

Spy Saga:
Lee Harvey Oswald and U.S. Intelligence

by
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In 1978 former CIA Director Richard Helms exited from his executive-session testimony before the House Select Committee on Assassinations. He paused to talk with the press. Washington Post reporter George Lardner, Jr. described the encounter in his paper's August 10 edition:

Helms told reporters during a break that no one would ever know who or what Lee Harvey Oswald, named by the Warren Commission as Kennedy's assassin, represented. Asked whether the CIA knew of any ties Oswald had with either the KGB or the CIA, Helms paused and with a laugh said, "I don't remember." Pressed on the point, he told a reporter, "Your questions are almost as dumb as the Committee's."

To Dorothy Edwards Hart

CONTENTS

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Photographs | 5 |
| Acknowledgements | 6 |
| Introduction | 10 |
| 1. Agent Oswald | 19 |
| 2. The Pinko Marine | 29 |
| 3. Oswald in New Orleans: Marxist or Mole | 65 |
| 4. The Mohair Marauder | 80 |
| 5. Smearing the Left Kremlin Red | 104 |
| 6. Dallas: The Long Arm of Langley | 137 |
| 7. Mexican Mystery Tour | 167 |
| 8. Legend I: Incidents | 189 |
| 9. Legend II: Evidence and Artifacts | 206 |
| 10. Cover-Ups | 224 |
| 11. Beyond Disinformation | 240 |
| Appendix A: Chronology of Lee Harvey Oswald | 252 |
| Appendix B: Excerpts, Testimony of Former CIA Director Richard Helms before the House Select Committee on Assassinations | 254 |
| Notes | 269 |
| Selected Bibliography | 316 |
| Index | 323 |

Photographs

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 1. Lee Harvey Oswald, U.S.S.R., Circa 1960 | 163 |
| 2. Lee Harvey Oswald Under Arrest in Dallas, Nov. 23, 1963 | 164 |
| 3. David Ferrie | 165 |
| 4. Guy Banister | 165 |
| 5. George de Mohrenschildt | 165 |
| 6. Snapshot of "Oswald" with Rifle, 1963 | 166 |

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century but, rather, a window onto the conspiracy behind
President John F. Kennedy's assassination.

Chapter 1

Agent Oswald: Setting The Framework

...suspicions that Oswald served as an intelligence operative--and, in any such case, there is great disagreement over whom he might have been working for--arise from examinations of his activities by observers dedicated to the study ^{of} ~~of~~ the world of spies.

--Henry Hurt, Reasonable Doubt

To the Warren Commission, Lee Harvey Oswald was simply a disgruntled Marxist. The political highlights of his life that were used by the Commission to sketch a tableau of leftism included: ~~his~~ ^{his} defection to the Soviet Union, his founding of a New Orleans chapter of the pro-Castro Fair Play For Cuba Committee (FPCC) and ~~before~~ his public demonstrations on its behalf, his attempt to return to Russia (via Cuba) the month before the assassination. Still, these major events were surrounded by intrigues, mysteries, and anomalies sufficient to force the Commission to worry about "the dirty rumor" that Oswald was connected to U.S. intelligence. In the final analysis the Commission officially concluded that Oswald was not anyone's agent. In 1978 the House Select Committee on Assassinations

(HSCA)* concluded that he was not a CIA agent:

The results of this investigation confirmed the Warren Commission testimony of [CIA Directors] McCone and Helms. There was no indication in Oswald's CIA file that he had ever had contact with the Agency. Finally, taken in their entirety, the items of circumstantial evidence that the Committee had selected for investigation as possibly indicative of an intelligence association did not support the allegation that Oswald had an intelligence agency relationship.²

Setting aside the quaint notion that if Oswald was linked to the Agency, proof would reside in the CIA files revealed to the Committee, there is extensive circumstantial evidence that Oswald was in fact an agent. The Committee examined only some of it, sometimes superficially. Before presenting this evidence, it is useful to examine some general propositions for interpreting Oswald's case history.

To conclude, as the Commission and the House Committee did, that Oswald was not an intelligence agent of any kind is to believe that his life was structured by endless coincidences and heavy doses of good and bad luck, that the pattern of mysteries and anomalies that dominated his adult existence were random and innocent. It is to believe that the incongruity between his actions and his alleged beliefs, and between his public and private behavior, had no significance beyond manifesting his alleged mental instability. It forces the conclusion that his

* Also commonly referred to as the House Assassinations Committee.

frequent and unusual interactions with government agencies lacked any overarching significance. In sum, the circumstantial evidence is so rich that to explain it away as coincidence or happenstance strains credulity. There are simply too many shadows of the unseen hand cast on Oswald's short but eventful life.

Whose agent was Oswald^{ours}--or theirs? To hold that he was recruited as a Russian spy, one must posit that virtually all of the agencies of U.S. intelligence and law enforcement were so completely ineffective when it came to Oswald that they must be imagined to be not just incompetent but comatose. Any government, any agency can be fooled. Spies do penetrate the other side, sometimes at the highest levels. But the opportunities of the U.S. government to discover Oswald-the-Soviet-spy were so numerous, and his interaction with U.S. agencies so extensive, that it requires too elastic a notion of American bad luck (and Russian good luck) to imagine that the Soviets slipped him past U.S. intelligence. As will be demonstrated, the notion that Oswald was a Russian spy requires the suspension of belief concerning a great deal of very good evidence.

A CIA memo written one month after the assassination makes a key point: "Longstanding KGB practice generally forbids agents serving outside the U.S.S.R. to have any contact with domestic communist parties or with Soviet embassies or consulates [deletion]. Yet Oswald blazed a trail to the Soviets which was a mile wide."³

Another theory, offered by British author Michael Eddowes, is that the Soviets pulled a switch while Oswald was in Russia, substituting a KGB agent who proceeded to assassinate the President on Moscow's orders. It is not the Bondian flavor to Eddowes' scenario that one balks at, for this is one arena in which truth is indeed stranger than fiction. Eddowes' contention rests primarily on alleged discrepancies in Oswald's height and appearance.⁴ For example, official records describe the Oswald who returned from Russia as shorter than the Oswald who enlisted in the Marines years before defecting to Russia. One difficulty with the scenario is that it assumes Oswald's mother and brother were fooled by an impostor, which seems extremely dubious. In 1981, under a court order obtained by Eddowes and Oswald's widow Marina, the badly decomposed body was exhumed and positively identified as the real Oswald.

