

Update: Hoch Chronology of Oswald in Mexico, the Mystery Man,
and the Warren Commission

The following is a quick summary of developments in this area since the completion of Mr. Paul Hoch's chronology in 1975. Included are documents from the latest CIA and National Archive releases. In some instances I have included my own analysis for the edification of the reader. In other cases I have included documents that were included in the Hoch chronology for the purpose of continuity.

Oswald in Mexico: September 26-October 3

In general: See The Night Watch, by David Phillips, pgs. 139-43

Mexico City Photograph: "The CIA and the Man who was not Oswald" by Fensterwald and O'Toole. N.Y. Review, April 3, 1975

CIA Intercepted Conversations

in Mexico City: See the New York Times, 9/21/75, pg. 1
Washington Post, 11/26/76, pg. 1
Secret Service # 104 - See my Mexico City Memorandum #4
State Dept. Telegram #1201, 11/28/63,
Ambassador Mann to Dean Rusk- also see cover sheet, Mexico City Memorandum #4

Cuba: See Washington Post, 11/13/76, pg. 1; Also see N.Y. Review, 10/13/77, Daniel Schorr article;
CIA item 680-290

Please also see my Mexico City Memorandum #2.

CIA Reaction to Oswald's Alleged Contacts with the Soviet and Cuban Embassies in Mexico City

October 9, 1963

The CIA Mexico City station cables CIA headquarters in Langley. (CIA item# 5-1A)

This is apparently the cable mentioned on pgs. 139-41 of David Phillips' book, The Night Watch. His account contains some apparent inaccuracies, one of which he has acknowledged; his explanation of the CIA's use of Lee "Henry" Oswald. (See my letter to Mr. Dan Hardway of 9/6/77)

October 10

CIA headquarters cables Mexico City station. (CIA item #2) The Agency appears to be remarkably uninformed on Oswald's recent activities. Paragraph #3 states that the latest headquarters information on Oswald is from a report dated May, 1962. Yet according to CIA item #580-252 (also see Warren Commission

October 10 (cont)

Document 692) the Agency was forwarded FBI reports on Oswald dated 9/7/62, 9/10/63, and 9/24/63. Presumably this material was made available to the CIA on a timely basis. Why aren't these later reports, one of which deals with Oswald's highly relevant activities in the New Orleans Fair Play for Cuba Committee, included in this telegram?

Also on this date the CIA in Langley telegrams other federal agencies concerning Oswald's contacts with the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City. (See Commission Document 631; also Hoch chronology pgs. 3-5)

October 15

CIA Mexico City station cables headquarters in Langley requesting a photo of Oswald. (CIA item #4) Also see handwritten note on the bottom of CIA item #5-1A.

October 16

CIA notifies American Ambassador to Mexico Thomas Mann of Oswald's contact with the Soviet Embassy. (CIA item 9-5) Why was this done?

October 24

CIA headquarters in Langley cables the Department of Navy requesting that they be forwarded two photos of Oswald "as soon as possible." (See Commission Document 631; Hoch chronology, pg. 5) As Paul Hoch has pointed out, the CIA already had two press photos of Oswald in its files from his defection to Russia. As of the time of the assassination, the Navy had not yet responded to this request. (See Hoch Chronology, pg. 6)

October 28

CIA Mexico City station photographs a man, who on November 22, is thought to be possibly identical with Oswald. (CIA item #12)

Sometime in October

On 12/31/76 Select Committee Chief Counsel Richard Sprague said in a news conference that the Committee had uncovered a draft of a pre-assassination CIA cable which included information about Oswald's visits to the Soviet and Cuban Embassies and his attempts to obtain visas there. The cable, according to Sprague, was re-written, and the version which was sent was done so in October, 1963. (See the Los Angeles Times, 1/1/77, pg. 1)

If the contents and date of this CIA cable draft have been accurately reported, then the Committee has evidence that the CIA misled the Warren Commission on a critical point; they claimed to have no knowledge of Oswald's contacts with the Cuban Embassy until after the assassination. (Warren Report, pg. 777; See also my Mexico City Memorandum #3, CIA item# 948-927T, and the New York Times, 9/21/75, pg. 1)

Sometime in October (cont)

The cable draft is also inconsistent with the information the Agency provided Ambassador Mann on October 16, supra. (CIA item #9-5) The Ambassador was told that a "Lee Oswald" had contacted the Soviet Embassy and that the Russians had sent a telegram to Washington in his behalf. However, the memo to the Ambassador stated that the Agency had "no clarifying information" about the subject matter of the telegram. The cable draft allegedly contained that information: that Oswald was trying to obtain a visa to that country.

