

For a long time after Oswald's defection the Navy bureaucracy continued to act as though Oswald was still without blemish—or at least so the known record suggests. It was only in September 1960, a whole year later, that the Marine Corps Reserve gave him an "undesirable discharge." To add to the confusion, Oswald's "201" file at the CIA shows Oswald's occupation as "Radar Operator, U.S. Marine Corps, as of 1960," even though Oswald had signed out of active service in autumn 1959. All this may reflect nothing more than the slip-ups of a creaky military bureaucracy. If so, the Oswald case has more than its fair share.

In 1978 I interviewed Gerry Hemming,⁴ a former Marine sergeant who served in radar control at Aitugi air base shortly before Oswald. Hemming claims that he was himself recruited by Naval Intelligence at the end of his own time in the Marines and that he met Oswald in January 1959 at the Cuban consulate on the outskirts of Los Angeles. The time fits the start of Oswald's stay at the Santa Ana base, near Los Angeles, which followed his unexpected and unexplained lone transfer home from Japan. The place of the alleged encounter, the Cuban consulate, fits with Oswald's interest in Cuba as expressed in talks with his barrack mate Delgado and specifically with Oswald's claim that he was in touch with Cuban officials. The year 1959 was a turning point in Cuba's relationship with the United States. Fidel Castro's revolution, a year earlier, had initially been welcomed by Washington as a change for the democratic better. It was only later, as the regime showed its true Marxist colors, that relations first soured and then turned to open hostility. Gerry Hemming was to become well known in the Sixties for his links with CIA-backed anti-Castro exiles; but in January 1959, as American policy hung in the balance, he was still working with Castro's people. This is how Hemming describes his encounter with Oswald: "He was attempting to get in with the representatives of Castro's new government, the consular officials in Los Angeles. And at that point in time I felt that he was a threat to me and to those Castro people, that he was an informant or some type of agent working for somebody. He was rather young, but I feel that he was too knowledgeable in certain things not to be an agent of law enforcement or of Military Intelligence, or Naval Intelligence." Hemming says he gained his im-

pression "because of the questions he was asking and by his obvious knowledge of my background. At a first meeting, not thirty minutes after we first met, he automatically not assumed but stated that I'm a radar operator and named the outfit he was attached to and details not every Marine would know—the crypto, the abbreviation of the outfit he was attached to. He obviously stated it knowing my background. Somebody had briefed him, somebody told him to approach me." Hemming explained that he believed Oswald's service at the Aitugi base made him a likely recruit for intelligence: "As a radar operator, living in a highly restricted area, he would have been fraternizing with CIA contract employees. Sooner or later he would fraternize with a case officer, one or more, that handled these contract employees. He would be a prime candidate for recruitment because of job skills, and expertise, and the fact that they could personally vouch for him and give him a security clearance."

Hemming offers only his personal opinion, based on a gut feeling at the time, that Oswald was involved with one of the intelligence services when he met him in 1959. Beyond the curricula and inconsistencies we have already identified, there is no way to pin down the nature of Oswald's role when he departed for Moscow. One former senior CIA officer, however, not only finds it plausible that Oswald worked for a branch of American intelligence but says it fits his own knowledge of efforts to infiltrate Russia at the relevant period.

Victor Marchetti resigned from the CIA in 1969, disillusioned with the Agency after fourteen years' service. As a staff officer in the Office of the Director, and an executive assistant to the Deputy Director, he is one of the few who speaks not only scathingly but with knowledge of how the Agency worked in the late Fifties and the Sixties. Marchetti has written a book, regarded as highly authoritative, which the CIA went to great lengths to prevent being published. The Agency's opposition did achieve the dubious success of making it the first book in American history to be censored before publication, and the publishers accordingly left the final text sprinkled with gaps where CIA scissors had been at work. The censorship is in itself ironic testimony to its author's