The other foreign-agent theory ties Oswald to Cuban intelligence. Beyond some rather flimsy assertions that he had contact with Castro's spies (assertions emanating from the CIA itself or from anti-Castro sympathizers), there is no convincing circumstantial evidence. As this analysis will show, one flaw in this scenario is the assumption that Oswald's pro-Castro involvements were real rather than a charade. It would be feckless for Cuban intelligence to employ an assassin so publicly identified with Castro's cause. Moreover, as will later be described, someone was controlling Oswald's movements in a manner that made him appear increasingly pro-Castro and pro-communist in the months preceding the assassination. Someone was also fabricating embellishments on a leftist image for Oswald--hardly

Introduction

"Everybody will know who I am."

--Lee Harvey Oswald, Nov. 22, 1963¹

The above comment was generally interpreted as a smug self-certification of Oswald's own infamy, his assured place in history as the President's assassin. As years passed, skepticism concerning the Warren Commission's findings about Oswald's background and his role in the assassination reached majoritarian levels. Researchers hypothesized a different meaning: namely, that Oswald was a complex young man playing roles and affecting political postures, and that these were about to be stripped away by the legal process as he sought to defend himself against charges of murder. Oswald was silenced by Jack Ruby before he could participate in the process, before he could tell us who he really was. That task has been left to others, who must follow the rich and mysterious trail of events and artifacts he left behind.

As we approach the third decade since Oswald's death, nothing approximating historical clarity has been achieved. The question "Who was Lee Harvey Oswald?" remains unanswered. He has been portrayed by official investigators, journalists or researchers as each of the following: a disgruntled loner and muddled leftist, a Russian spy, an agent of Castro's intelligence

service, a low-level Mafia pawn, a U.S. intelligence agent. These images have been dismissed by some as the product of conspiracy mentalities or of the psychological need to portray the President's assassin as complex and larger than life. This need, it is argued, results from an unwillingness to believe that a lone nut with a cheap rifle can so profoundly alter our political history. He must be someone special, the embodiment of dark, powerful forces. The mystique of Camelot and lure of conspiracy-think have undeniably combined to distort various facets of this case. But the fact is that Oswald actually lends himself to all of these divergent portraits, although to some much better than others. He is by far the most fascinating and complex assassin (alleged or actual) in American history. Despite three official investigations and hundreds of file drawers full of documents, despite the work of hundreds of journalists and researchers, there is no agreement about who this man was.

This analysis seeks to provide the answer to this question by presenting the best evidence in systematic, detailed form. That Lee Harvey Oswald was some sort of U.S. intelligence agent has always been one of the options. The author will place the available data about Oswald's activities and associations--some of the data old, some new--within the context of the perspectives, programs and people that were operative in the U.S. intelligence community (primarily the CIA) in Oswald's era. In so doing, this book hopes to elevate what was formerly one option to the status of the correct answer: Lee Harvey Oswald spent nearly all of his adult life working for U.S. intelligence--most

likely for the CIA--as an agent-provocateur. He did so in both the domestic and international arenas, right up to his involvement in the assassination.

As Warren Commission member Alan Dulles told his commission colleagues, it is difficult to prove a negative: proving that Oswald was not a CIA operative would be nearly impossible, Dulles warned. Similarly, the other options for Oswald (Mafia soldier, communist spy, crazed loner) cannot be disproved here. However, presenting the evidence that he was a U.S. intelligence agent goes a long way toward establishing what he was not, through mutual exclusivity.

What follows is a dossier on Oswald-the-spy. The reader is invited to review it as would an FBI counterintelligence officer--is he a spy? for whom? how consistent and cross-corroborative is the data? Too often Oswald is misperceived as an infamous assassin whose name and face are so familiar that we know everything about him.

This is not primarily a psychological profile, except implicitly as we describe his patterns of behavior and reactions to crucial situations. This study eschews many of the controversies which the author credits as valid and important: did Oswald kill the President? what was his precise role? The failure to understand who he really was has severely inhibited all official attempts to resolve the issues attending this crime. We will take a micro look at Oswald through the lens of tradecraft, of espionage. Hopefully, the clarity provided by this view will help bring into focus the unresolved questions and

controversies that still plague the assassination of our thirty-fifth President after nearly thirty years.

Oswald is the most complicated individual ever to be charged in a major political assassination case in the United States. Valid questions have been raised about Sirhan Sirhan's motive and his mental state, about James Earl Ray's officially ascribed modus operandi. But their lives are relatively simple and explicable, even uneventful compared to Oswald's. We basically know who they are in terms of the major dimensions of their lives. while this in no way precludes unanswered questions, mysteries or even conspiracies, it presents a more solid baseline from which to seek valid conclusions.

Oswald is enigmatic partly because he spent so much of his life in the shadowy, compartmentalized world of U.S. intelligence where deception is more the norm than ^{the} exception, where valid data is difficult to unearth. As we shall see, he maintained a facade of leftism created by his politically-charged letters and solo public performances. In contrast, his associations and contacts were decidedly right-wing and anti-communist. Moreover, as we shall see, false information was purposely created about Oswald, blurring even further the truth about his political identity and activities.

