

ARMY INTELLIGENCE, A.J. HIDELL, AND THE FBI

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- Some just-released FBI documents appear to provide significant leads about:
- (1) the role played by Army Intelligence in events surrounding the assassination;
 - (2) conflicting evidence on how the authorities learned of, and reacted to, Oswald's use of the name A. J. Hidell.

BACKGROUND:

Previously available evidence about Army Intelligence is discussed in Section I of "Government Documents and the John F. Kennedy Assassination," by Peter Dale Scott. (See also Anson, pp. 284-5) Scott points out that the head of a local Army Intelligence Unit helped select an interpreter for Marina Oswald's crucial early interviews; Army Intelligence agent James Powell was inside the TSBD when the rifle was found; an Army Intelligence agent was with SA Hosty before the assassination; and various interesting Dallas Police officers were members of the Army Intelligence Reserve. Most provocatively, Don Stringfellow of the DPD intelligence unit told the Army's 112th Intelligence Group that Oswald was a card-carrying Communist who had defected to Cuba; this false information was included in a mysterious cable from the Army to the U.S. Strike Command on the evening of November 22.

Chapter 6 of Sylvia Meagher's book is devoted to the Hidell problem. Meagher argued persuasively that there was a need for "a complete and convincing explanation of why the Dallas police and the other official agencies acted for at least 24 hours as if there were no Hidell [draft] card [found in Oswald's wallet when he was arrested] and no Hidell." (P. 198) She concluded that the "actions, statements, and [contemporary] reports" of the Dallas Police witnesses who claimed that the forged Hidell card was found on Oswald "are completely at odds with the later testimony, which must raise the possibility of perjury and collusion." (Page 198; see especially pp. 185-191, and O'Toole, Chapter 9.) While I have not yet reviewed my files to see if any relevant evidence has been released since the 26 volumes were published, I am not familiar with anything which invalidates Meagher's analysis.

Meagher noted that the only contemporaneous report indicating the existence of the Hidell card on November 22 is the report by FBI SA Manning Clements on his interrogation of Oswald that evening. Meagher found it puzzling that the contents of Oswald's wallet happened to be available to Clements at that interview.

EVALUATION OF THE NEW INFORMATION:

The new FBI documents indicate that Army Intelligence learned of the Hidell card suspiciously soon - within an hour and a half of Oswald's arrest.

By matching this one bit of information with a record in San Antonio Army files about the alleged distribution of "Hands off Cuba" literature by A. J. Hidell, the Army was able to produce, very promptly, the name of an apparent political associate (and possible co-conspirator) of Oswald's.

In fact, by bringing this information to the attention of the FBI, Army Intelligence guaranteed that there would be FBI interest in Hidell.

Specifically, Army Intelligence prompted the FBI interest in the Hidell draft card. The information provided by the Army apparently led directly to the Clements interview of Oswald, a fact not reflected in Clements' testimony.

If there was in fact conspiratorial intent in either the actions of certain Army Intelligence people around the time of the assassination, or the actions of the Dallas Police relating to the Hidell draft card, the new information in these documents should allow a focusing of the investigation.

DETAILS:

In summary, the contents of the new documents are as follows:

At 3:15 p.m. on November 22, the FBI in San Antonio was contacted by Lt. Col. Robert E. Jones, Operations Officer of the 112th Army Intelligence Group. (This was about an hour and a quarter after Oswald's arrest, about 45 minutes

after the first interrogation session started, and just about the time that FBI agents joined in the interrogation. (WR 612) That is, by any standards Jones' contact with the FBI was early.) Jones said that they had learned "through news broadcasts" that Oswald had been arrested and was a suspect in the assassination.

Jones gave the FBI information from Army Intelligence files in three cities. Corpus Christi (and/or San Antonio) had newspaper articles on Oswald's defection and return. (This seems perfectly routine; what is odd is that the Dallas Police did not have any files on Oswald.) The Army in New Orleans knew of Oswald's arrest "for distributing pro-Cuban literature." The two most interesting sentences relate to information in San Antonio:

"When arrested today in Dallas, according to information he [Jones] has received, Oswald was carrying a Selective Service card having the name of Alex Hidell."