qualifications. Marchetti's explanation of the relationship between the CIA and the military intelligence agencies—such as the Office of Naval Intelligence—helps the outsider understand the infrastructure in which the Oswald case may be emmeshed. Marchetti writes: "Although the CIA has had since its creation exclusive responsibility for carrying out overseas espionage operations for the collection of national intelligence, the various military intelligence agencies and the intelligence units of American forces stationed abroad have retained the right to seek out tactical information for their own departmental requirements. . . . The military intelligence agencies have consistently sought to acquire information through their own secret agents." Marchetti's exposition may also explain how, if Oswald was some sort of agent, the CIA was able to deny accurately that he had anything to do with the Agency. He writes: "To avoid duplication and proliferation of agents, all of these espionage missions are supposed to be coordinated with the CIA. But the military often fail to do this because they know the CIA would not give its approval, or because an arrangement has been previously worked out to the effect that as long as the military stay out of CIA's areas of interest, they can operate on their own. . . . The tribalism that plagues the intelligence community is at its worst in the military intelligence agencies. . . ."

Marchetti wrote this several years ago, in a general context quite separate from the subject of Lee Harvey Oswald or his possible use as a "fake" defector. I contacted Marchetti in 1978 when I became aware that he had specialist knowledge of Soviet affairs. He was recruited into the CIA from university, where he had majored in Soviet studies and history, and at the time of Oswald's defection he held a post in the Agency team analyzing Soviet military activities. In this capacity he was aware officially and sometimes from private contacts, of Naval Intelligence operations. I asked Marchetti specifically about independent Naval Intelligence espionage operations against the Soviet Union, and his answer was startling. He said, "At the time, in 1959, the United States was having real difficulty in acquiring information out of the Soviet Union; the technical systems had, of course, not developed to the point that they are at today, and we were resorting to

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sorts of activities. One of these activities was an ONI [Office of Naval Intelligence] program which involved three dozen, maybe forty, young men who were made to appear disenchanted, poor, American youths who had become turned off and wanted to see what communism was all about. Some of these people lasted only a few weeks. They were sent into the Soviet Union, or into eastern Europe, with the specific intention the Soviets would pick them up and 'double' them if they suspected them of being U.S. agents, recruit them as KGB agents. They were trained at various naval installations both here and abroad, but the operation was being run out of Nag's Head, North Carolina."

No other former American intelligence officer of Marchetti's background has talked publicly about such a plan to put false defectors into Russia. It fits the Oswald case so well one might suspect Marchetti had dreamed up the project to fit the characteristics of the alleged assassin. On the other hand it could just be that Oswald was spotted as a candidate tailor-made for the ONI part. Marchetti, who also served for a while with CIA's clandestine Services department, finds that notion quite plausible. He drew my attention to an incident that followed Oswald's arrest, one he thinks bears out his suspicion and does remain unexplained.

On November 22, 1963, once Oswald was safely installed in a cell on the fifth floor of the Dallas City Hall, Police Chief Curry gave instructions that the prisoner should be allowed all the usual rights and privileges. According to routine Dallas police reports, Oswald asked to use the telephone on Saturday, the day after the assassination. The police record shows that he was allowed to do so at least twice, at about 4:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. Apparently he reached Ruth Paine, the woman who owned the house where Oswald's wife, Marina, was living, and talked to her about search for legal assistance. He also failed to complete another call. According to one of the switchboard operators, he also tried to make a call later that night. The operator, Mrs. Troon, remembers the incident because of the unusual circumstances. She says that her colleague, Mrs. Swinney, had been forewarned that enforcement officers—she thinks it may have been Secret

