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Pattern of Defeat

LEE. A Portrait of Lee Harvey Oswald by His Brother. By Robert L. Oswald with Myrick and Barbara Land. Illustrated. 246 pp. New York: Coward-McCann. \$5.95.

By PETER KIHSS

A CONCERNED and questioning man, Robert Oswald believes his brother Lee Harvey Oswald did kill President John F. Kennedy and Dallas Patrolman J. D. Tippit four years ago. But he does have a "lingering doubt" and a hope some time to be convinced otherwise. He thinks his brother may have been "influenced" or "encouraged or helped along by individuals or an individual"—as to such influence he offers no proof, although he has clear dislike for one friend of his brother.

Robert's book is the story of his "attempt to understand" the strange brother who was five years younger, who did look up to him in boyhood, but who at 20 wrote to him as a defector then in Russia, "you really don't know anything about me." Not for a year before the assassination had the brothers seen each other; not for eight months had Lee even written to Robert; Robert did not even know Lee had a second daughter. At the end, a day after the President was killed, Robert stared into Lee's eyes in the Dallas jail—"Brother, you won't find anything there," Lee told him. And Lee insisted on his own choice of a lawyer—"you stay out of it."

Robert's answer to his own questioning about Lee is that "the discouragements and disappointments beginning in his childhood, continuing through the school years and the years in the Marines, the death of his dream of a new life in Russia, the boring jobs back in the United States which made it impossible for him to support Marina [his wife] adequately and gain some recognition as a man, even the fact that he hoped for a son and had two daughters instead—the whole pattern of failure through most of his 23 years led to the out-

bursts of violence in April and the final tragedy in November, 1963."

Robert finds some merit in views of one of three psychiatrists consulted but not cited by the Warren Commission in its investigation. This was Dr. D. A. Rothstein who later wrote that "despite Lee's hostility to his mother, he may have revealed his attachment to her by acting out through the assassination his conception of her own wish to become fa-

MR. KIHSS is a reporter for The New York Times who worked on the Oswald case.

mous." Dr. Rothstein offered three other suggested factors—reaction to "an older brother's more successful military career," "a history of suicidal attempt or gesture," "a recent rejection by a significant female."

Lee, in Robert's opinion, "tried to gain the world's attention through violence and destruction." There was "no understandable political motivation" in Robert's view—"I am convinced that Lee could easily have chosen as his victim someone entirely different politically

from John F. Kennedy." The shots were at someone "receiving the applause of the crowd" as a "final protest to a world that had ignored him."

Notwithstanding, Robert has his own "strong reservations about the investigation and about the Warren Commission report." He says the Commission failed to ask "some important questions" and to resolve "some troubling inconsistencies"; it ignored some witnesses.

HE contends Lee would have had to spend considerable time practising with a telescopic rifle sight which he thinks Lee had never used before about April, 1963. He thinks Lee did practice on a firing range, and may have gone there with someone else. He thinks a police car did stop and honk a horn outside Lee's rooming house a half hour after the assassination.

A fourth of Robert's book is devoted to such attempted analysis of his brother and of the evidence. Another fourth movingly describes how Robert himself learned about the shooting and how he last talked with Lee and then buried him. (Robert has a correction for William Manchester's "Death of a President": he denies that the Secret Service assumed responsibility for Lee's burial; he says he took it over.) Half the book is Robert's story of his brother's life, in part from firsthand experience, in large measure as reconstruction.

Robert's book is plainly written, with the aid of a Look magazine editor, Myrick Land, and his wife Barbara, through taping sessions. The Warren Commission printed 205 pages of Robert's testimony in its first volume of hearings. Somewhat disjointed, Robert's book leaves an impression of sincerity and searching—"guileless Robert," Warren Commissioner Gerald Ford has described the older brother. Robert overcame the problems of growing up with an often difficult mother; he became a satisfied family man and middle-class salesman; Lee took a darker road.

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