"Jones stated INCT [i.e., Army Intelligence] records here [San Antonio] reflect a reference to Ana [sic; should have been "an A."] J. Hidell who reportedly has been distributing 'Hands off Cuba' literature."

The FBI in San Antonio sent a teletype message to the Director's Office about an hour after the contact with Jones, at 4:25 p.m. CST (3:25 p.m. EST). (The time of the contact is not mentioned in the teletype, but is given in a letterhead memo prepared the same day.) A handwritten note on the teletype from San Antonio reads "Have field locate & interview Alex Hidell & Ana J Hidell."

At 9:21 p.m. CST (10:21 p.m. EST), the FBI in Washington notified Dallas and New Orleans of the unsuccessful pre-assassination attempt in New Orleans to identify Hidell. Referring to the information provided by Jones, Washington ordered these field offices to "make every effort to develop further information concerning Alex Hidell, Ana Hidell and A. J. Hidell. If located interview thoroughly concerning any knowledge of or possible participation in plot to assassinate the President."

I find it noteworthy that the result of the contact with Army Intelligence in San Antonio was to force the FBI into consideration of Hidell as a possible participant in a conspiracy. (The New Orleans FBI knew before the assassination that Hidell's name had appeared on some of Oswald's papers, and had unsuccessfully tried to locate him, but this was quite possibly not known to the Army in Texas.)

In this 'urgent' teletype from Washington, Dallas was specifically told to "immediately obtain full information concerning Selective Service card in name of Alex Hidell which was allegedly [sic] in possession of Oswald." This suggests that as of 9:30 p.m., the FBI knew of this card only through Army Intelligence. At about 10 p.m., SA Clements did in fact interview Oswald and list the contents of his wallet.

QUESTIONS AND LEADS:

(1) Exactly what did Army Intelligence know about Hidell and Oswald before the assassination, and what were the sources?

Certainly the files from San Antonio, Corpus Christi, and New Orleans should be examined, to see if they contain anything other than what was reported to the FBI. What about Dallas and other cities, especially in Texas?

The report that Hidell was distributing "Hands off Cuba" literature is interesting, in that it implies that the person involved was not identified (in the records) as Oswald. Thus, the source could not have been (for example) the FBI reports on Oswald in New Orleans.

One possibility is that the Army learned of a handbill bearing Hidell's name and New Orleans P.O. Box which had been picked up by Martin Abelow in June 1963 and turned over to the Security Office at NASA in Houston. (I have a fairly complete file on this incident, which is the only one involving Hidell but not Oswald which has come to my mind.)

(2) When and from whom did the Army learn about the Hidell card?

Meagher's book discusses in detail the testimony of the Dallas Police officers who supposedly knew of the card on November 22. If any of these men were privately passing information to Army Intelligence within an hour or so of Oswald's arrest, the implications should be very carefully considered.

Certainly all the people involved in the actions of Army Intelligence around the time of the assassination are potentially key witnesses. One of them might provide a breakthrough into some kind of conspiracy.

The Dallas Army files in particular should be looked at closely. I don't know of any researcher who has requested them under the FOI Act.

I would like to know if Army Intelligence was getting a full report on the questioning of Oswald. Given the general absence of official reaction to the Hidell card, the passing on of this bit of information, either by itself or with other "major" leads, is intriguing. (By the way, the name on the card is Alek, not Alex, but it would be easy to misread.)

Incidentally, Jones' statement to the FBI that Oswald "had traveled extensively in Russia" strikes me as being a familiar phrase. (I'm not sure that assertion is correct, and I wouldn't have made it, but it could easily be a normal interpretation of reports which were circulating right after Oswald's arrest.) Perhaps some of my colleagues will be able to locate other uses of the phrase "traveled extensively in Russia;" that might be helpful in tracing the flow of information.

(3) Who prompted the contact between the Army and the FBI, and why?

Obviously, this question reflects my suspicion that there was more going on than meets the eye.

(4) What were the actual circumstances of Clements' interview of Oswald? Did the FBI then, or does it now, suspect the claim that the Hidell card was found in Oswald's billfold?

