

Oswald's Trip to Mexico City

During Oswald's stay in New Orleans (May to September 1963) he was under the generally watchful eye of FBI agent M. R. Kaack, at the request of FBI agent Hosty of the Dallas office. He was not, however, under suspicion of espionage or other dangerous activities, and was not subjected to day-to-day surveillance. The FBI was not aware that Oswald had applied for and received a passport with the stated intention of travelling to the Soviet Union. The Passport Office of the State Department, which had granted the passport within 24 hours, did not notify the FBI or any other federal agency, apparently being unaware that the FBI took any interest in Oswald.

Despite these facts, Oswald was "checked" by U.S. Immigration and Customs officials on entering and leaving Mexico, at the request of an unnamed federal agency at Washington. Eugene Pugh, a Customs official, admitted that this was not the usual procedure (New York Herald-Tribune, November 26, 1963). William M. Kline, Chief of the U.S. Customs Bureau at Laredo, Texas, also acknowledged that Oswald's movements were watched (New York Post, November 25, 1963).

How did a federal agency other than the FBI have advance knowledge of Oswald's trip to Mexico, which he had confided only to Marina and of which the FBI had no prior knowledge? Which federal agency was it that arranged for Oswald to be watched by U.S. Customs? Why? The Warren Commission has not even mentioned these curious facts, much less explained them. However, both William M. Kline and Eugene Pugh appear in the list of witnesses as having submitted affidavits to the Commission, which will appear in Volume XV of the Hearings. Perhaps this mystery will be explained when that volume is published.

The Warren Commission informs us that Oswald was watched by the CIA during his stay in Mexico City, and that the CIA in due course notified the FBI and the State Department that Oswald had visited the Soviet Embassy there (although the CIA apparently was not then aware that he had also visited the Cuban Embassy). Was the CIA the unnamed federal agency in Washington that had alerted U.S. Customs? Was Oswald under CIA surveillance, unknown to the FBI? Why has the Warren Commission chosen to omit from its report any indication of these as-yet unexplained goings-on?

There are other puzzles connected with Oswald's trip to Mexico City which the Warren Commission has not fully explained. If the trip was a prelude to defection to Cuba, or re-defection to the Soviet Union, how did Oswald intend to pay his way to either country? The Commission tells us, in a neat exercise in speculative accounting, that Oswald was able to finance his trip to Mexico City out of his known income. But the Commission does not tell us how he would have paid his fare to Cuba or the Soviet Union if his visas had been granted. The Commission calculates that Oswald could have had cash on hand of just under \$130 at the end of his stay in Mexico City. It is highly doubtful if this sum could have taken him to Havana without permission from the Mexican Government to leave Mexico bound for Cuba. That such permission is customarily withheld from Americans whose passports are stamped "Not Valid for Travel to Cuba" accounts for the fact students and other Americans who defied the State Department by visiting Cuba (student groups travelled there in the summers of 1963 and 1964) had to go via Prague or other Eastern European cities. The cost would be far in excess of \$130.

It seems highly unlikely that Oswald was unaware of this. He was preoccupied for some months before his trip to Mexico with pro and/or anti-Castro activities. He must have known that he did not have enough money to reach Cuba even if he did get a visa. The real purpose of his trip to Mexico remains somewhat clouded. The Commission's speculations do not meet the test of logic, nor can we ascribe Oswald's wild-goose chase to the fact that he was alleged to have been a psychopath (the explanation which is used whenever the investigation has failed to uncover actual motivation). He was crazy like a fox when it came to money, by no lesser an authority than the Warren Commission. The Commission, in an attempt to show that Oswald did not have mysterious income from unknown sources, has ascribed to Oswald a wild talent for financial management that most of us should envy. According to the Commission, a man who was earning the legal minimum of \$1.25 an hour and averaged about \$244 a month in salary managed, in six months (August 1962 to January 1963) not only to support a family of three but to repay debts in the amount of \$635 without any impatience from his creditors. Such a man is not one to waste \$84 for visas he could not use if he got them.

In disposing of the speculation that Oswald intended to flee to Cuba after assassinating the President, the Commission points out that he did not have the financial means to do so, having left \$170 with his wife and carrying only \$18 on his person when arrested. By analogy, he could not have intended to travel to Cuba or to any European country when he visited Mexico City---unless he had access to funds which the Commission has not discovered. The Commission does not indicate that Oswald maintained a bank account; presumably he paid debts as well as mail ordered weapons by money order. The Commission does not consider that he might have received payments through his post-office box (Ruby maintained one also) and the Commission discounts as inconclusive and probably mistaken testimony that Oswald received money through Western Union (where Ruby sometimes sent money).

The conjectures and conclusions concerning both the trip to Mexico City and Oswald's income leave something wanting. In particular, the Warren Commission has not been completely frank about the role of the U.S. Customs Bureau and the unnamed federal agency, which have been omitted entirely from the relevant chapters of the report.