November 22 (early afternoon)

CIA Mexico City station cables cables CIA in Langley. (CIA item# 12) CIA Mexico City station learns that a "Lee H. Oswald" has been arrested in Dallas and presumably connects this with its 10/9 cable, supra. Mexico again(see 10/15) requests a photo of Lee Oswald and forwards a photo of a visitor to the Soviet Embassy on 10/28 who "could be" Oswald.

November 22 (P. M.)

CIA station in Mexico City turns over to the Naval Attache there two sets of six photographs of the unidentified man in Commission Exhibit 237. The Attache travels to Dallas by plane this night, at the request of Ambassador Mann, and turns over at least one of the photographs to the FBI there. He then mails one set of the six photos air mail special delivery to the home of a CIA official in Washington. (See CIA items 7,14,19)

Mexico City station also sends the six photos of the unidentified man, plus two more of him outside the Cuban Embassy, by "regular pouch" to headquarters in Langley. (CIA item # 48-19 and #19) The timing is not clear here. The date could also be 11/23.

November 22 or 23

FBI agents "who had conversed with Oswald in Dallas" are shown photographs of a man and listen to a tape recording of a voice. Presumably these items are provided the Bureau by the CIA and are related to the CIA surveillance of Oswald in Mexico. (FBI Memorandum entitled "Assassination Of President John F. Kennedy Dallas, Texas, November 22, 1963" dated 11/23/63; Identical with Secret Service #104; Please see my Mexico City Memorandum #4;)

November 22-3

Mexico City station sends CIA headquarters three cables, two of which relate to photos of the unidentified man. (CIA items 19, 47-544, and 10) Also see Hoch chronology, pg. 7.

November 23

"Sanitized" versions of these threecables are delivered to Robert I. Bouck, Protective Research Service, U.S. Secret Service,

November 23(cont)

at the white House.

(See CIA
item# 619-792, 1272-1028; Also Warren Commission Document 674)

November 23 (early evening)

FBI agent Bardwell Odum shows Marquerite Oswald Commission Exhibit 237, one of the photos of the unidentified man in Mexico City. After her son is killed, Mrs. Oswald tells the press that she was shown a photo of Jack Ruby the night before Oswald's murder. It is Mrs. Oswald's mistaken recollection that brings this photo to the attention of the Commission staff.

November 23

CIA (presumably headquarters) cables the FBI that "information from....Mexico....reveals significant facts about the activities of a 'North American' who may be identical with Lee J. (sic) Oswald, who visited both the Cuban and Soviet Embassies in Mexcio City on 28 September 63." (CIA item # 17)

The CIA has maintained that it did not learn of Oswald's contacts with the Cuban Embassy until after the assassination. (See "Sometime in October", supra) This 11/23 cable relates the CIA's discovery of Oswald's Cuban contacts.

December 2

Mrs. Oswald's claim to have been shown a photo of Jack Ruby the night before her son's murder appears in an article in the New York Times. (See Hoch Chronology, pp. R)

January 31, 1964

The date of Warren Commission Document 347, a CIA report on Oswald in Mexico City. This document is still completely withheld from research. However, a great deal is already known about the contents of this document from other sources. (Hoch Chronology, pgs. 8-10) It is quite possible that the primary reason C.D. 347 is still withheld is that its release would clearly show that the CIA was holding back relevant information from the Commission at this point in the investigation.

February 12

Date of J. Lee Rankin letter to Thomas Karamessines, Acting Deputy Director of Plans of the CIA. Rankin wants information on the photograph shown to Mrs. Oswald by the FBI, which he has learned was provided by the CIA. The General Counsel asks "to be informed of the circumstances surrounding the obtaining of this picture by your Agency and the identity of the individual shown, if this information is currently available."

Also on this date Rankin writes CIA Director John A. McCone.

February 17 (cont)

In paragraph 2 of this letter Rankin requests several reports that the CIA had furnished the Secret Service dating back to November 23. The General Counsel had learned of their existence from the Secret Service on January 8. (Hoch Chronology, pg. 8) This request would include the three reports delivered to the Secret Service on 11/23 mentioned earlier.

