

Oswald or Oswald-imposter in Mexico City

Among the mysteries surrounding Oswald's trip to Mexico City at the end of September 1963 are indications that a man identifying himself as Oswald but differing in appearance and voice from the genuine Oswald visited the Cuban Consulate and the Soviet Embassy. The House Committee on Assassinations attempted to resolve these mysteries.

A photograph, initially thought to be a photograph of Oswald by the CIA, shows a man of about 35 years, six feet tall, athletic in build, with a balding head and a receding hairline. The House Committee after investigation concluded that the CIA's initial identification of the man in the photograph as Oswald was the result of "a careless mistake" by the CIA (HSCAR 249) and that the man in the photograph was not an Oswald imposter. The CIA is unable to this day to identify the man in the photograph.

What of the voice? It became known in the mid-1970s that the CIA had a tape recording of a man identifying himself as Lee Oswald, speaking to the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City. The CIA claimed that it had routinely destroyed this tape recording before the assassination. But the FBI claimed that its agents, who had conversed with Oswald in Dallas, presumably after his arrest on November 22, 1963, had "listened to a recording of his voice" and were of the opinion that the voice was not that of Lee Harvey Oswald. This information, contained in an FBI memorandum dated November 23, 1963, suggested (1) that an Oswald-imposter had telephoned the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City in an apparent attempt to incriminate the real Oswald, and (2) that the CIA had deliberately lied about destroying the tape before the assassination and had in fact preserved it long enough for FBI agents to listen to it on November 22nd or 23rd.

The House Committee reviewed the records of the CIA and the FBI and questioned their present and former officials. Those questioned included former FBI agents James Hosty, John Fain, Burnett Tom Carter, and Arnold Brown (but not three other FBI agents who had also conversed with Oswald at one time), all of whom denied ever having listened to a recording of Oswald's voice. The Committee then concluded that the FBI memorandum of November 23, 1963, with the explicit statement that "agents of this Bureau, who have conversed with Oswald in Dallas ...have listened to a recording of his voice" and "are of the opinion that the ...individual was not Lee Harvey Oswald", was mistaken. (HSCAR 250)

Any student of FBI reports and documents knows the cruel and inhuman punishment inflicted on the English language by FBI writers of memoranda and reports. But whatever its sins of syntax, it is impossible to believe that the FBI at its most careless or crippled level of writing would set down, in error, the clear and unmistakable description of having "listened to a recording" when there was no recording. Moreover, the CIA when it claimed that it had destroyed the recording routinely, before the assassination, admitted unequivocally that there was a recording.

How, then, should we evaluate the House Committee's conclusions that the photograph of a still-unidentified man was identified by the CIA as Oswald as the result of a "careless mistake" and that the FBI memorandum stating that FBI agents had listened to a recording of Oswald's voice and found it not to be the voice of the real Oswald was merely "mistaken"? It is logical to infer that the CIA and the FBI successfully stonewalled the House Committee and that the Committee in turn supinely decided not to challenge these two powerful institutions whose penchant for the illicit and untruthful has become notorious.

The discussion of the non-existent CIA tape recording comes late in the House Committee's Report (HSCAR 249-250) but is detailed at the outset of this critique of the Report in order to show at once the preposterous and unashamed manner in which the Committee "resolved" crucial problems and the gullibility which is required for the acceptance of many of its findings.