Servicemen—would be coming to listen in on an Oswald call. Sure enough two men arrived, showed identification, and were shown into a room next to the switchboard. At about 10:45 p.m. a red light blinked on the panel, showing that someone was placing a call from the jail telephone booth. Both telephone operators rushed to plug in, and in the event Mrs. Swinney handled the call, with Mrs. Troon listening in avidly. According to Mrs. Troon, a curious thing then occurred. Operator Swinney spoke to the two officers eavesdropping in the next room and told them Oswald was placing the expected call. As Mrs. Troon tells it: "I was dumfounded at what happened next. Mrs. Swinney opened the key to Oswald and told him, 'I'm sorry, the number doesn't answer.' She then unplugged and disconnected Oswald without ever really trying to put off her notation pad and threw it into the wastepaper basket." Mrs. Troon says she later retrieved the note referring to the Oswald call, and kept a copy as a souvenir. Recent research, including inquiries by Congress' Assassinations Committee, indicates that—assuming Mrs. Troon's record is accurate, Oswald intended to call a man named "Hurt" in Raleigh, North Carolina. The note lists two alternative numbers, which do relate to listed subscribers of that name. Both men, contacted today, deny all knowledge of the Oswald call. There has been concern, however, because one of the two—John D. Hurt—served in U.S. Military Intelligence during World War II. The Chief Counsel of Congress' Assassinations Committee, Professor Blakey, says, "It was an outgoing call, and therefore I consider it very troublesome material. The direction in which it went was deeply disturbing."

Former CIA officer Victor Marchetti observes that the Oswald call was directed at a number in the same general area as the North Carolina base where—says Marchetti—U.S. Naval Intelligence once planned infiltration missions into the Soviet Union. For all the mass of minute detail about Oswald's life, and although we have his address book, Oswald had no known contacts in North Carolina. Unless further research resolves the mystery, this Oswald call remains yet another loose end in the assassination story.

* Some theorize that the aborted call was incoming; not an attempt by Oswald to call out.

In the face of a serious claim that U.S. intelligence was engaged in a scheme to get agents into Russia, the record of American defections deserves scrutiny. State Department documents, coupled with fresh Assassinations Committee research, do indeed provide food for thought. It is reported that, in all the fourteen years between 1945 and 1959, only two American enlisted men defected to the Soviet Union or Eastern Europe. In the eighteen months up to 1960, however, a good number of the known defectors either went over direct from the military or had sensitive backgrounds. In a sudden rash of turncoats, no less than five were Army men stationed in West Germany,* and two were former Naval men and employees of the National Security Agency—the top-secret department charged with breaking foreign codes and ciphers. Of the civilians who went to the Soviet Union, one was a former official of the Office of Strategic Services (the forerunner of the CIA), another was a former Air Force major, and a third a former Navy enlisted man currently working for the Rand Development Corporation. Then of course there was Lee Oswald, fresh out of the Marines. It is not known for sure what eventually became of all these individuals. Two are believed to have died in the Soviet Union, and the CIA regards the two National Security Agency cases as "too sensitive" to impart to Congress' Assassinations Committee. It may be significant that of the remaining seven, four are known to have returned to the United States after a few years.

An assessment of the claim that U.S. intelligence was sending out false defectors must take account of the sudden increase in the number of Americans with Government or Defense Department backgrounds who went to Russia just before or after Oswald. There has been insufficient investigation into the cases of the five Army men who chose to cross the border. For the outsider, research in this area is extremely difficult—not least because genuine defectors who return home, let alone possible spies, have understandably stayed out of the public eye. It might be especially useful, however, to locate the Rand Development Corporation employee who went over in 1959.

The Rand employee was Robert Webster, a young plastics expert who failed to join colleagues returning to the United States after working at an American exhibition in Moscow. He had been,

Note 43: There remains, too, the question of why Oswald went through the charade of his "defection" visit to the Embassy, if it was a charade, if Oswald really was part of a U.S. intelligence operation and if Snyder was himself CIA. Two main factors might explain this. First, it is common practice to run an intelligence operation as tightly as possible. To all except his immediate superiors, therefore, Oswald may indeed have seemed a genuine defector. Second, and perhaps more important, may have been the need to convince the Soviets. Edward Epstein reports (*Legend*, p. 301) that Soviet intelligence had 134 electronic listening devices in the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. The consulate section, which Oswald visited, employed Soviet nationals, and it was assumed that they reported back to the KGB. If it was necessary to convince the Soviets that Oswald was a real defector, the visit to the Embassy may have been most effective.

