

Follows Oswald's Track,

By DAVID JACKSON
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CHICAGO — Edward Jay Epstein is not an assassination buff. Yet his new book, "Legend: The Secret World of Lee Harvey Oswald," has added so much new information about President Kennedy's assassin that Epstein may be considered an instant Assassination Buff Emeritus.

Epstein avoided the theories about conspiracies, ballistics and bullet trajectories to focus on Oswald's 1959 defection to the Soviet Union and what he did between then and Nov. 22, 1963.

For more than two years, Epstein filed Freedom of Information Act requests and traveled around the world interviewing people who knew Oswald and who could add to the still mysterious portions of Oswald's life.

Most of the information Epstein uncovered was not even investigated by the Warren Commission. Even so, he admits "there are gaps in the story that we'll never know."

Included among his unsettling findings:

— Oswald was most likely a Soviet-influenced intelligence agent who, Ep-

stein believes, killed Kennedy not on the orders of the U.S.S.R. but possibly at the suggestion of pro-Castro Cubans.

← Oswald's expertise as a Marine radar specialist probably enabled the Russians to shoot down Francis Gary Powers' U-2 spy plane in May, 1960.

— J. Edgar Hoover apparently ordered the destruction of files on Oswald to mask that agency's "gross incompetence" in Oswald's handling after his return to the United States.

— Today, a long-term Soviet agent (in intelligence jargon: a "mole") probably is working in a high position in either the CIA or FBI.

— An intelligence feud between the FBI and CIA ended in a destructive purge of CIA officials.

In Chicago to promote "Legend" (a cover story in intelligence jargon), Epstein, a former political science professor at Harvard, UCLA and MIT, said he believes the Soviets "may have sent (Oswald) here to do some low-level spying" but not an assassination.

He said it was a "possibility," however, that "some hothead" in the Cuban Embassy in Mexico City suggested to Oswald in early October, 1963, that he "do some act" and that Oswald then de-



EDWARD JAY EPSTEIN

ecided to kill the President.

In his book, Epstein writes of Yuri Nosenko, an alleged KGB (Soviet intelligence) defector whom Epstein — and many CIA theorists — believe was sent here to steer the CIA, FBI and the Warren Commission away from connecting Oswald with the KGB.

Yet Hoover fought to establish Nosenko's credibility because Nosen-

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ko's story exonerated the FBI's weak investigation.

One thing is sure, according to Epstein. Intelligence leaks aimed at establishing Nosenko's credibility "brought out everything skelton in the closet," leaving the CIA "totally wrecked."

Epstein also raises disturbing questions about the FBI's handling of Oswald before the assassination. He contends the FBI knew Oswald was a Soviet agent in 1962 and 1963.

"The FBI was trying to activate him, move him around Dallas, trying to find out who his network was," he said. "And they couldn't. They even tried to double him (make him work for the FBI as a double agent).

"When he finally killed Kennedy, they just couldn't (continue). Then they destroyed every real file they had on Oswald."

Oswald, said Epstein, "thought he was going to be a super agent. He thought he was really hot stuff, and then the Soviets gave him a very low-level job. And they they refused to contact him. He thought they were dumping him.

"He went off on his own. . . . I think there was a coincidence of timing and

that when Kennedy was suddenly passing by his route, he (Oswald) said, 'That's what I'll do. And I'll be a hero.'"

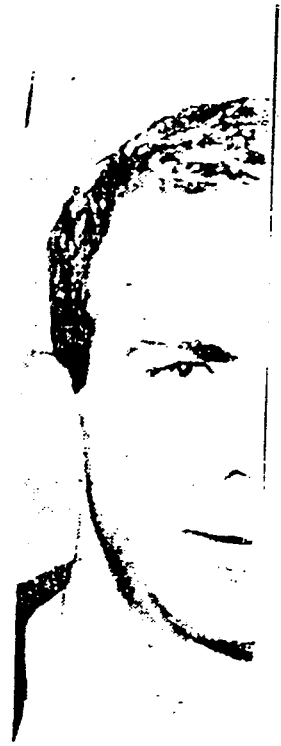
As he probed Oswald's past, Epstein said, "I sort of felt that I knew Oswald." In the late 1960s during the student movement, Epstein recalled. "I knew so many of my friends . . . the type of student leader who reminded me of Oswald. He was intelligent, articulate, he felt that he wanted to do something."

"He was ahead of his time, he was self-educated. He was going to act. And maybe his first act was to go to Russia."

If Oswald had been born 10 years later, Epstein speculated. "he might have been one of the leaders of the peace movement. Right now he'd be working for some congressman . . ."

The story is far from over, though. "There's a whole area missing. Epstein admitted, adding that "journalism can only go so far." The gaps, he said, "have to be answered by someone with subpoena power I think a congressional committee can do that."

Then, he concluded, "The whole thing might unfold." And that would make all the assassination buffs happy.



LEE HARVEY