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Oswald in Mexico - Excerpts

(Transcribed by Paul L. Hoch 12/4/83)

PARTICIPANTS:

MOO: Margo Alder, Jean Davison, Phil Melanson, Tom Powers, Peter Dale Scott, and Tony Summers. Produced by Larry Schlossman & Rosemary Reed.

MA: One of the things that I think about, certainly when I've read the parts of your book - and thinking about the assassination, and thinking about Lee Harvey Oswald, is all this question of the Cuban connection, of his trips to Mexico City, trips to New Orleans, etc., and I was wondering if you could for a minute talk about that connection.

JD: Yes. I didn't really begin to believe that I understood what was going on there until I did take the time to study his life in great detail, and eventually what he had in mind seemed to become apparent. He went to the Soviet Union hoping to make a name for himself, hoping to get somewhere there; really, I believe, sincerely believing in Marxism; he was disillusioned when the Russians didn't take him seriously, didn't give him the kind of job he wanted, or the kind of education he wanted; he came back to this country, as he once put it, to join the struggle; he immediately, almost immediately, set about building up his political credentials, because one of the problems he'd had in Russia was that, when the Russians asked him, who are you, what papers do you have to show who you are, he couldn't produce any; he had no record as a political figure of any kind. So he did begin to try to accumulate documents showing what he had done to help the Cubans, and he had wanted to help Castro apparently ever since 1958, 1959.

Now I realize that there are other interpretations of some of this evidence, but I was never able to interpret him as a political provocateur for some American intelligence agency and fit it in to the rest of his life and character. He did go to the Cuban Embassy in Mexico City in September of 1963, hoping to get a visa to that country, and [MA: was disappointed] was disappointed, yes.

MA: Does anyone else have any information, or any thoughts about the Cuban and Mexico City connections in all of this? Peter Scott, or Phil Melanson?

PM: Yeah; I think this is one of the keys, again, to different interpretations. The Mexican [sic] City trip is seen by the Warren Commission and by Ms. Davison and others as one of the final acts in Oswald's life of leftism, and the kind of frustration that was gearing himself - he was gearing himself up for the assassination. There's again another focus on that, and that is that there's a good deal of evidence, as with the rest of this case, that there was a lot of funny business going on down in Mexico.

For example, the CIA has admitted that they had at one time three distinct tape recordings, I believe, of Oswald visiting the Cuban and Russian consulates in Mexico City. These would have

been extraordinary evidence at the time, in the sense that to have Lee Harvey Oswald, the real Oswald, on tape as making overtures to get back to the Soviet Union would in fact have been as close to fleshing out the Warren Commission picture of him as we might come. These tapes were routinely destroyed, it has been described by CIA officers. It's hard for me to imagine that there could be anything routine about the destruction of evidence which purported to show that Lee Harvey Oswald was doing what he was supposed to do.

There's a good deal of other, suspicious evidence that it may not have been the real Lee Harvey Oswald who was in Mexico City, and I wish we had Tony Summers to speak to this, because I think he's done some of the most original work on this question.

MA: We actually do! [PM: Oh! That's fortunate.] We actually have, we do have Anthony Summers on the line, who may have been listening to all of this [PM: That would be better than my -] and maybe he can put forth some of the stuff that he's been researching about Oswald's connections, and his trips to Mexico City. Hello, Mr. Summers.

TS: Yes, hello. I feel like a rabbit coming out of a hat, at that point. I haven't in fact been working intensively on the case for a year or two now, since some while after my book came out, but certainly, I did do more work than can be seen in my book, in the months following its publication. And I continue to think that Mexico is the core of this story, and that if there is any way into the mystery at this date, it would be through a proper revelation of the events in Mexico.

What concerned me very much at a very quick look at Jean Davison's book is the way in which she dealt with the matter as though it was reading the Dead Sea scrolls, and I suspect that she didn't go down the road and talk to people about - who were actually involved on the ground in Mexico or in many of the events surrounding those last months of Oswald's life.

