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Russian
Secret
Agent
Reveals...

Soviet Leaders Panicked When Oswald Was Arrested for Assassinating JFK

The arrest of Lee Harvey Oswald for the killing of President Kennedy in 1963 caused a panic in Soviet officialdom that ran all the way up the bureaucracy to Nikita Khrushchev himself.

The Russian leaders feared an explosive international crisis might result from the assassination. The reason: When Oswald lived in the Soviet Union from 1959 to 1962, the secret Russian police, the KGB, had tried to "influence" him, his file showed.

The concern of the Russians was understandable. Was Oswald in fact a KGB agent? Or had he, perhaps, been encouraged by the KGB in his reckless act? If so, would the U.S. hold the Soviet government responsible for the murder of its president? The consequences could be catastrophic.

The complete account of this amazing story — and its aftermath — is contained in an FBI document based on information from a high KGB officer who defected to the U.S. in 1964. The officer's name is Yuri Ivanovich Nosenko. His rank in the KGB was lieutenant colonel. The FBI document was until recently classified "secret."

The strange story began when Oswald entered Russia as a tourist in the fall of 1959. A file on him was opened by the Second Directorate of the KGB, the division dealing with Russian internal security.

Oswald let it be known that he wanted to stay in



RUSSIANS WORRIED when Lee Harvey Oswald was arrested (above) after the killing of President Kennedy in Dallas. They were afraid Soviet government would be implicated.

the USSR permanently. But, his KGB file indicated, he "was not regarded as being completely normal mentally nor was he considered to be very intelligent."

He was told he could not remain in the country. His reaction was to lock himself in his Moscow hotel room and slash his wrists. Hotel employees broke open his door and rescued him. If they had not, Nosenko told the FBI, Oswald would certainly have bled to death. He was rushed to a hospital.

When he came out, Russian authorities relented and allowed him to stay temporarily within the USSR, but not in Moscow. He was permitted to live in Minsk with the Russian woman he had married by then, and he took a rather menial job at a radio manufacturing plant. The KGB office at Minsk was instructed to "maintain a discreet check" on his activities.

Interestingly, the KGB discovered Oswald couldn't handle a gun very well. When he went hunting rabbits near Minsk with fellow workers, he did so poorly, his file showed, that the others had to



OSWALDS IN RUSSIA: Oswald and his wife Marina (right) with her aunt and uncle — during time they lived in Minsk, USSR, where secret police kept check on Oswald's activities.

give him some rabbits they'd shot. Oswald returned to the U.S. in June 1962, and the KGB "washed its hands of him" until Nov. 22, 1963, when Kennedy was shot in Dallas.

Within two hours, Nosenko was called by the KGB center and given the news, and two hours later was told Oswald had been arrested for the crime. He was ordered to report at once on what the KGB file on the accused assassin contained.

A summary was forwarded to the higher-ups. In shock and dismay, they found it contained a statement that KGB men had made an attempt "to influence Oswald in the right direction" — which could only mean toward greater Soviet partisanship, and possibly some action. Hasfily, Gen. Oleg Gribanov, chief of the Second Directorate, ordered "all records at Minsk pertaining to Oswald forwarded immediately to Moscow." The panic was on.

Nosenko told the FBI that Gen. Gribanov prepared a report on the whole affair for the chairman of the KGB, "who in turn reported to the Central Committee of the Communist Party and to Khrushchev."

Russian officialdom held its breath — waiting to hear whether U.S. intelligence agencies would learn of the damning statement about the Soviet attempt to "influence in the right direction" the man accused of shooting the U.S. President.

When the result of the inquiry came in, Soviet officials breathed a bit easier. According to the new KGB report, the statement about "influence" had only been included in the summary because someone in Minsk wanted to make KGB activity look good to the Moscow authorities — and the statement was untrue.

Was Oswald in fact influenced to assassinate his president by the Soviet secret police? The answer depends on which KGB report can be believed. This irony remains: If Russian hotel employes had not broken in Oswald's door when he attempted suicide, John F. Kennedy might be alive today.

— JOHN HURST and DAVID KLEIN