In spite of all this confusion there is still a dominant image of Oswald. It is the one put forth by the Warren Commission in 1963 and shared by the House of Representatives Select Committee on Assassinations in 1978, the one so pervasive among mainstream historians and journalists. Lee Harvey Oswald: hot headed, violence prone, a confused leftist who could not find

his political niche, a "loner", a man who couldn't hold a job, frustrated and "unstable." As the Warren Commission described him, a man who,

was perpetually discontent with the world around him. Long before the assassination he expressed a hatred for American society and acted in protest against it. Oswald searched for what he conceived to be the perfect society and was doomed from the start. He sought for himself a place in history--a role as the "great man" who would be recognized as having been in advance of his times. His commitment to Marxism and communism appears to have been another important factor in his motivation.²

This public perception was shaped more by the media than the Commission's report, but the image was consistent. The February 21, 1964 issue of Life magazine had Oswald on the cover, the infamous photo of him dressed in black, holding a rifle and leftist literature, wearing a pistol strapped to his waist. An editorial proudly touts the massive investigative effort that produced "our study of Lee Harvey Oswald." The huge spread (twelve pages of pictures and text) traces his life from early childhood to the assassination. It is titled "The Evolution of an Assassin, A Clinical Study of Lee Harvey Oswald." There are quotes from teachers, family members, Marine Corps associates, neighbors. There is not one hint of intrigue or mystery. There is no mention of the shadowy characters who will soon be portrayed here (David Ferrie, George de Mohrenschildt), characters central to the Oswald enigma. But for Life and its

readers there was no enigma, only the depressing banality of a psychological misfit, an awkward, struggling "loner" who could never find himself:

--"He never came to squadron parties," said a Marine.

--A truant officer claimed that Oswald told him that "most of all he liked to be by himself and do things by himself."

--A neighbor said he shouted at his wife, "I am the commander!"

--"He looked like he was just lost" said a teacher.

Life's Oswald was summed up vividly by a psychiatrist who had once examined him when he was thirteen. Said Dr. Renatus Hartogs:

Psychologically, he had all the qualifications of being a potential assassin. Such a criminal is usually a person with paranoid ideas of grandiosity who can get satisfactory self-vindication only by shocking the entire world. He had to show the world he was not unknown, that he was someone with whom the world had to reckon.³

You are about to meet a very different young man: a poised, rather resourceful political manipulator who surely lived one of the most eventful, intrigue-filled lives imaginable--albeit very short. His life was spent within the shadow of, if not the networks of, U.S. intelligence. Whatever ethical judgement one might render about his activities, he was, it would seem, good at what he did--successfully posing as a defector and spying in the Soviet Union, functioning as a low-to-middle-level agent-

provocateur in the U.S.

From the time he was an eighteen-year-old Marine until his murder at age twenty-four, he lived a secret life. We will follow it from the Marines to Moscow to New Orleans to Mexico City to the Texas School Book Depository in Dallas. He might have become an infamous character apart from President Kennedy's assassination. He could easily have been portrayed as the traitor who gave the Soviets the information needed to shoot down our U-2 spy plane, an incident that created a diplomatic crisis and caused a loss of military-intelligence secrets which was unparalleled in the previous decade. Oswald had access to the U-2 while in the Marines, had defected to the Soviet Union offering to reveal military secrets and was still in the U.S.S.R. when the spy plane was shot down ⁱⁿ ~~on~~ May 1960. As we shall see, the fact that he was not cast as a notorious traitor is one of the key factors to unravelling the Oswald ~~murder~~ *mystery*.

Ironically, though none of the agencies involved would admit it, young Oswald probably had one of the longest government paper trails of any person his age in the entire nation (in terms of the number and volume of files). The destruction or suppression of some of this material, especially CIA and military intelligence files, contributes substantially to the historical confusion. This data would be dwarfed by the mountain of post-assassination paper. Still, not many twenty-four-year-old Americans could claim to have been a subject of interest to the U.S. State Department, the CIA, the FBI, military intelligence, the passport office, the KGB, the MVD (the Soviet equivalent of our FBI) and unofficial dossiers kept by a variety of anti-Castro

groups and interests in the U.S.

This analysis will reach a conclusion about a conspiracy in John F. Kennedy's assassination, although it does not seek to establish Oswald's innocence or the existence of a second gun. Instead, it will demonstrate that Oswald's movements were still being choreographed by his handlers in U.S. intelligence--however on the fringe or renegade they may have been--at the time of the assassination. Whatever his role in the crime, persons who knew his background were fabricating not only his image as a hot-headed communist but also evidence of his guilt in the assassination. Such activity--if clearly and purposefully connected to the impending crime, as some of it definitely was--constitutes conspiracy. The legal definition is: knowingly attempting to further the success of a crime at any phase of its commission.

In any assassination investigation, authorities check on the background and associations of the accused. They attempt to discover if he or she was part of any group or interest that might be behind the crime, either directly (by providing assistance) or more indirectly (by encouraging or manipulating the alleged assassin). If so, authorities have found a conspiracy. For example, the FBI investigated Sirhan Sirhan to see if he was part of, or backed by, any Middle Eastern organization or terrorist group, since he was Palestinian in origin and Robert F. Kennedy strongly supported Israel. No such connection was found. In Oswald's case, concluding that he was a U.S. intelligence agent is not a footnote to the crime of the

a smart move for Castro's agents. The notion that Oswald was linked to Cuban intelligence but did the assassination on his own still requires that he be a genuine pro-Castroite (when, in fact, he was just the opposite).

The assertion that Oswald was ours and not theirs only partially answers the question "whose agent was he?" FBI? CIA? National Security Agency? Defense Intelligence Agency? Army or Navy intelligence? Robert Sam Anson is correct when he cautions that, "Oswald's having been an agent does not necessarily mean he was a CIA man. Part of the common misunderstanding of the nature of intelligence derives from the assumption that all spies work for the CIA."⁵ Not only do other U.S. intelligence organizations have their own spies, but the CIA by no means had exclusive rights of turf to the various intelligence contexts in which Oswald appeared. Military intelligence had been involved in the arena of Soviet espionage; the FBI and military intelligence were very active in Cuban-exile politics and espionage within the U.S.

What can be said is that Oswald's linkages to CIA-related persons, projects and contexts appears far stronger than to any other U.S. intelligence agency, although the FBI and military intelligence run a distant second and third. Oswald's two spookiest known associates, George de Mohrenschildt and David Ferrie, seemed more firmly linked to the CIA than to any other intelligence organization.