I did do a good deal of that; in particular, for example, I confronted Sylvia Duran, the woman at the Cuban Embassy in Mexico City who handled the visa application for Oswald, and I discovered to my amazement that she had never, at any time by anybody, and that's including the Warren Commission investigators and the FBI, been confronted with photographs, let alone moving film, of the man who came into the Embassy. And since there has been the suggestion that this was - it was somebody other than Oswald, using the Oswald name, who went into the Embassy on at least one or some of the occasions that he's supposed to have gone in there, what I did was to come back to the United States, get hold of photographs, and, I think, most important, moving footage taken in New Orleans that summer, of him walking and talking, and got these things to her, and was - I must admit myself, in spite of my belief in a conspiracy, and a belief in hanky-panky over who exactly was coming and going at the Embassy, I was amazed to find that she looked at them and said, but this does not seem to me to be the man. And here, this was the key Mexico City witness, really felt, on the whole, that this was not the right person. That was very serious.

I also found, on looking at Jean Davison's book, that she puts a lot of weight on a story that was published eventually in

the National Enquirer, by a British journalist called Comer Clarke, about a conversation, an interview that Comer Clarke supposedly did with Fidel Castro in Havana after the event, in which Castro talked about things that Oswald was supposed to have said to his people at the Embassy in Mexico City. Now I have since the book done some research in England into Comer Clarke, who is now dead. I talked to his widow, and I talked to his associates, and I established that at the time that he supposedly did this interview, they are quite certain that he wasn't in Havana, and what's more that he never ever went to Havana. Now this is something that can be done, by making some phone calls and writing some letters. I understand from another researcher that I respect on this story, who's also done work on the area, that Comer Clarke in fact got his information in one of the Latin American countries, and, at a time and in a way that suggests that he was being fed disinformation.

I think that in fact disinformation and the possibility that, before the assassination, Oswald or Oswald's name was as it were being set up, is crucial. It may well be that at the time he was being set up purely in order to smear the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. There were other schemes along exactly these lines to do just that. And of course it may be that in the end, he was - that setup was used for the biggest setup of all, setting him up in the assassination.

MA: Mr. Summers, I want you to stay on the line. I should say that Anthony Summers is a former BBC journalist, and he's author of the book "Conspiracy." I didn't identify him before. But before going on, I'd like Jean Davison to respond. You criticized Mr. Summers quite a bit in your book, I noticed.

JD: Yes, I did. I will say this about Sylvia Duran: she did see a photograph of Oswald in her local newspaper the day after the assassination, and according to her statement to the Mexican police, she immediately recognized him as the man she dealt with. The House Assassinations Committee, I believe, also - I think they spoke with her, and she still identified the man as Oswald; um -

TS: What she saw in the newspaper - if I may interrupt for a second, because I talked to her deep in the night about this, was a blurry photograph, and she said it was a wire photograph at the time, and - that the point is that the name was Oswald, that was the impact of the thing, and he was a young man, and there he was in the wire photograph, and at the time her husband shoved the paper across the table to her, and then she never thought twice about identification again. In fact, she to this day has not really been aware of the controversy about the possibility of an impostor using the name Oswald.

JD: Well, I find it difficult to believe that in all these years she had not seen many photographs of Lee Harvey Oswald.

[TS: Well, she -]

MA: Well, I think we sh- we can - the photograph itself is sort of a minor point; I think [JD: yeah] you probably have a lot of other things that you would [JD: right] like to say, as far -

JD: And as far as the Comer Clarke interview - of course, if that were all the reason to believe that Oswald had made a threat at the Cuban Embassy against President Kennedy, I would

not have paid any attention to it, and I don't think such people as Daniel Schorr would have paid any attention to that alone, but there was an FBI informant who gave similar information, there was other corroboration for this; and also I -

TS: - thing, if I may; forgive me interrupting you, you're welcome to interrupt me in a minute; what I'm saying about this is that one has to do the homework. I find also that a lot of weight has been put on the statement of Daniel Harker about the interview that he did with Fidel Castro in advance of the assassination; and I think you yourself mention this with fairly heavy emphasis, that Fidel Castro was suggesting that the lives of United States leaders would not be safe if the United States at the same time was threatening Cuba or Cuban leaders.

