

FBI INVESTIGATION OF OSWALD'S USE OF THE ADDRESS 544 CAMP STREET

Synopsis: One of Oswald's pamphlets with the 544 Camp St. address was in the files of the FBI before the assassination. At that time, the FBI apparently did not investigate the FPCC's connection with the building there. The Warren Commission seems not to have noticed this omission.

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The day after Oswald's arrest in New Orleans on August 9, 1963, he was interviewed, at his own request, by SA John L. Quigley of the FBI. Among Oswald's literature was a pamphlet entitled "The Crime Against Cuba." Quigley noted that Oswald "made available" a copy of this pamphlet and of the two one-page items he was handing out (17H761). As reported in detail below, I have learned that Quigley kept this copy, and that it did bear the rubber-stamped impression "FPCC / 544 CAMP ST. / NEW ORLEANS, LA."

Quigley's report of the interview (17H758-62) includes a verbatim transcription of the two one-page items, each of which bears Hidell's name and "P.O. Box 30016." However, there is no mention of 544 Camp Street anywhere in this report. The only reference to the pamphlet is as follows: "OSWALD stated in addition to this he had on his person several copies of a thirty-nine page pamphlet entitled "The Crime Against Cuba" by CORLISS LAMONT, which he carried with him as it contained all of the information regarding the committee, and he would be in a position to refer to it for proper answers in the event someone questioned him regarding the aims and purposes of the committee. OSWALD had in his possession at the time of interview a copy of the above three described documents and made available a copy of each to the Agent." (17H761)

This 1961 pamphlet is a critical essay on U.S. policy toward Cuba before and during the Bay of Pigs invasion. The FPCC is mentioned only in one of the references on page 38, and in the rubber-stamped address. One can only speculate why Oswald allegedly told Quigley that the pamphlet contained information about the committee. Quigley testified that Oswald was evasive when asked for details such as where FPCC meetings were held (4H435-6). Quigley's report noted that "OSWALD said that the committee did not have any offices in New Orleans, and whenever meetings were held they were held in residences of various members." (17H759)

It is hard to see how Quigley could have missed the stamped address. He told the Warren Commission that he "reviewed" this pamphlet with Oswald (4H437). Since Oswald probably did not say "I have this thirty-nine page pamphlet with me," and the back cover is not numbered as page 40, it is reasonable to conclude from the language of Quigley's report that he himself looked at page 39, where the address appears.

The pamphlet was not completely forgotten by the FBI: on September 12, the New Orleans office asked the New York office to "furnish an appropriate characterization of Corliss Lamont" (17H811). This "characterization" (of Lamont as a Comsymp, of course), and Quigley's interview report, were included in two larger reports: that of SA Kaack, dated October 31, 1963 (CE 826), and that of SA DeBrueys, dated October 25, 1963 (CD 1114, VI-29, pp. 24-41). Neither Kaack's nor DeBrueys' report includes any further information on the pamphlet (beyond what is in the Quigley memo). In particular, neither mentions the 544 Camp Street address.

This omission is most suspicious in the case of the DeBrueys report, the title of which is not "Lee Harvey Oswald" but "Fair Play for Cuba Committee - New Orleans Division." Although this report is primarily about Oswald, it does mention attempts to identify A.J. Hidell. (As the Commission noticed - see CE 833, # 17 - this was not in the otherwise quite similar Kaack report.) DeBrueys' synopsis noted that "Cuban sources at New Orleans have no pertinent information regarding anyone named HIDEELL and there is no record of any such name in the New

Orleans directory or from credit sources. No activity of subject organization observed since 8/16/63." (As I observed in my memo of 5/7/68, DeBrueys' description of the August 16 incident is peculiar. He said that there were two, not three, persons involved, and that they remained in front of the ITM "for only a few moments." This incident is not in the Kaack report at all.) Thus, it appears that DeBrueys quite properly tried to identify Hidell, who was presumably a leader of the N.O. FPCC, but the evidence which Quigley had obtained that a certain address was being used by the "subject organization" somehow escaped his attention.

I cannot be sure that I have seen all of the FBI reports which should have mentioned the 544 Camp address. (Understandably, the unpublished DeBrueys report was not included in the headquarters file on Oswald (CE 834); my copy is from the State Department file.) The Commission was not eager to study even the headquarters file (5H11-14); I have seen no indication that they ever got interested in the Dallas and N.O. field office files where, presumably, such material as the pamphlets and transcripts of tape recordings were kept. However, to the best of my knowledge, there is no mention of Oswald's use of the 544 Camp Street address in any FBI report prepared before the assassination, although a pamphlet with that address was in the FBI's files.