Another frequently encountered misconception is that U.S. intelligence agencies are monolithic, either as an entire community or as individual organizations. In fact, secrecy and

turf rivalry significantly compartmentalize them from each other and within themselves. It is thus possible that one CIA office in Langley, Virginia was earnestly studying Oswald to see if he was a Russian spy (as in the previously mentioned CIA memo), while someone in another section was running him as a U.S. agent.

As former CIA Director ^{Ken}Alan Dulles indicated to his colleagues on the Warren Commission, proving or disproving that Oswald worked for the Agency would be very difficult given the nature of the organization.⁶

ALLEN DULLES: There is a terribly hard thing to disprove, you know. How do you disprove a fellow was not your agent: How do you disprove it?

CONG. HALE BOGGS (Dem. La): You could disprove it, couldn't you?

DULLES: No ...

BOGGS: ...Did you have agents about whom you had no record whatsoever?

DULLES: The record might not be on paper. But on paper would have hieroglyphics that only two people knew what they meant, and nobody outside of the agency would know and you could say this meant the agent and somebody else could say this meant another agent...

BOGGS: ...Let's say [U-2 pilot Francis Gary] Powers did not have a signed contract, but he was recruited by someone in CIA. The man who recruited him would know, wouldn't he?

DULLES: Yes, but he wouldn't tell.

CHIEF JUSTICE EARL WARREN: Wouldn't tell it under oath?

DULLES: I wouldn't think he would tell it under oath, no..

WARREN: Why?

DULLES: He ought not tell it under oath. Maybe not tell it to his own government, but wouldn't tell it any other way.

COMMISSIONER JOHN MCCOY: Wouldn't he tell it to his own chief?

DULLES: He might or might not. If he was a bad one, then he wouldn't.

Direct proof that Oswald worked for the CIA is probably impossible to come by without Agency cooperation. The evidence will be circumstantial. But this does not mean that a valid conclusion cannot be reached. In counterintelligence work, U.S. agencies must constantly reach decisions about which employees might be spying for a foreign government, which defectors are real and which are planted spies. Since the KGB and other adversary organizations will not provide accurate data, conclusions must be reached by assessing the weight, consistency, and validity of accumulated circumstantial evidence. Was the case in question treated unusually or suspiciously by a foreign government? Who were the suspect's associates? Did the suspect do or know something that tends to indicate that their story is a fabrication? Is there a discernible pattern to their actions and linkages, a pattern whose individual components may seem benign but whose cumulative image is clearly one of espionage. The same paradigm through which the CIA seeks out moles in its headquarters, double agents in its field offices and foreign spies who have pretended to defect is what we will apply to Oswald to determine if he worked for U.S. intelligence (and, more specifically, the CIA).

It should also be noted that not all CIA agents operate at the level of, or in the sophisticated style of, James Bond. As former deep-cover agent Philip Agee reminds us:⁷

There are many different types of agents in CIA parlance. Many operations are structured under the leadership of a single agent to whom other agents respond either as a group working together or in separate, compartmented activities. The single agent who runs the operation under station direction is known as the principal agent and the others as secondary or sub-agents... An action agent is a person who actually provides secret information, e.g. a spy in a communist party, whereas a support agent performs tasks related to an operation but is not the source of intelligence....

There are agents who work for an organization on a full time basis throughout their entire careers. There are contract agents who are hired to perform assigned tasks for variable duration, from weeks to decades--fly secret missions, produce phony documents, perform assassinations.

Nor are such men all cut from the same mold. Some could pass as mild-mannered accountants or college professors while others manifest the bravado of clandestine cowboys or an ideological zealotness bordering on derangement. Former Warren Commission Counsel David Belin said of Oswald, "There is nothing in CIA files to give even the slightest hint that he was a CIA agent. Moreover, it is relatively obvious that a man of Oswald's background and emotions is not the kind of person the CIA would

entrust with anything."⁸

Belin neglects the fact that the U.S. intelligence community has been populated by some of the most emotionally volatile characters imaginable, persons who at times are so unstable that even their handlers are at a loss to control them. In a subsequent chapter we will meet Oswald's associate David Ferrie, who was unstable by almost any conventional measure. Still, he found work as a pilot and as a soldier in the CIA's war against Castro. Released CIA documents indicate that two CIA contract killers hired in the early 1960s were flamboyant types who got involved in narcotics, freelance assassination, and serious trouble with the law while in Agency employ. One of the hired guns was described in a Senate hearing as an "unguided missile." It is only in the world of fiction that intelligence-employed assassins are ice-cool, unflappable professionals like Frederick Forsythe's the Jackal.

In a Warren Commission executive session, Commissioners briefly discussed this very point, behind closed doors.⁹

MCCLOY: Well, I can't say that I have run into a fellow comparable to Oswald, but I have run into some very limited mentalities in the CIA and FBI.

WARREN: Under agents, the regular agents, I think that would be all right, but they and all the other agencies do employ undercover men who are of terrible character.

DULLES: Terribly bad characters.

SEN. RICHARD B. RUSSELL (Dem. Ga.): Limited intelligence, even the city police departments do it.

WARREN: It almost takes that kind of man to do a lot of this intelligence work.

Oswald's odyssey in the grip of U.S. intelligence would take him to Russia and back, then to New Orleans, Dallas and historical infamy. But it began while he was a nineteen-year-old Marine.

Chapter 2

The Pinko Marine

It was almost as if he [Oswald] was trying to bait the consul into taking adverse action against him. He mentioned that he knew certain classified things in connection with having been, I think, a radar operator in the Marine Corps and that he was going to turn this information over to the Soviet authorities. And, of course, we didn't know how much he knew or anything like that...

