

Helms on Nosenko

12 March 1964

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WILLEMS, MARINE

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et al on CIA contribution to Commission

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Meeting with the Warren Commission on 12 March 1964

1. On 12 March 1964, Mr. Helms, STAFF OFFICERS met with Mr. Rankin, Chief Counsel for the Warren Commission, Mr. Willems, and other members of Mr. Rankin's staff. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss the current status of the CIA contribution to the work of the Warren Commission.

2. The first topic raised by Mr. Rankin concerned information on Lee Harvey Oswald's stay in the Soviet Union as reported by the FBI, based on their interview of the defector, Yuriy Ivanovich Nosenko. This discussion is reported in a separate memorandum.

3. After disposing of the question of Nosenko's information on Oswald, Mr. Rankin's staff showed us a detailed memorandum they had prepared based on all of the information available to them, including our own contribution concerning Oswald's stay in the USSR. This material, together with some questions specifically related to the material we provided, will be forwarded to us by Mr. Rankin's staff. It was then suggested that a CIA officer most familiar with the material provided by CIA on the USSR aspects of the Oswald case visit the Commission in order to review on the spot the testimony given to the Commission by Marina Oswald. We agreed to send the appropriate officer to review this testimony but suggested that we wait until after receipt of the material just shown to us.

4. Members of Mr. Rankin's staff then spoke about having found a book in Oswald's possessions which had certain letters cut out giving the impression that this might have formed the base or key for a cipher system. They asked whether it would be useful in our opinion to send this book to NSA for review. We assured them that NSA was the appropriate Agency for this and STAFF OFFICER commented that when this was done reference might also be made to the portion of Lee Oswald's notes which mentioned microdot. Another member of the Rankin staff

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Document Number 603-256

for FOIA Review on JUN 1976

commented on the fact that Oswald had obtained employment in this country in a photographic firm through a Russian friend. He thought this might have a possible bearing on any clandestine communications systems he might have received from the Soviets.

5. Members of Mr. Rankin's staff then commented on the testimony of Mrs. Oswald to the effect that the letters from her son regarding his desire to return to the United States had the appearance of being dictated since they contained none of his usual grammatical errors and used legal language with which he would not have been familiar. In this connection, the fact that Lee Oswald wrote to the Embassy requesting help in arranging his return to the U.S. soon after receipt by the Embassy of a telegram from the Department reporting on correspondence with Oswald's mother seemed to indicate to members of Mr. Rankin's staff that the Soviets might have had access in some fashion to the contents of the telegram. They did not believe it was coincidental that Oswald's letter to the Embassy came immediately on the heels of the telegram from the Department. This led to a discussion of the appearance in the press of another telegram or report, from the Embassy in Moscow to the Department. Mr. Rankin said he would undertake to clarify this.

6. Mr. Willems noted that Mrs. Oswald had introduced a statement to the effect that she suspected her son to be a CIA agent. Mr. Willems asked whether in fact Oswald had been a CIA agent. Mr. Helms replied that he had not been. Mr. Willems then asked if there were any way of proving this. Mr. Helms first remarked that in him and Staff Officer the Commission had the two Clandestine Services officers who certainly would know whether or not Oswald had been an agent for CIA in the Soviet Union. He then said that the Commission would have to take his word for the fact that Oswald had not been an agent. Mr. Rankin interjected the view that the Commission had not adopted this procedure with other agencies and wondered whether there was not some way to clarify this point more effectively for the Commission. One suggestion he made was to have Mr. Dulles, who is familiar with CIA records and procedures, review the material which would normally be held on agents and report to the Commission. Another suggestion was to follow the lead of the Director of the FBI who forwarded an affidavit to the Commission regarding the nature of FBI relations with Oswald.

7. A considerable part of the meeting from this point forward consisted of a review by Mr. Rankin and his staff of the gaps in their investigation to date. They noted that the most significant gap appeared in the Mexican phase. For example, they had no record of Oswald's

daily movements while in Mexico City nor could they confirm the date of his departure or his mode of travel. The original assumption that he had returned by bus could not be proven. Several possibilities were discussed whereby the Commission could fill in the gaps of its investigation of the Mexican phase. The suggestion was made that the most effective way of resolving the questions they had would be to have a member of the Commission visit Mexico City and discuss the issues on the spot with those American and Mexican officials directly concerned. Mr. Helms noted that it would be possible for a member of the Commission to visit our Staff Officer who would then be able to work out with the Warren Commission staff member the best way to handle interviews with Mexican police officials, particularly if it is desired that these interviews be informal in nature. Our Staff Officer would also be able to put the Warren Commission staff member in contact with the FBI officials and Immigration and Naturalization Service officers stationed in Mexico City. Mr. Helms cautioned that our Staff Officer would be under State Department cover and that it would be proper to advise the Department of the planned visit and upon arrival to meet briefly with the Ambassador or Minister Counselor before proceeding to work out details with the CIA Staff Officer .-