141 Navy reaction: VIII.298, testimony of Lieutenant Donovan.

Note 44: The Assassinations Committee did receive information which suggested that the Marine Corps had taken a hitherto unknown interest in Oswald after the President's death. The Committee was informed by former Marine navigator Larry Huff that—in December 1963 and early 1964—he had taken part in transport operations involving a team of military CID investigators. Huff, who still has personal logs for the period, said the group of about a dozen investigators were flown to Japan, on their way to the Atsugi base where Oswald had once served. Huff said he learned from his passengers that their purpose was to investigate Oswald's activities at Atsugi. When he later picked up the group to take them back to base, they told him something of their investigation and let him take a look at their report. It was, according to Huff, marked "Secret—For Marine Corps Eyes Only." He said the report contained a psychological evaluation of Oswald and concluded that the alleged killer "was incapable of committing the assassination alone." As he held a "Secret" clearance, it was not extraordinary that he had been allowed to scan the report—said Huff. Huff also believed, on the basis of hearsay, that a similar military team had been dispatched to Dallas. The Committee conducted extensive inquiry into these allegations but could find no trace of the supposed report. Late in its research, however—when there was no time left for further inquiry—the Committee obtained confirmation from another crew member that the flights to and from Japan did indeed take place. The Committee left the matter somewhat in the air, and—

now that it is established the flights did take place—a future inquiry should clearly try to establish exactly who the passengers were (HSCA XI.541).

"damage assessment" and defections: *Legend* by Epstein, pp. 102, 366.

Discharge: XIX.665; XVII.663.

Note 45: Gerry Hemming's reliability as a source has on occasion been called into question. I met him in person, saw his service credentials, and spoke to him at length on the meeting he claims to have had with Oswald in Los Angeles. I have included his story because it seems credible in terms of time and place and Hemming's service credentials. (For a further indication of the relevance of Hemming, see Odio episode in Chapter 20, "Double Image in Dallas.")

142 Cuban consulate and Delgado: see Chapter 8, "Red Faces."

143 Marchetti book: see bibliography.

145 Curry instructions: Curry, *op. cit.*, p. 75, and author's interview of Curry, 1977.

Police record: affidavit of Lieutenant Thumber Lord, August 20, 1964 (published in Curry, *op. cit.*, p. 74); see also: XXIV.505. Call to Mrs. Paine: III.85, testimony of Ruth Paine.

Troon/Swinney episode: statement by Troon to Bernard Fensterwald, Committee to Investigate Assassinations. Raleigh Spectator, 17 & 24 July 1980; *Raleigh News & Observer*, July 17, 1980.

Defectors: HSCA XII.437-; and correspondence between Hugh Cumming, Director of Intelligence at State Department, and Richard Bissell (CIA Deputy Director for Plans), October-November 1960, and attachments.

Note 46: The five Army men were a Sergeant Jones, Sergeant Ernie Fletcher, Bruce F. Davis, Sergeant Joseph Dukantz, and Specialist 5th Class Vladimir Sloboda. The two National Security Agency employees were William H. Martin and B. Ferguson Mitchell. The former OSS official was Maurice Halperin, the former Air Force major, Libero Ricciardelli; and the Rand Development Corporation employee Robert E. Webster.

147 Webster information: see above sources.

Rand: Canfield/Webster, *op. cit.*, p. 24; author's consultation with Professor Peter Dale Scott and the latter's unpublished ms. "The Dallas Conspiracy," II.11.

148 Marina on Oswald defection: CD 5.259 (conversation reported by Dallas friend Katya Ford).
Oswald inquiry about Webster: McMillan, *op. cit.*, p. 107.