--U.S. Embassy official John McVickar¹

In October of 1956, seventeen-year-old Lee Harvey Oswald joined the Marine Corps. By 1957 he had been trained in radar techniques and air traffic control. He finished seventh in his class and was certified as an aviation electronics operator. According to the official Marine Corps records, he was given a confidential clearance.² That same year he was assigned to the MACS-1 Marine Air Control Squadron at Atsugi Air Force Base, Japan.

Atsugi was no ordinary base. In clandestine parlance, black means secret. Atsugi was one of the blackest bases anywhere in the world. Among other things, it was the home of what the

Soviets called "the black lady of espionage"--the U-2 spy plane.³ The aircraft's primary mission was to gather photograph intelligence over the Soviet Union and China. The plane's high-flying cameras ferreted out missile sites, airfields, aircraft, missile-testing and training activities, special weapons storage, submarine ~~production~~ ^{construction}, even atomic production.⁴ The U-2 accounted for no less than ninety percent of America's hard data on Soviet military and defense activities. It is easy to understand why the black lady was the KGB's highest-priority target. The problem for the Soviets was that it flew so high (80,000 to 90,000 feet) that nothing could find it much less shoot it down, or so it was assumed by the United States.

Inside the radar "bubble" at Atsugi (the control room where friendly and unfriendly aircraft were monitored as they flew through a vast chunk of Pacific air space) the U-2 was easily identified. The world altitude record was then 65,889 feet; the U-2 pilots would ask the bubble such things as, "Request winds aloft at 90,000 angels" (90,000 feet). According to some of the Marines who worked in the bubble, one of their colleagues showed an extraordinary interest in the flight paths of the conspicuously high-flying blip.⁵ His name was Lee Harvey Oswald. He worked inside the bubble directing air traffic and scouting for incoming aircraft.⁶

Even the lowliest Marine stationed at Atsugi knew that the Utility Plane (U-2) was something special. The hangar that housed it was ringed with machine-gun-toting guards. Oswald's squadron kept its gear in this hangar.⁷ All data on the plane, including its altitude, was ultrasecret. According to official

Marine records, Oswald's clearance was only "confidential." According to one of the Marines who worked in the bubble and who testified before the Warren Commission, minimum clearance for the men in the bubble was "secret."⁸

Outside the bubble, Oswald saw the U-2's being taxied out of their hangars for take-off. So interested was he that he discussed the plane with the officer in charge of his unit.⁹ He was also seen strolling around the base taking pictures.¹⁰ Whether Oswald violated regulations and photographed the U-2 is not known, but he did take pictures of other aircraft and military bases while in the service.¹¹

Top secrecy concerning the aircraft was essential because any technical information could potentially help the frustrated Soviets in their frenzied attempts to catch the black lady. Any data on altitude and flight patterns, which the men in the bubble had witnessed firsthand, would certainly have been of help to the Soviets, who presumably could not even track the U-2. Whatever Oswald's security clearance, his presence in the bubble assured that he would possess information useful to the Soviets.

Atsugi had another claim to black fame: it was one of the largest CIA bases in the world.¹² Two dozen buildings, euphemistically called the Joint Technical Advisory Group, comprised the nerve center of the CIA's pervasive covert operations in Asia.¹³ It was from Atsugi that the CIA flew Chinese Nationalist agents to be parachuted into Communist China.¹⁴

It was only fitting that the black lady lived here, since

she belonged not to the Air Force but to the CIA. The plane was developed by Richard M. Bissell, Allen Dulles' deputy. Bissell worked in concert with experts from the Air Force and Lockheed Aircraft, which built the planes.¹⁵ He was an urbane, six-foot-four former professor of economics, but he was no ivory-tower type. He was a key member of the Agency's clandestine elite and directed some of its most secret operations.¹⁶ Bissell's clandestine career, like Oswald's, was to span both of the CIA's then most important arenas--the U-2/Soviet sphere and Cuba. Bissell was in charge of planning the ill-fated Bay of Pigs Invasion in which the Agency attempted to use an army of Cuban exiles to overthrow Castro.¹⁷

The U-2 was the Agency's most prized toy. From the time it became operational in 1956 until the time it was shot down in 1960, it was considered to be the most spectacular technical achievement in the history of U.S. intelligence. Its capabilities and its success were without peer.¹⁸ Twenty-two of the planes were built. They represented dramatic advances in aircraft technology and design as well as in photographic technology.¹⁹ When the Soviets finally shot down pilot Frances Gary Powers' U-2, they did more than stop surveillance: they came into possession of wreckage that provided clues to spectacular U.S. advances in several realms of technology.

Powers was shot down in May 1960, while Oswald was in Russia. His plane was equipped with self-destructive charges which supposedly would be activated after the pilot had ejected during trouble. It is possible that Powers, knowing the mentality of his employers, suspected that the explosive charges

might be designed to terminate the pilot as well as the plane, in case he were to become squeamish about following the order to poison himself ^{to death} before being captured.²⁰ Whatever the cause, both Powers and his aircraft fell into Soviet hands.

Oswald's Asian activities, like Atsugi itself, are ^hshrouded in mystery. In September 1958 his Marine unit was transferred from Atsugi to Taiwan. The Department of Defense told the House Assassinations Committee that its data indicates that Oswald stayed behind at Atsugi when his unit moved out.²¹ Yet one of Oswald's officers, Lieutenant Charles ^R Rhodes, remembered that Oswald was in Taiwan but was abruptly flown back to Atsugi by military aircraft. Rhodes was told that Oswald was going back for "medical treatment." Marine Corps files indicate that Oswald had a very mild venereal disease.²² The question arises as to why a mild disease which is not known to preclude a regular work routine would cause Oswald to be flown across the China Sea back to Japan. One possibility is that the disease was a cover to allow Oswald to leave his military duties to pursue some other assignment for a while. In actuality, the sickness ploy is a frequently used intelligence cover for getting military personnel out of circulation to receive special training.²³