And, y'know, I have yet to see anybody do an in-depth interview with Daniel Harker, who supposedly did that interview. I haven't done that, unfortunately, but I did at the very last minute, too late for publication, track down Daniel Harker, who still exists and is in New York City, not too hard to find; and he is - he may for all I know be an excellent journalist, and he may have absolutely told the truth; however, he - the name Daniel Harker is deceiving; he's in fact an extremely Latin journalist, who to this day is very shaky in English. Now, I simply would like to know more about him, and more about his role at the time, [MA: Mr. Summers-] in the light of the fact that we find, time after time, the traces of disinformation concerning Oswald's visit to Mexico City, and everything to do with him in New Orleans, and those last months of his life.

MA: Mr. Summers, I'm interested in your thoughts about the Select Committee on Assassinations, the report about Mexico City.

TS: Um, yes. Or rather, the report that we haven't seen. If we look in the report of the House Assassinations Committee, and in the volumes that accompany it, there's an extraordinary gap on the Mexico City area, just a few lines here and there, one of them indicating, I think in a footnote, that there was - that there is a report that had been done by their investigators, but the report is nowhere to be found in the volumes. When I asked Chief Counsel Blakey about this, he said to me that, well, there was such a report, but Mexico, and I quote, is an area impossible to discuss in full in the report. And I said - challenged him and said, but for goodness' sake, it's obvious to everyone, whichever side of the case they're on, that Mexico, coming when and how it did in Oswald's career, is a crucial period; and he said, well - well, it couldn't be revealed, because of protecting U.S. intelligence sources and methods.

Well, methods, baloney. Intelligence methods have changed so much since 1963 that there is no secret today about saying which cameras were where and being pointed by whom, as far as U.S. agents went. If there were sources, U.S. agents - Cubans, I mean - working, or supplying information to the United States, who might still be alive, possibly in Cuba, clearly that would be very sensitive, but I think in order to reveal what they had to say, one wouldn't have to reveal who they were. There are ways of talking about these things.

What I did was to track down that - the existence of a House Assassinations Committee report on the Mexico matter, discovered

that there was a report which was 300 pages long. I have had sight of that report; I don't know whether anyone else has; and I find that, to my money, it contains vital information which the American public certainly should have been told about. It satisfied me that the CIA, or specific Agency officers, indeed covered up the Mexico evidence.

Pictures were made during the, quote, "Oswald" Mexico visit, and they've either been destroyed or were deliberately withheld from the Committee. Now there was one photograph, as I understand it, from what I know of the report - and I'm afraid I don't have it sitting in front of me; I wish I did; it would be journalistically very valuable; I must stress that I was just given sight of it - but that there were photographs, and at least one of the photographs did show Oswald. Now this is backed up in the House Assassinations Committee report by - in the report we have not been allowed to see - by statements of five former CIA officers; and they also tracked down a secret - memoir, I guess, is the best way to describe it - left by the former Mexico station chief, Winston Scott, and all of this put together convinced the Committee staff that a photograph of Oswald was taken in Oswald City [sic], and that it was preserved until the station chief's death in the early '70s, and he kept a copy of the picture, along with his written record, and both of these were removed from his Mexico safe following his death by a senior and renowned counterintelligence chief, and that photograph is now, to all intents and purposes, vanished.

One has to ask, before getting into the further complexities of whether and what the real Oswald was up to, one has to ask why on earth, if there was such a photograph, and if it was in existence then, and it was known to the CIA both before and after the assassination, why we haven't been allowed to see it yet. It would have been the best proof possible, one might say, for the official version of the way things supposedly occurred.