In paragraph 3 Rankin asks for a copy of the CIA's entire pre-assassination file on Oswald. (This would include the October Mexico cables on Oswald, which were apparently only paraphrased in Commission Document 347 (See January 31)) The General Counsel notes in particular "we are also interested in knowing what dissemination, if any, was made to other federal agencies, of items added to the file after October 9, 1963 and prior to November 22."

Rankin could not be any more explicit in asking for a copy of the Agency's October 10 telegram to the FBI, Department of State, and Navy. The material requested on this date would bring out the erroneous description of Oswald (See Commission Document 631) and relatedly the link between the photo shown Mrs. Oswald and the Agency's Mexico City operations. The CIA's response to these requests should be studied carefully. For some reason the Agency deliberately withheld from the Commission, for at least a month and a half, the relevant Mexico City documents requested on this date.

March 5

Date of high level CIA memorandum on Rankin's 2/12 letter to John McCone. (CIA item# 579-250) All CIA employee names have been deleted.

A CIA official maintains in this memo that the reports the Agency had delivered to the Secret Service (e.g. See 11/22-3, supra) were of no substantive value to the Warren Commission investigation, as the material only referred to "aborted leads" or to information that had already been provided to the Commission. Making reference to Rankin's 2/12 letter to McCone, the author of this memo wrote: " Unless you feel otherwise, (Deletion replaced with "Staff Officer") would prefer to wait out the Commission on the matter covered by paragraph 2." Referring to the "aborted leads" contained in the messages to the Secret Service, the memo makes note of the "famous six photographs which were not of Oswald." (emphasis mine)

The material discussed here would also likely have revealed the link between the photo shown Mrs. Oswald and the CIA's Mexico City operations. (See March 24, infra)

March 6

The CIA responds to the 2/12 Rankin-McCone letter by sending over material denominated as Commission Document 692.

The CIA's response does not include the messages delivered to the Secret Service as explicitly requested in paragraph 2 of Rankin's letter. Apparently the suggestion to "wait out" the Commission on this material is followed. (See 3/5 memo above) Also while Rankin's request asked for all CIA material on Oswald prior to 11/22, the Agency only provides documents in their files "up to early October 1963." Instead of turning over to the Commission

March 6 (cont)

the October Mexican cables mentioned earlier, the Agency simply resubmits Commission Document 347, which the Commission received on 2/3/64. (Hoch Chronology, pg. 10) CD 347 apparently only contains paraphrases of these cables.

March 9

Date of memo from Howard P. Willens to J. Lee Rankin concerning the CIA's response to the 2/12 Rankin-McCone request. (Released this year; heavily deleted.)

Assistant Counsel Willens notes that the CIA did not respond to Rankin's request for the messages the Agency provided the Secret Service and he calls Richard Helms, Deputy Director of Plans of the CIA. Helms tells Willens that this request gives the Agency "certain unspecified problems". The material in these messages, Helms maintains, is either not relevant or has passed to the Warren Commission in a different form. The memo continues:

"He (Helms) stated they (CIA) would prefer not to comply with this request. When I (Willens) suggested we had certain problems with this proposed disposition we agreed we would talk about it at our next meeting."

March 12

Officials of the CIA (Richard Helms, Raymond Rocca, and a person whose name has been deleted) meet with staff members of the Warren Commission (J. Lee Rankin, Howard P. Willens, William T. Coleman, Jr., Samuel A. Stern, Burt Griffin, and W. David Slawson) at the office of Mr. Rankin.

Mr. Helms tells the Commission staff that the CIA does not furnish copies of actual CIA communications because they would endanger confidential sources and methods. He agrees to provide the Commission the October 10 telegram to other federal agencies in its "original form". (Slawson's 3/12 Memo for the Records) and paraphrases of those documents which present security problems. In addition he invites a member of the Warren Commission staff to go to La ley and review all documents requested to ensure the paraphrases are complete.