When Oswald's tour of duty in Asia was finished, he returned stateside. In late 1958 he was assigned to El Toro Air Station in California. Again official records indicate that he had only "confidential" clearance.²⁴ The commander of Oswald's El Toro unit told the Warren Commission that he "must have had 'secret' clearance to work in the radar center, because that was the

minimum requirement for all of us."²⁵ A Marine who served with Oswald testified that, "we all had access to classified information," which the Marine believed to be classified as "secret."²⁶ Marine Kerry Thornley said of Oswald's El Toro rating, "I believe that he at one time worked at the security files...probably a 'secret' clearance would be required."²⁷ The Marine Corps's then Director of Personnel wrote to the Warren Commission that Oswald may have had a secret clearance while performing certain duties.²⁸

His access to sensitive--most likely, secret--information while at El Toro is important because of his strange behavior there. His duties were never changed nor was his access restricted even though ~~he became~~ a conspicuous leftist--a Russophile.²⁹ The young Marine studied the Russian language, an endeavor he had begun while in Asia. He played Russian records so loudly that they could be heard throughout his barracks; he read Russian books, hour after hour; he subscribed to a Russian-language periodical. He openly discussed Soviet politics. Oswald blathered Russian at his fellow Marines, who could not begin to understand him.

It was all extremely conspicuous. His Marine peers humorously dubbed him "Oswaldskovich." In return, he addressed them as "comrade."³⁰ It was not all language and literature: there was a decidedly pro-Soviet flavor to Oswald's Russian interests. He touted Soviet communism as "the best system in the world."³¹

This was 1958. Cold-war tensions were high. The House Un-American Activities Committee was active; blacklisting was

declining but still in evidence. It had been only four years since Senator Joseph McCarthy's witch hunts for alleged communists in the government exploited the national paranoia about subversion. It was an era of extreme tension and distrust between the United States and the Soviet Union. This young Marine, who had access to a wealth of radar information relevant to U.S. forces in the Pacific and who had served at one of his nation's most sensitive foreign bases, could have been in deep trouble. The Marine Corps is not renowned as a bastion of liberal tolerance and free thinking, but it reacted in Oswald's case as if it were. There was no reaction at all to Oswald's pinko inclinations--at least, not in any records or in the recollections of military personnel involved.

If Oswald was a foreign spy at this point in his life, he certainly had a novel approach to building a cover--flaunting his communist tendencies in the midst of America's most conservative military subculture. If so, the tactic worked: the Marines ignored him. Mail-room personnel dutifully reported the leftist nature of Oswald's mail.³² Nothing came of it. One officer who attempted to discuss Oswald's Russophile behavior with him remembers the young man replied that he was "trying to indoctrinate himself in Russian theory in conformance with Marine Corps policy."³³ Evidently this putative policy superseded any worries the Corps might have had concerning some of its other policies, such as loyalty and the protection of secrets (unless someone in authority knew that there was nothing to fear from Oswaldskovich).

Oswald made a crash effort to master Russian language as well as theory. In February 1959 he failed a Marine Corps proficiency test in Russian. Six months later he had made remarkable progress. It seems likely that Oswald received special training from the government, as part of the preparation for his forthcoming espionage mission to the U.S.S.R. One of his Marine friends arranged for him to meet an aunt who was also studying Russian. The aunt, Rosaleen Quinn, talked Russian with Oswald for over two hours during supper. She was preparing to take a State Department exam and had worked with a tutor for more than a year. According to Quinn, Oswald spoke Russian better and more confidently than she did.

When Oswald failed his Russian test in February, he had scored a "-5" in understanding spoken Russian. By the time of his summertime encounter with Quinn, he ^{not only} understood it but spoke it with considerable fluency. Neither Quinn nor, supposedly, anyone else tutored him. His explanation for this progress was that it resulted from listening to ^Radio Moscow. Not only would that be a tough way to learn a language, since Radio Moscow is not noted for talking slowly, but Russian is a difficult language for an American to master.

I consulted Dr. James Weeks, a professor of modern languages at Southeastern Massachusetts University who teaches Russian and who himself underwent language training while in the military.³⁴ He cited statistics which indicate that attaining Russian fluency requires more than twice as many hours as did Spanish or French--eleven hundred hours or more, including instruction. Weeks opined that the kind of progress described in Oswald's case would

be exceedingly difficult if not impossible to attain in such a short time by using only the radio and self-study props. Such progress would require people, Weeks asserted--instructors or, at a minimum, persons proficient in the language who would be willing to converse extensively with the student. Oswald supposedly had access to neither formal nor informal tutors.

In 1974 a transcript of an executive session of the Warren Commission was released after a prolonged legal battle by a private researcher.³⁵ Classified as Top Secret until its release, it contains a reference by Chief Counsel J. Lee Rankin to the Commission's efforts, "to find out what he [Oswald] studied at the Monterey School of the Army in the way of languages."³⁶ There is no known official record of Oswald having studied there. The Monterey School (the Defense Language Institute), located in California, was operational in 1959. It was, and still is, the linguistic West Point for U.S. military and intelligence personnel who need to learn a language thoroughly and quickly. If Oswald studied there, it would explain his phenomenal progress.

The Monterey School is not a self-improvement institution offering courses to anyone who is interested. In 1959 it was a school for serious training relating to government work, not to the academic whims of military or intelligence personnel. Only those with a certain level of aptitude were admitted, and training was in a language selected for the student by the government, according to needs or assignments.³⁷ If Oswald went there, it would also explain why he was not seen as a threat to

Marine Corps security: he was indeed being trained in things Russian in conformance with someone's policy--most likely, U.S. intelligence.

In September 1959 Oswald left the Marine Corps--three months ahead of his scheduled discharge.³⁸ In the first of what was to be a long series of quick and favorable treatments by various government agencies, he was given a dependency discharge because of an injury to his mother.³⁹ The speed of his release surprised his Marine peers.⁴⁰ But the Marine Corps was duped, or so it appears. The discharge was obtained on false grounds. Oswald's mother's injury consisted of a jar falling on her toe while at work. She stayed home for a week, but when she returned she did not mention the injury at all much less describe it as a continuing problem. All of this took place the year before Oswald's dependency discharge.⁴¹

Perhaps Oswald was in a hurry to get out of the Marines because he had other things to do. In October 1959--one month after his three-months-early discharge--he was on his way to Moscow to defect. As with most aspects of his defection and his return, his journey to Russia is enigmatic.

