. On April 6, 1964 an ONI operative, G.R. Wilson, turned over to FBI Agent J.M. Fitzgerald, a "Confidential" memorandum containing classified information. The memo contained statements made to the ONI by a Eugene J. Hobbs, a former Marine who was stationed at Atsugi, Japan in 1956 through 1957. Hobbs contended that it "was common knowledge" that Atsugi was used for reconnaissance flights for the U-2. Somehow he aware, it was not explained just how he knew, that Oswald was with a Marine radar unit assigned to Atsugi, and that he may have furnished valuable information to the Soviets that led to the May 1960 shoot-down of Gary Powers.<sup>24</sup>

Since the ONI did not object to the FBI sharing Hobbs' "Confidential" statements with the CIA, Hoover wasted little time in contacting Langley. Apparently during the intervening week the FBI did its own investigation into Oswald's Marine Corps records. When Hoover wrote to CIA Director McCone a week after Agent Fitzgerald received the Hobbs' memo, he was able to cite chapter and verse about Oswald's assignments at Atsugi and Cubi Point, in the Philippines. The FBI had contacted at least 5 Marines who had served with Oswald at either Atsugi or Cubi Point. According to Hoover, one of these former Oswald associates recalled that at Cubi Point "the gear of the Squadron was housed there in an airplane hanger which he says he now knows was the hanger for a U-2 airplane." This underscored Hobbs' concerns in his memo that Oswald could have had some social contact with the U-2 pilots and maintenance personnel who serviced the U-2s, picked up some valuable tidbits of intelligence about the spy plane and passed these onto the Russians. Hoover's three-page letter to McCone was couched in terms of professional courtesy, furnished solely for the DCI's information. However, the FBI Director let McCone know that if the CIA felt it necessary "to conduct further inquiry" into Hobbs' disclosures, the "Bureau would appreciate being advised of the results of your analysis and inquiry."<sup>25</sup>

All Washington insiders knew that the FBI Director was a master at bureaucratic in-fighting. Just as all veterans and observers of the Washington power game knew that beginning with the Truman Administration the Hoover Bureau and CIA had waged behind-the-scenes some bitter turf battles.<sup>26</sup> But with the assassination and its aftermath Hoover had some immediate scores to settle with McCone's Agency. It would be understandable if Hoover was unhappy with the CIA for withholding from the FBI Oswald's connections with the U-2 and what it learned from the accused assassin of President Kennedy when it debriefed him, as Hoover rightly assumed it must have as standard intelligence procedures dictated. Since President Johnson assigned the FBI to investigate the crime the Bureau had every right to information about the assailant from all cooperating agencies indicated in the presidential executive order, including the CIA.<sup>27</sup> This practice of CIA withholding carried over into Oswald's activities in Mexico