The Warren Commission staff also raises the issue of the photo shown Mrs. Oswald by the FBI. They point out that the Agency had yet to respond to Rankin's 2/12 letter to CIA official Thomas Karamessines, which asked for an explanation of the "circumstances surrounding the obtaining of this picture" and the identity of the individual shown. The Commission staff's memo on this meeting, written by assistant counsel W.D. Slawson, simply states:

"In response to inquiry from Mr. Willens regarding the Commission letter to CIA dated 2/12/64 relating to a photograph... shown by the FBI (to) Mrs. Marquerite Oswald, the CIA representatives stated they would check into it and contact Mr. Willens."

The CIA's memo on this meeting contains a somewhat different account. (CIA item# 603-256)

"Mr. Willens asked if we could check on a memorandum sent to (Thomas Karamessines) on 12 February regarding one of the pictures identified by Mrs. Oswald as that of Jack Ruby. These pictures were (deletion) provided (to) the FBI and then cropped to make a display to show Mrs. Oswald... (Deletion replaced with "Staff Officer" will follow up on this."

March 12

The Agency's handling of the photo shown to Mrs. Oswald suggests evasive conduct on their part. By this date the CIA had gone an entire month without responding to the Commission's 2/12 request for information concerning this photograph. When questioned here on the subject, the CIA officials tell the Commission staff they will "check into it." It is hardly plausible that the CIA officials present at this meeting were not fully informed about the circumstances surrounding this photo. The Mexico photographs played an important role in the early JFK investigation. Copies were sent to a high CIA official in Washington on the evening of the assassination. Additional copies were sent to Agency headquarters on either the night of 11/22 or 11/23. (CIA item# 19) In addition, the 3/5 CIA memorandum, supra, refers to the "famous six photographs which were not of Oswald." (emphasis mine) The CIA's memorandum for the record of this March 12 meeting should be noted as well. While the Commission's memo makes clear they were interested in learning the circumstances surrounding the obtaining of this photo, (that is, Mr. Rankin's request of 2/12) the CIA memo indicates that a completely separate issue was brought up: "The Commission has been unable to determine which of these pictures (that the CIA turned over to the FBI on 11/22) was shown Mrs. Oswald. (Deletion replaced with "Staff Officer" will follow up on this." (CIA item# 603-256) It would seem unlikely that the Commission staff would be solely interested in which of six photos were shown Mrs. Oswald when they did not know where the photos had even come from. It seems apparent then, that the Agency was for some reason holding back the connection between the photo shown Marguerite Oswald and its Mexico surveillance of the accused assassin.

March 16

See Hoch Chronology, pp. 13.

March 24

The Warren Commission receives from the CIA Commission Documents 631 and 674. CD 631 consists of an exact retyped copy of the 10/10 telegram to other federal agencies as well as the 10/24 CIA headquarters telegram to the Department of Navy requesting two photos of Oswald. A cover memo is also attached. The memo however does not explain the erroneous description of the accused assassin found in the 10/10 telegram and makes only a murky reference to a photograph "which did not refer to Oswald."

Commission Document 674 consists of a cover memo with three attachments, which are paraphrases of the three messages delivered to the Secret Service on 11/23/63. The memo notes that "immediately following the assassination of President Kennedy, three cabled reports were received from the CIA (deletion) in Mexico City... relative to photographs of an unidentified man who visited the Cuban and Soviet Embassies in that city during October and November 1963.... On November 23 a CIA (deletion) officer... cabled (probably should be 'carried') three reports based on these cables to... the Secret Service... Paraphrases of the three unnumbered reports thus delivered to the Secret Service are attached to this memorandum."

These three reports have been released with deletions in CIA item# 555-809. It may be of note that the CIA's paraphrasing of these reports leaves out the information that the photos

of the unidentified man were sent to Dallas as well as Washington. The paraphrase simply states that the photographs "had been forwarded to Washington by the hand of a United States official returning to this country." If the Commission staff had been informed that the photos had gone to Dallas, then they could have connected the photos mentioned in CD 631 and 674 with the photo shown Mrs. Oswald. CIA item# 555-809 however, indicates that the reports were paraphrased because they contained information that could jeopardize the Agency's intelligence gathering activities in Mexico City. Presumably the reports contain information that the unidentified man was photographed outside the Cuban or Russian Embassies, thus possibly compromising the Agency's "method of acquisition." (Id, pg. 2)

March 26

Date of memorandum by assistant counsel William T. Coleman concerning Commission Document 631. (See above)

At this relatively late date in the investigation Coleman poses some basic questions about the CIA surveillance of Oswald in Mexico. Part of it reads:

"We would like to know just when (deletion; probably Mexico City station) got the information with respect to Lee Harvey Oswald and what was that information and how was it obtained. How did the information get from Mexico to the CIA in Washington, and in what form did it come?