There's also the evidence involving the bugged telephone conversations held by the, quote, "Oswald," at the Communist embassies and with Communist officials. In some of them he spoke hopelessly bad Russian, and in others he spoke Spanish. The authentic Oswald, at least as best I could understand it from talking to those who knew him in Dallas during that last year or so, including some Russians who knew him in Dallas, Russian exiles, he spoke - he still spoke sufficiently good Russian that he could virtually pass for a Russian, being a Russian from the Baltic states. He didn't speak any Spanish at all, so far as I can find out. And this seems to me to support the notion that while he did indeed go to Mexico, he was not the man who created the stir at the Communist embassies, or at least who created a large part of it. And I suspect that he was not the man who spoke to a KGB official belonging to the department which handled sabotage and assassination projects, which is made much of by those who like to suggest that in some way Communist Cuba was behind the assassination.

MA: Thank you very much, Anthony Summers. And perhaps, Tom Powers, you'd like to reply. That's a lot of different things that have been put on the table.

PDS: Could I add one question for Tom Powers, out of all of

that? There are two people at this table who don't believe there was a conspiracy, but after what you've just heard about Mexico City, surely you must agree there was a coverup.

MA: And before you answer that, we have to pause once again, for station [... - cut off locally]

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MA: We have in the studio Jean Davison, author of "Oswald's Game," Prof. Phillip Melanson, of Southeastern Massachusetts University, Thomas Powers, author of "The Man Who Kept The Secrets: Richard Helms and the CIA," and Peter Dale Scott, author of "Crime and Coverup"....

TP [paraphrased by PLH: intelligence services are always sensitive about surveillance; there is always extraordinary attention to the Soviet Embassy. I think we can establish a long, sustained pattern of foot-dragging in the JFK case, but that doesn't necessarily mean involvement in a conspiracy. These people all work for the President; getting his confidence and his ear is important. They are believers in the American dream, and they are dazzled by the Presidency.] I have never met anybody in an intelligence service who did not have a kind of a deep-seated desire, almost like a moth for a flame, to get close to the White House.... I just find it extremely difficult to believe that chief operating officers in the CIA would ever try and kill a President. I don't think anybody can bring forth very much solid evidence that they've ever even tried to do anything like embarrass a President. Many of them were extremely upset about the way we handled the Bay of Pigs, and the fact that we did not follow through with the sort of energy that they thought was necessary. But - and I talked to a lot of people who were involved in the planning of the Bay of Pigs, and so on, and I must say that although they thought Kennedy made a mistake, they were very far from having any kind of angry feelings towards him. They really admired that man, and they just thought he was badly advised, and made the wrong choice, and blame it all on Arthur Schlesinger. [Laughter?] So I - ...

MA: Tony, Tony Summers?

TS: Yes; I must say, first of all, I think it needs to be said that nobody serious that I know suggests that "the CIA" as such killed President Kennedy, or was involved in its planning. It seems to me however that what Tom Powers was just saying sounded like a bit of a P.R. job on behalf of the Agency. It seems to me that one has to look at the evidence, and look at the individual facts and the figures involved.

I would come back to the apparent facts in the matter, and a story that the House Committee staff found plausible, but which was never revealed by the Warren Commission, which described Oswald in the company of two men, whose descriptions we now have, leaving [sic] the United States, after the Mexico visit; a Mexican border record showed that Oswald returned to the United States by car. Now he had no car, and as far as we know he couldn't drive. We were told that he returned to the United States by bus, alone. Now the source of the account that Oswald was accompanied in Mexico City, a woman [Elena Garro de Paz], has consistently claimed that when she began making her allegation about this, after the assassination, she was promptly whisked

into seclusion in a hotel, and warned not to repeat her story, and that she was later further silenced with threats against her person. Now, it's now been established by the Assassinations Committee, and by some work I did, that the sequestration, the carrying her off to the hotel, did occur; even more troubling, the man who arranged it, and the person who later made threats against her, were CIA agents, and I know their names.