Firstly, there is financing. The trip cost at least \$1500. The Warren Commission decided that Oswald, being frugal, saved the money out of his Marine Corps pay.⁴² Before his departure for Moscow his bank account reflected only \$203. He could have squirreled away \$1300 in cash and carried it around with him to pay for his trip (awkward, but by no means impossible); or his trip could have been subsidized by someone. Friends and relatives claim not to have given him any money during this

period, but perhaps someone else did.

Secondly, there is Oswald's itinerary. He arrived in England on October 9 and left October 10. So says his passport, stamped at the London airport.⁴³ His next destination was Helsinki, en route to Moscow. He arrived there on the 11th. But there was no available commercial flight that would have gotten him there that soon.⁴⁴ Either his nest egg of cash was bigger than anyone imagined--enough to hire private air transport--or he was flown to Helsinki by noncommercial aircraft, private or military.

After arriving in Moscow in October of 1959, he told Soviet officials of his desire for Soviet citizenship. The officials were unimpressed and probably more than a bit suspicious. They rejected his request for citizenship and ordered him to leave Moscow within two hours.⁴⁵ Allegedly, Oswald's response to this rejection was to slit his left wrist. He was rushed to a hospital by a Soviet Intourist guide who found him bleeding in his hotel room. He was then confined to a psychiatric hospital while the Soviets decided his fate. Certainly they must have debated whether Oswald was for real or a spy. This was an era in which the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. were playing extensive spy games with ostensible defectors.⁴⁶

After waiting several days for the Soviets to make up their mind, Oswald decided to take action. He went to the American Embassy in Moscow where he denounced the U.S., praised the U.S.S.R., and stated that he wanted to renounce his U.S. citizenship.⁴⁷ He also made another, very dramatic announcement: he stated that he had offered to give the Soviets radar secrets

that he had learned in the Marines. He added ominously that he, "might know something of special interest" (an obvious reference to the U-2).⁴⁸

This action seems counterproductive on Oswald's part. To make such threats to the Americans might cause them to panic, to employ extraordinary means to stop the young Marine from spilling secrets. If the U.S. Embassy did not previously know of Oswald's access to secret materials, it did now. If Oswald's real goal was to become a Soviet citizen, taunting U.S. officials with not-so-thinly-veiled threats about the ultrasecret U-2 might have caused them to think up some cold-war caper to silence Oswald and thus eliminate risk to the U-2. In addition to U-2 data, Oswald had access to a wealth of secrets concerning radio-communications codes, radar installations and aircraft deployment in the western United States.

Still, nothing happened. U.S. officials listened to Oswald's threats with conspicuous tranquility. Perhaps he knew that they would not try to stop him; perhaps he wasn't even talking to them, but to the Soviets. In the late 1950s, the U.S. Embassy was one of the best places in Moscow to get the ear of Kremlin intelligence officers. The bugging of our embassy there was common Soviet practice, as was our bugging of their embassy in Washington. Oswald's statement may well have been advertisements to the wavering Soviets, not threats to the U.S. officials.

The Soviets remained unconvinced. Oswald languished for weeks in a Moscow hotel, writing pro-communist letters to his family back in America and explaining at length the reasons for

his defection. Since it would have been a safe assumption that the Soviets would open and read his mail, these too may have constituted self-advertisements for Soviet citizenship.⁴⁹

Finally Oswald's frantic efforts to be accepted payed off. The Russians took him and, presumably, his store of radar secrets along with him. Although the Soviets would claim that they had no interest in Oswald and never debriefed him.⁵⁰

It is interesting to note that the CIA expressed extreme skepticism concerning the Soviets' professed disinterest in Oswald. It did not seem logical, given Oswald's radar knowledge, that the Kremlin would not even talk with him. Yet the CIA wanted everyone to believe that its claims of disinterest in Oswald upon his return from Russia were perfectly logical, that there was no reason why they would want to discuss with Oswald how much of what he told the Soviets.

The Warren Commission's vision of Oswald is one of a hot-headed ideologue whose political passions compelled him to do everything from slashing his wrist to shooting the President. The Vice-Consul of the U.S. Embassy in Moscow has an interesting recollection about Oswald's defection speech. John A. McVickar told the Warren Commission that the young defector seemed to be following some "pattern of behavior in which he had been tutored by person or persons unknown, that he had been in contact with others before or during his Marine Corps tour who had guided him and encouraged him in his actions."⁵¹

McVickar was not alone in his perception that Oswald was a cool and purposeful young man. A New Orleans radio host who interviewed him about his pro-Castro activities said, "He seemed

to be very conscious about all of his words, all of his movements, sort of very deliberate...and he struck me as being rather articulate. He was the type of person you would say inspired confidence."⁵² Fifteen years after the assassination Dallas Police Chief Jesse Curry and Assistant District Attorney William Alexander were still haunted by the eerie demeanor of their most-famous prisoner. Curry said he thought Oswald "had been trained in interrogation techniques and resisting-interrogation techniques."⁵³ Said Alexander, "I was amazed that a person so young would have had the self-control he had. It was almost as if he had been rehearsed, or programmed, to meet the situation that he found himself in."⁵⁴

A New Orleans policeman who interviewed Oswald following his arrest for a street fight that ensued from his pro-Castro leafletting described him as "answering questions in a mechanical manner, much like a machine that could be turned on and off."⁵⁵

The other embassy official who dealt with Oswald, besides John A. McVickar, tried to talk Oswald out of defecting. After conversing with him for about an hour, the official told the young Marine to return in two days to formally renounce his U.S. citizenship.⁵⁶ This official was Richard Snyder, a man alleged by some Warren Commission critics to have been working for the CIA under diplomatic cover.⁵⁷

In 1977 the House Assassinations Committee was attempting to sort out the CIA's possible interaction with Oswald. The CIA and Snyder denied that he worked for the Agency while in Moscow, although admitting that he had worked for it briefly at an earlier time. The Committee discovered that his CIA file had

been "red flagged" and specially segregated. In attempting to find out why, the Committee found the CIA's innocent explanation unsatisfactory. HSCA termed the matter of Snyder's file "extremely troubling."⁵⁸ However, based on Snyder's testimony, a review of his file, and statements from his former State Department personnel officer, the Committee concluded that "a finding that he was in contact with Oswald on behalf of the CIA was not warranted."