Clements testified to the Warren Commission that he was in the DPD homicide bureau for some reason he did not recall; that he asked SA Bookhout if anyone had obtained a detailed physical description and background information from Oswald; and that Bookhout suggested he do so. Clements said that he talked with Oswald, and that when Oswald was taken out for a lineup, he examined the contents of his wallet. (7H320)

In light of the "urgent" teletype message of 9:21 p.m., Clements' account of how he more or less drifted into this interview at about 10 p.m. simply does not ring true.

In fact, the first substantive point in Clements' report on this interview (WR 614-8) is that Oswald declined to explain his possession of the Hidell card; that is what one would expect if the interview was the result of the orders from Washington.

I am, naturally, curious to know if Clements or anyone else in the FBI suspected that the Hidell card might have been planted on Oswald, or if he felt that Army Intelligence was trying to push the FBI too hard to go after Hidell. The Dallas FBI file might be helpful here. Certainly Clements should be asked about his testimony.

Two incidental points: the Hidell certificate of service card, said by Curry to have been found in Oswald's wallet, is not mentioned in Clements' report. (See Curry, p. 98.) Also, Clements did notice that the Hidell draft card was "obviously fictitious" because it contained a photograph. It is not at all clear why Oswald would want such a card. Fred Newcomb and I have done some work along the lines of a hypothesis mentioned in Meagher's book (p. 194); I am willing to speculate that Oswald might have ordered his weapons using a false name and with obviously false identification on instructions, thinking that he was helping with the investigation being carried out by the Dodd Committee of the Senate into mail-order sales of firearms.

(5) Why did the Army Intelligence files never reach the Warren Commission?

Perhaps a careful review of all Army Intelligence files on Oswald in the pre-assassination and immediate post-assassination periods will provide the answer.

As far as I know, the Warren Commission never realized that the Army had any relevant pre-assassination material. While a copy of the November 22 cable to the Strike Command was included in the O.N.I. file, it was not, as far as I know, submitted directly by the Army.

Sam Stern of the Warren Commission staff did realize that the initial routine request for all pre-assassination Defense Department files was not being complied with. In an attempt to be sure that he had all Defense Department records, Stern wrote a rather blunt letter in March. Within five days, the Defense Department said that all known material on Oswald had been furnished to the Commission, a statement which was clearly false (and not just because of the Army Intelligence files). An examination of internal Defense Department communications immediately after the assassination might be helpful.

Any request for files to the Army should specify the name of Harvey Lee Oswald, as well as other variants of Oswald and Hidell. The appearance of "Harvey Lee Oswald" in various post-assassination documents, such as the cable to the Strike Command, might be of some help in the tracing of sources. It may reflect a pre-assassination file in that name held by someone, such as the Law Enforcement Intelligence Unit (see O'Toole's article) or Army Intelligence.

I am sending out a few copies of this memo in its present somewhat unpolished form because I think these new FBI documents are worth some immediate attention. I would prefer that the recipients not distribute it further without checking with me. This is one of those areas where my feeling is that a little official investigation would be more valuable than whatever press or public reaction we might be able to generate. Of course, I would be glad to discuss any of this information further.

Dear Donovan, [Gay]

It was a pleasure meeting you in Washington, and I look forward to hearing from the Committee again.

Enclosed is a memo on Army Intelligence, A. J. Hidell, and the FBI. For what it's worth, my hunch is that there is something crucial buried in this business. Naturally, I would be interested in your reaction.

Some recent publications, and rumors of forthcoming publications, have reinforced my view that it might be more productive to look at what happened in Dallas on November 22 than to try to make sense of all the evidence which can be read as suggesting a big conspiracy. This is a point I tried to make at the conference, but wasn't able to formulate clearly. Some of the theories now floating around deal with facts which have a substantial probability of meaning just the opposite of what they appear to mean. For example, if someone says that Oswald was working with a team of pro-Castro Cubans, someone else will say he was a CIA penetration agent. Ultimately, perhaps, if Oswald was working for the CIA, someone will say that the KGB had penetrated the CIA. In a mathematical analogy, the Committee might find itself dealing with a non-convergent series; if you add one more term (one more piece of evidence), the whole direction of the result changes.

Because of Mr. Dodd's special interest in the FBI files, I'm sending a copy of this to him. Peter Scott has mentioned this material to Mr. Lawson; please give him a copy if he is interested.

Sincerely,

Paul

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