The role of a specific CIA officer is central to this Mexican business; we now know in vivid detail that one officer who gave sworn testimony to the Committee - his testimony was so unsatisfactory, and his demeanor and his responses so apparently deceptive and contradictory, [MA: I think you've laid -] the staff were convinced he was lying. His written and his verbal statements, of his personal role in the CIA surveillance episode, were hopelessly shaky, not least because the record shows that he wasn't even in town on days he said he did certain things.

MA: Mr. Summers, I think you've laid now so much out on the table that I think it's only fair that I have to get everyone in, because there are people on this table who are dying to respond to you. So I'll go first to Jean Davison, and then to Phil Melanson.

JD: [Paraphrased: Well, there were undoubtedly many false stories given to the authorities, as after any such event. Summers left out the two embassy witnesses who identified Oswald; the visa application included his photo; later, Oswald mentioned his visit in a letter to the Soviets in Washington. That's hard to explain away.]

PM: [Paraphrased: Some of Tony's stuff is hard evidence which can't be explained away as bad witness recall. There was a coverup, whether or not it was of an assassination conspiracy. Agreed, Tom Powers hasn't come into contact with CIA people who seem capable of killing a President, but the worst CIA types aren't in Washington wearing suits. Consider QJ/WIN and WI/ROGUE, Ferrie, Terpil, and Wilson. The problem is that certain networks can't be controlled from above. What Powers said is not incompatible with lower-level CIA involvement.]

PDS: On Mexico City: I think we should be talking about the CIA now, and not just Oswald in Mexico City; and I too agree, you're not going to find that the CIA as such killed the President, or anything like that. I think it's quite clear that a lot of people in CIA felt that there was urgent unfinished business in Cuba and would have liked to link Oswald to Cuba, which is a separate issue. And one of the stories that we had right after the assassination was taken quite seriously at the time, was a Nicaraguan who claimed to be pro-Castro, claimed to have been in the Consulate, Cuban Consulate when Oswald [came] in; this was the first version of what later, if you like, became the Comer Clarke story. He actually claimed to hear Oswald saying that he would kill the President and had been paid in the Embassy to do it.

Now in retrospect that looked like a wild story; and in fact David Phillips, who's one of the more renowned CIA officers, who was himself in the Mexico station at that time, in his book definitively disposes of Gilberto Alvarado because he points out that he was working for Somoza's Nicaraguan intelligence service

and obviously had been put up to say - to invent this story, as a way of provoking the United States to retaliate against Cuba. But what Phillips doesn't - and Phillips suggests in his book that, y'know, he saw it to be a false story at the time; actually there were some people in the CIA station at the time who were supporting Alvarado's story - I suspect that in fact one of these people may have been Phillips himself - and they said that he seemed very credible and intelligent in the way that he let out his story; and then I think much more relevant to this question of the missing tapes, the CIA sent a message to Washington reporting from, quote, from a sensitive and reliable source - now that indicates hard intelligence of surveillance type - which corroborated Alvarado's story.

Then we had Ambassador Thomas Mann, who had a very different Latin American politics from Kennedy's, and much more of a hard liner, particularly against Cuba, saying that we should take much more seriously than we were at that time the hypothesis that Castro had been behind the assassination, and recommending that all the Cuban informants of the government in the United States be consulted as to whether they thought Castro had done it. Well, these were of course all the anti-Castro Cubans, who would have been only too delighted to say that.

So it's not just that there was a coverup for technical reasons of surveillance records and things like that. There was a very messy record of CIA involvement in the politics of the case down in Mexico City, and not just CIA, Embassy personnel as well. Some of these other people who may have reacted the other way, and turned three men into one man, may have been trying to get rid of this false hypothesis, this false evidence that Castro had done it.

MA: It's very clear that when you take a subject like the Kennedy assassination, it's hard for anyone to get a word in edgewise, and there are a lot of people who have been waiting on the phones to ask questions of the panelists. We have our first call, from Tennessee....