Three days after the assassination, the FBI did conduct what may generously be called an investigation of this matter. This investigation seems to have consisted of an interview with Sam Newman (CD 75, pp. 680-1), and brief followup checks with Frank Bartes and Guy Banister (CD 75, pp. 682-3). The results were incorporated into the FBI's Summary Report to the Commission: "Also at the time of his August, 1963, arrest, Oswald had been passing out publications bearing the stamp "FPCC, 544 Camp Street, New Orleans, La." But Mr. S.M. Newman, owner of the building at that address, advised he had never rented office space to the Fair Play for Cuba Committee or to anyone using any of the aliases Oswald had been known to use. Neither could Mr. Newman identify photographs of Oswald as having been the occupant of office space in the building." (CD 1, p. 64)

The Secret Service did investigate this address (CE 1414, CE 3119). In fact, the copy of the Lamont pamphlet in CE 3120 got to the Commission via the SS (CD 1495). On December 6, 1963, the FBI emphatically dissuaded the SS from continuing its investigation of Oswald's literature. It appears from SS SAIC Rice's report on his conversations with the FBI that the FBI's action was prompted by Rice's inquiries on that date into the printing of some of Oswald's literature in New Orleans (SS 517, unpublished part). However, another SS report (that part of SS 517 which is in CE 1414) reveals that Rice had also asked about 544 Camp: "On 12-6-63 SAIC Rice inquired of FBI Special Agent Paul Alker, New Orleans, as to the results of any investigation which they may have conducted in an attempt to connect Lee Harvey Oswald and the "FAIR PLAY FOR CUBA COMMITTEE" with the address 544 Camp Street, New Orleans. SA Alker advised that they had checked this angle out thoroughly but with negative results." (22H831)

Unless there are reports I have not found, the FBI never told the Commission the significance of 544 Camp Street, nor did it point out its own incompetence (at least) in failing to check this out before the assassination. The FBI may not even have sent the Quigley copy of the pamphlet to the Commission. (FBI Exhibit D-25 appears to include the "Hands off Cuba" handbill which Oswald gave Quigley, but the Archives could not find any cover letter or memorandum relating to this exhibit, which is identified only as "three FPCC handbills.") My inquiries have not been successful in obtaining a copy of this Quigley pamphlet in the Archives or elsewhere (but they have been successful in finding that the 544 Camp address was on it); a summary of these inquiries is presented here.

After reading "Oswald in New Orleans," I wondered what the FBI had done about this matter before the assassination. I noted that Quigley's report does not explicitly say that he kept the literature that Oswald showed him, and I learned that some copies of the Lamont pamphlet were found without the stamped

address. Since I did not expect the Archives could find an item which I could not prove they had, I decided to write first to the Justice Department, under the Freedom of Information Act. (Copies of my correspondence with the Justice Department and the Archives, totaling 18 pages to date, are available on request.) I would characterize the Justice Department's replies as slow, not too responsive, and remarkably imprecise considering that the department is full of lawyers. I suspect that such responses are more routine than not, and I feel that whatever deliberate suppression was involved in delaying a meaningful response to me is of negligible significance, compared to the importance of the document itself.

The first breakthrough was in a letter from Mr. James T. Devine, Assistant to the Deputy Attorney General, dated September 11, 1968, in which he confirmed my guess that Quigley had kept the pamphlet which Oswald had "made available" to him, and indicated that a "record copy" is presently in the files of the Justice Department. In a letter dated November 8, Mr. Devine confirmed the presence of the address: "The Quigley document is identical to the 11 copies transmitted to the Warren Commission which contain the rubber stamped impression: FPCC / 544 Camp St. / New Orleans, La."

On the important question of whether the FBI suppressed this pamphlet from the Warren Commission, the information I have obtained so far is contradictory. The Archives has told me that "an examination of pertinent records of the Commission has failed to reveal any indication that the original Lamont pamphlet given to Special Agent John L. Quigley by Lee Harvey Oswald, a copy, or a report concerning the pamphlet was transmitted to the Commission by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. None of the original pamphlets which we received from the F.B.I. bears any identification which would indicate that it is the pamphlet given to Agent Quigley by Oswald We have no original Crime Against Cuba pamphlets except those in CE 3120 and F.B.I. Exhibits 99 and 303." (Letters dated August 2 and 19, 1968) Before the Justice Department checked their "record copies" for me, they said that "we have caused the files of the Federal Bureau of Investigation to be re-checked and it has been determined that all copies of the pamphlet you requested have been turned over to the Archives." (Letter of April 23, 1968) On the one hand, I would not be surprised if the Archives were honestly unable to find this item even if they had it. On the other hand, the Justice Department (that is, presumably, the FBI) may have been in error. (After all, I deliberately had not explained why I was interested in just this one copy of the pamphlet, hoping that my correspondents would not see its significance.) In any case, one cannot determine to what extent the FBI kept this pamphlet (and its meaning) hidden from the Warren Commission without clarifying this contradictory evidence.

Note added October 26, 1969:

After attempting to divert me by repeating the claim that a copy is in the Warren Commission files, and by sending me a copy of CE 3120, the Justice Department finally gave in (when I appealed to the Attorney General) and sent me a Xerox of the original pamphlet. The original is the record copy, and thus was apparently never given to the Commission. It bears the Camp St. address, Quigley's initials and the date received, but no other handwritten markings.

Paul L. Hoch
December 26, 1968