

GENERAL SCIENCE

Killing Still Mystery

Despite the exhaustive studies made by the Warren Commission that revealed Oswald as a person "capable of assassinating" the President, why he did so remains unknown.

► WHY LEE HARVEY OSWALD assassinated President John F. Kennedy remains a mystery.

Despite an exhaustive review of every facet of Oswald's life, the Warren Commission could not make a "definitive determination" of the slayer's motives.

However, the seven-man commission, whose chairman was Chief Justice Earl Warren, did find that Oswald was "moved by an overwhelming hostility to his environment."

Included in the factors that contributed to his character and to his decision to assassinate President Kennedy were:

1. A deep-rooted resentment of all authority, expressed in a hostility toward every society in which he lived.

2. An inability to enter into meaningful relationships with people, and a continuous pattern of rejecting his environment in favor of new surroundings.

3. An urge to try to find a place in history, and despair at times over failures in his various undertakings.

4. A capacity for violence, shown by Oswald's attempt to kill Maj. Gen. Edwin A. Walker, U.S. Army, (Ret.)

5. An avowed commitment to Marxism and communism, as he understood the terms and developed his own determination of them; this was expressed by his antagonism toward the United States, by his defection to the U.S.S.R., by his failure to be reconciled with life in the United States after returning from Russia and by his frustrated efforts to go to Cuba.

6. A demonstrated capacity to act decisively and without regard to the consequences when such action would further his aims of the moment.

Out of these and many other factors molding the character of Lee Harvey Oswald, the Warren Commission concluded, "there emerged a man capable of assassinating President Kennedy."

The Warren Commission made a thorough study of Lee Harvey Oswald's background and possible motives. The evidence they assembled identifies Oswald as the assassin of President Kennedy and indicates he acted alone. There is no evidence that he had accomplices or that he was involved in any conspiracy directed to the assassination of the President.

Concerning the question of what impelled Oswald to conceive and to carry out the assassination of the President of the United States, the Commission has considered many possible motives for the assassination, including those flowing from Oswald's commitment to Marxism or communism, the existence of some personal grievance, a desire to effect changes in the structure of society or simply to go down in history as a well publicized assassin.

"None of these possibilities," the Commission's Report said, "satisfactorily explains Oswald's act if it is judged by the standards of reasonable men. The motives of any man, however, must be analyzed in terms of the character and state of mind of the particular individual involved.

"For a motive that appears incomprehensible to other men may be the moving force of a man whose view of the world has been twisted, possibly by factors of which those around him were only dimly aware. Oswald's complete state of mind and character are now outside of the power of man to know.

"He cannot, of course, be questioned or observed by those charged with the responsibility for this report or by experts on their behalf. There is, however, a large amount of material available in his writings and in the history of his life which does give some insight into his character and, possibly, into the motives for his act.

"Since Oswald is dead, the Commission is not able to reach any definite conclusions as to whether or not he was 'sane' under prevailing legal standards. Under our system of justice no forum could properly make that determination unless Oswald were before it.

"It certainly could not be made by this Commission which, as has been pointed out above, ascertained the facts surrounding the

assassination but did not draw conclusions concerning Oswald's legal guilt. . . .

"Perhaps the most outstanding conclusion of such a study is that Oswald was profoundly alienated from the world in which he lived. His life was characterized by isolation, frustration, and failure. He had very few, if any, close relationships with other people and he appeared to have great difficulty in finding a meaningful place in the world. He was never satisfied with anything. . . .

"Marina Oswald thought that he would not be happy anywhere, 'Only on the moon, perhaps.'

"While Oswald appeared to most of those who knew him as a meek and harmless person, he sometimes imagined himself as 'the Commander' and, apparently seriously, as a political prophet—a man who said that after 20 years he would be prime minister.

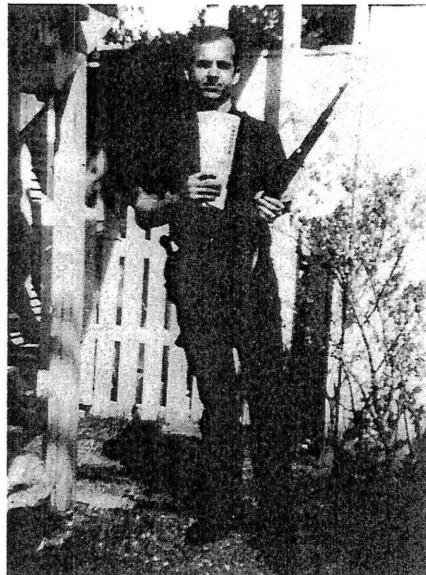
"His wife testified that he compared himself with great leaders of history. Such ideas of grandeur were apparently accompanied by notions of oppression.

"He had a great hostility toward his environment, whatever it happened to be, which he expressed in striking and sometimes violent acts long before the assassination. There was some quality about him that led him to act with an apparent disregard for possible consequences.

"He defected to the Soviet Union, shot at General Walker, tried to go to Cuba and even contemplated hijacking an airplane to get there.

"He assassinated the President, shot Officer Tippit, resisted arrest and tried to kill another policeman in the process."

• Science News Letter, 86:230 October 10, 1964



Warren Commission

EXHIBIT NO. 134—Oswald holds a rifle, a pistol and issues of two newspapers, Worker and the Militant, in this photograph taken in the backyard of his home in Dallas in the spring of 1963.