8. In connection with the Mexican phase of the investigation, members of Mr. Rankin's staff questioned Mr. Helms and Staff Officer regarding the extent of the CIA file on Oswald for the period 8 October to 22 November 1963. They questioned the sanitized extracts which they had been shown and wondered if there were not more. Staff Officer summarized the materials that had come to the attention of the Secret Service, or had been disseminated to the Secret Service, immediately after the assassination. Staff Officer said there was not additional substantive information and that the sanitized version seen by the Commission constituted the sum of our holdings. Mr. Helms then explained that as a matter of practice we did not release actual copies of our messages because they contained code-words and digraphs which would be unintelligible to a person not familiar with them. He added, however, that he would be happy to show the file with the original messages to any staff member of the Warren Commission who might come to visit him at Langley.

9. The question of why no action was taken by other agencies of the government after their receipt of CIA information that Oswald was in contact with the Soviet and Cuban Embassies in Mexico City was next discussed. Mr. Rankin and members of his staff clearly felt that this was a crucial question which needed careful review. They appeared to

believe that the information on Oswald was unusual enough to have caused recipients to take special measures which might conceivably have led to a closer scrutiny of Lee Harvey Oswald and his movements.

Such information is routinely passed to other agencies and entered in CIA files.

Thus the information on Oswald was similar to that provided on other American citizens who might have made contacts of this type. In Oswald's case, it was the combination of visits to both Cuban and Soviet Embassies which caused the Mexico City Station to report this to Headquarters and Oswald's record of defection to the Soviet Union which prompted the Headquarters dissemination. At the conclusion of his remarks on this subject, Mr. Helms specified that the information he had given Mr. Rankin was extremely sensitive.

10. The Commission, Mr. Rankin said, would be interested in any information held by CIA on Jack Ruby. Mr. Rankin said the Commission staff had prepared a roundup on Ruby, a copy of which he handed Mr. Helms. He said he would appreciate any file reflections or comments that CIA analysts might make on this material. Mr. Rankin and members of his staff then discussed Ruby's confirmed trip to Havana in 1959. The Commission has received information from an unspecified source that Ruby was in Havana again in 1963 under a Czech passport. Mr. Rankin asked whether CIA could provide any assistance in verifying this story. Mr. Helms replied that CIA would be limited in its possibility of assisting.

11. Mr. Helms was then asked if CIA had done any follow up to its original telegraphic dissemination of the information on Oswald's visits to the Cuban and Soviet embassies in Mexico City. Mr. Helms replied that there had been no CIA action following our initial dissemination. Mr. Willem's then asked if there were any liaison problems faced by CIA in its efforts to deal with other agencies in matters affecting internal security. Mr. Helms replied that there were always understandable human problems in conducting any liaison on any subject but

that by and large the procedures for dealing with internal security and counterespionage information which needed to be brought to the attention of other agencies were effective.

12. Mr. Willems then asked if CIA's intelligence collection system was automated. Mr. Helms replied that we did in fact have a machine records system for recovering file information which was unique in that it had been designed specifically with the requirements of the CIA Clandestine Services in mind. Thus, any information reposing in our files could be recovered by means of this machine system rapidly and efficiently. Mr. Helms invited Mr. Rankin and members of his staff to visit the Langley Headquarters and inspect the machine records system which he had described.

13. In speaking of the broader question of protection for the President, Mr. Rankin asked about our procedures for working with the Secret Service when the President travels abroad. Mr. Helms described how the system works and cited examples from the past to illustrate. He commented on some of the South American trips and on the visit to West Berlin to show the way in which the effectiveness and competence of the local police force plays a key role in efforts to insure the President's safety.

14. Mr. Willems asked if we could check on a memorandum sent to Staff Officer [redacted], on 12 February regarding one of the pictures identified by Mrs. Oswald as that of Jack Ruby. These pictures were

provided to the FBI and then cropped to make a display to show to Mrs. Oswald soon after the President's assassination. The Commission has not been able to determine which of these pictures was shown Mrs. Oswald. Staff Officer will follow up on this.