Coleman continues:

"As you know, we are still trying to get an explanation of the photograph which the FBI showed Marquerite Oswald soon after the assassination. I hope that paragraph 4 of the memorandum of 3/24/64 sent Mr. Rankin by the CIA is not the answer the CIA intends to give us to this inquiry."

The memo concludes:

"We should also determine why the Navy never furnished the CIA copies of the most recent photographs of Oswald."

Apparently Coleman has figured out that the photo shown Mrs. Oswald relates to Mexico City. Paul Hoch suggests that by sending over CD 631 and CD 674 to the Commission on the same day, the CIA wanted them to reach that conclusion. (Hoch Chronology, pgs. 13-4) In any event it is clear from the memo that Coleman does not know that the unidentified man visited the Soviet Embassy the same day as Oswald's contact.

March 27

Assistant counsel Samuel A. Stern meets with CIA official Raymond Rocca at Agency headquarters in Langley. (See Stern-Rankin memo of 3/27/64 and CIA item# 633-797) Stern reviews at least part of the Agency file on Oswald up to November 23. He is shown photos of the unidentified man, but apparently does not inquire as to how the photos were obtained. He also looks over: 1) the October-Mexican Oswald cables; 2) cables from Mexico of 11/22-3, 3) the messages delivered to the Secret Service on 11/23; 4) the 11/23 cable to the FBI on Oswald's 9/28 Soviet/Cuban contacts. Stern appears to be completely satisfied.

April 8-13

Howard Willens, William Coleman, and W.D. Slawson of the Warren Commission staff visit Mexico City and confer with State Department and CIA officials there. Presumably at this point the Commission staff members are given an explanation of the erroneous description of Oswald in the 10/10 telegram, the photo shown to Mrs. Oswald, and other details of the CIA Mexico City surveillance operation. CIA item# 648-825, an internal CIA cable sent just before the staff's Mexico trip states:

" These officers know we have (deletion) assets, may have guessed from coverage, (deletion) but do not know details or our arrangements (deletion). Request (deletion replaced with "CIA Field Rep") lend them all needed assistance with minimum possible disclosure of assets and techniques and no publicity at all."

This suggests that even at this point the staff may not have received the detailed information required to properly evaluate the CIA's surveillance of Oswald. Specifically the possibility that an impostor, representing himself as Oswald actually contacted the Embassies could not have been properly evaluated without a detailed explanation of the Agency's surveillance operations.

July 23

In response to assistant counsel J.W. Liebeler's request of a week earlier, the CIA delivers to the Commission on this date a cover memo and affidavit "respecting the origin and circumstances" of the photo shown to Mrs. Oswald on 11/23. This material was denominated Commission Document 1287.

The cover memo requests that the Warren Commission not publish this photo "because it would jeopardize a most confidential and productive operation...(and)... in addition it could be embarrassing to the individual involved who as far as this Agency is aware, had no connection with Lee Harvey Oswald or the assassination of President Kennedy."

The affidavit probably added little to what the Commission staff already knew about this photo, except perhaps that the photo was taken in Mexico City on October 4. The date here is important, for Oswald had left Mexico City two days earlier. Hence the Commission staff had little incentive to determine the photographed man's identity. However, had the Commission known that the unidentified man had also visited the Embassy on October 1, the same date as Oswald's contact, (CIA item 17, 648-9271) they might have been inclined to make an effort to locate him as a potential important witness.

The possibility should be considered that the man in the photograph turned out to have some sort of CIA connection and this led to the evasive conduct noted in this chronology. One might consider whether Hugh McDonald's claim to have seen the unidentified man at CIA headquarters in Langley has any basis in fact. (See Appointment in Dallas) In any event, it is important to examine the CIA's contacts with the Warren Commission very carefully, both in terms of whether the Agency withheld important information from the Commission and if so why, and in terms of the Select Committee's present dealings with the Agency as well.

For subsequent CIA-Warren Commission contacts on this subject, see Hoch Chronology, nos. 17-9.

Mark A. Allen 10/30/77