

Oswald and the State Department

The Warren Commission in Appendix XV of its report has reviewed the transactions between Oswald and the State Department and reached the conclusion that Oswald received no unusual favorable treatment. To reach this opinion the Commission has swallowed a large helping of "coincidence" and "clerical error" without visible signs of discomfort.

We are asked, with a straight face, ^{TO BELIEVE} that the decisions taken by the State Department on a series of problems raised by a defector, expatriate, self-declared enemy of the United States, and self-appointed apologist for Castro—decisions invariably working to his ultimate advantage—were wholly innocent. This goes against the grain, when one examines the extraordinary succession of circumstances which, against all regulations, policies, and common sense brought Oswald over every obstacle on the road from Minsk to Dallas.

(1) The State Department acknowledges that as early as October 1959 it had reasonable grounds for preparing a "lookout card" in Oswald's file but did not do so, for reasons not stated but with the implication that it was a matter of judgment.

(2) In March 1960 the Passport Office made up a "refusal sheet" on the grounds of Oswald's possible naturalization in the Soviet Union. The automatic procedure would have been to insert a lookout card in Oswald's file as a consequence of the refusal sheet. This was not done, and there is no clear explanation given for the lapse except that it was possibly the result of a "clerical error."

(3) Meanwhile, Oswald in the Soviet Union was striving furiously to renounce his American citizenship. He came to the Embassy with a written statement requesting that his citizenship be revoked; he told the Consul, Richard Snyder, that he intended to offer the Soviet authorities information on the Marine Corps and on his specialty, radar operation; and he announced that he would seek to become a citizen of the USSR.

One would think that Mr. Snyder, not knowing just how much sensitive information Oswald might have, should have had the patriotism to lock him in the nearest broom closet until he could obtain advice and instructions. Not at all. Mr. Snyder did not permit Oswald to shed his citizenship because it was a Saturday, and told him to return on a regular working day. This infuriated the would-be turncoat. He wrote Snyder a bristling letter, demanding his rights and threatening that, if his request for naturalization was granted by the Soviet Union, he would have his new motherland lodge a formal protest against the old for denying him his rights. Within the same 24 hours Snyder also received a cablegram from the State Department emphasizing that the Embassy had no authority to withhold from Oswald the right to renounce his citizenship.

Nevertheless, Oswald's citizenship was never revoked for the purely technical reason that Oswald failed to make a second personal visit to the Embassy.

(3) Thus, despite his vigorous representations, 1961 found Oswald still with his unwanted American citizenship and still without a lookout card in his file in Washington. This was fortunate for him, as it turned out. On February 5th he decided to ask for the return of his passport, which he had flung on a desk in the Embassy on that Saturday in 1959, so that he could make his way again to his native land.

But he set a condition---a full guarantee that he would not be prosecuted under any circumstances. The Warren Commission does not tell us whether or not he ever received such a guarantee or by whom. The fact is that he did return and he was not prosecuted. A clue may lie in the statement by the State Department that it had concluded, in the light of the failure of the U.S. Navy Department or other government agencies to institute proceedings against Oswald, that his 1959 threat to betray classified information was only "rash talk."

(4) Oswald's request to return to the United States, soon extended to include the admission of his new wife and their infant, met with friendly and helpful treatment at the Embassy. The procedure for admission to the United States was set in motion, notwithstanding the fact that on his application Oswald apparently had admitted an act or acts implying his expatriation. It is not easy to make sense of the Warren Commission's explanation of this peculiar transaction.

On his application, Oswald was required to indicate whether or not he had committed acts which might disqualify him from receiving a passport, by striking out either the phrase "have" or the phrase "have not." One existing carbon copy of the application shows that "have not" has been typed over. Snyder does not remember to which of the acts Oswald was thereby admitting; it may have been "swearing allegiance to a foreign state;" on the other hand, the strikeout of "have not" may have been another "clerical error."

Next the Warren Commission tells us that there is an "actual signed copy of the application" in the files of the Embassy in Moscow "which is not a carbon copy of the copy sent to the Department," in which the strikeout is slightly above the "have," which itself is above the "have not." Therefore, the Commission assumes, the strikeout may have been intended to obliterate the "have."

What, pray, is an "actual signed copy of the application...which is not a carbon copy of the copy sent to the Department"? Having re-read the phrase five times the meaning is still elusive. Surely the Warren Commission has not resorted to such an elaborate string of words to substitute for the words "original application"? Where, then, is the original application filled out by Oswald? We have "one existing carbon copy, " location unknown. We have an "actual signed copy" in the Embassy files but it is not a "carbon copy of the copy sent to the Department." Is it a carbon copy at all? Is it the original of the carbon copy sent to the Department? This torturous use of language only raises the suspicion of subterfuge and concealment---especially when it is further suggested that when the application reached Washington the strikeout of the phrase "have not" was disregarded.

(5) Marina, on her application, made a false statement about membership in KOMSOMOL but this did not come to light at the time. It seems odd that with excellent intelligence facilities in the Soviet Union it was not possible to check on the applicant's veracity while she was still on her own side of the Iron Curtain---odder still if the lie was known but overlooked.

(6) Despite the known or overlooked defects in both Oswald's and Marina's applications the Visa Office of the State Department in October 1961 referred the matter for processing to the Immigration and Naturalization Office (INS) at Dallas. At the end of January 1962 the INS decided to deny waiver of sanctions against Marina's admission. The decision was transmitted to the State Department by telegraph as well as letter because "Washington had previously indicated its impatience." The Warren Commission has not explained this "impatience" on behalf of an obscure, unpleasant, and disloyal citizen.

(7) When the Embassy learned of the negative decision by INS it might have shrugged its shoulders in weary resignation. Rather, at the suggestion of the State Department, the Embassy contacted the Brussels Embassy in an attempt to secure a visa there for Marina and so circumvent the denial of waiver.

(8) That manoeuver proved unnecessary, since the Soviet Desk of the State Department began in March 1962 to pressure INS to reverse its decision. On May 9 INS formally reversed its prior decision. The impatient State Department did not wait but cabled the good news to the Embassy on May 8.

(9) Oswald had made unsuccessful attempts from February to May to obtain funds for repatriation from the Red Cross and the International Rescue Committee. The State Department, sometime in May 1962, authorized a loan of funds to Oswald and the renewal of his passport. On June 1 Oswald borrowed \$435 from the Embassy and left the USSR with his wife and child.

At this point, for financial rather than security reasons, the regulations of the State Department required that a lookout card be placed in Oswald's file. You have guessed already: no such card was prepared, perhaps because of still another "clerical error."

(10) On June 24, 1963 Oswald applied for a passport in New Orleans. He received the passport on June 25.* The State Department and the Warren Commission would have us believe that this was perfectly normal and that it was merely a coincidence that of all the 25 names on the list of passport applicants received in Washington the letters "NO" in red were placed alongside of Oswald's name and no other, and that "NO" was an abbreviation for New Orleans.

What is even more offensive to swallow than this weird string of errors, oversights, and peculiar interpretations of regulation is the suggestion put forward that even if none of these extraordinary irregularities had occurred, exactly the same sequence of events would have taken place. It would be interesting to ask William Worthy or the kids who violate our sensibilities each summer by their illicit trips to Cuba or any of a dozen other victims of passport denial whether they ever had the good fortune to benefit by a clerical error in the State Department. That so many mistakes and unexpected decisions in Oswald's case were random and unmotivated is impossible to swallow, even with the endorsement of the Warren Commission at its full splendor of impartiality.

*We are not told whether or not he struck out "have" or "have not" on this application for renewal of passport, perhaps because it would have made no difference anyhow.