HSCA was told by a former State Department official who was "familiar with State Department procedures regarding CIA employees" that "at no time from 1959 to 1963 did the CIA use the State Department's overseas consular positions as cover for CIA intelligence officers." But in his 1980 book Wilderness of Mirrors, David C. Martin alleges that in November 1962 Hugh Montgomery was "a CIA officer under diplomatic cover in the embassy [U.S. Embassy in Moscow]," as was Richard Jacobs, "another CIA officer serving under diplomatic cover." Martin's book is based in part on interviews with retired CIA officers.

Snyder, who was the embassy's second-secretary, listened to Oswald's threats to reveal secrets but apparently took no action to try to stop him (beyond trying to talk him out of it). While the author has no knowledge of what standard procedure would be in such cases, this reaction appears rather casual, given that no one at the embassy could have known the magnitude of secrets Oswald might spill.⁵⁹

Snyder was in charge of Oswald's handling by the embassy. In a confidential State Department memorandum he stated, "I was

the sole officer handling ~~the~~ Oswald case."⁶⁰ In addition to this chore, Snyder described himself in a Yale alumni book as having been "in charge of the Gary Powers-U2 trial matters" (when Powers' U-2 was shot down by the Soviets).

The defection of this radar operator who dealt with secret codes and files in California and who worked in the bubble that monitored U-2 flights, brought a mixed reaction from the U.S. military. At El Toro Air Base in California (Oswald's last assignment before leaving the Marines), there was a flurry of activity when local commanders learned of his defection. According to Oswald's former commanding officer there, the defection precipitated wholesale changes in codes, frequencies for radio transmission and for radar, and in aircraft call numbers--changes designed to repair any leaked secrets.⁶¹ Marine Lt. John Donovan told the Warren Commission that Oswald had a wealth of knowledge about West Coast air bases, including: "all radio frequencies for all squadrons, all tactical call signs, the relative strengths of all squadrons, number and type of aircraft in a squadron...the authentication code for entering and exiting [the air defense zone]...the range of surrounding units' radio and radar."⁶² At the higher levels of military bureaucracy in Washington, however, there was scarcely a ripple.

According to Colonel Thomas Fox, former head of counterintelligence for the Defense Intelligence Agency, ~~it~~ was standard operating procedure to conduct a "net damage assessment" for defectors.⁶³ The assessment was an analysis of the secret information which a defector might have had access to, in order to discern what operations might be compromised. In the cases of

the only two U.S. enlisted men who defected to communist countries before Oswald, damage assessments were conducted; in the cases of at least two of those who defected after Oswald, assessments were conducted.⁶⁴ There was none for Oswald.

It is not that he had no secrets or could cause no damage. It would seem that with El Toro, Atsugi, and the U-2 there was plenty of potential damage to assess. It is not that there were so many defectors flocking to Russia that our bureaucracy couldn't keep up with them, so that Oswald slipped through the cracks. It is not that American officials had no warning that Oswald was going to divulge secrets. Is it that the "damage" had already been precisely calculated when designing Oswald's cover as a defector?

If he was a genuine defector instead of a spy, U.S. intelligence could well have taken the view that his was one of the most damaging defections in history. The sequence of events surrounding his threats to divulge secrets could have been viewed as rendering Oswald the traitor of the decade. As Sherlock Holmes told Dr. Watson in The Hound of the Baskervilles, the key to the mystery lies in why the dog did not bark.

On May 1, 1960, six months after Oswald defected, boasting that he "might know something of special interest," the CIA's black lady came crashing to Russian soil outside the city of Sverdlovsk. The diplomatic fallout was immense. At first, Washington claimed that the downed craft was a weather plane which had innocently drifted into Russian air space from Turkey, because the pilot became oxygen deprived and lost his sense of

direction.⁶⁵ Moscow waited forty-eight hours, allowing plenty of time for the U.S. cover story to circulate, before blowing it out of the water. Then the Soviets revealed that they had both the plane and pilot. President Eisenhower was probably advised by the CIA that the U-2 had been blown up per standard procedure. Eisenhower paid dearly for the Agency's unfounded optimism--with his own credibility. The State Department admitted the craft was a spy plane but said the flight was not authorized in Washington. Two days later this fallback position crumbled: Eisenhower finally assumed responsibility for the U-2. In addition to Administration credibility, the other casualty of the affair was the upcoming four-power summit conference, which collapsed in wake of the spy flight.

How did the U.S.S.R catch the black lady? One qualified expert, Colonel Fletcher Prouty, who was liaison officer between the Air Force and the CIA for the U-2 project, believes that the plane must have been flying at an abnormally low altitude when it was shot down.⁶⁶ Another qualified source, U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers, opined that technical data supplied to the Russians by Lee Harvey Oswald may have been U-2's downfall. Powers voiced the suspicion that Oswald's knowledge of the plane's operational altitude and of the radar techniques used during its flight provided what the Soviets needed in order to target their missiles more accurately and at a much higher altitude than was previously possible.⁶⁷ Commenting on Oswald, Powers said that, "he had access to all our equipment. He knew the altitudes we flew at, how long we stayed out on any mission, and in which direction we went."⁶⁸

Whether Prouty or Powers is correct, or neither is correct, it would seem that the CIA would logically have an intense interest in discovering just what role Oswald may have had in the fate of U-2--especially since spy planes continued to fly after the Soviets brought Powers down. The Agency claims it had no interest in Oswald and ~~never~~ debriefed him upon his return from Russia. Was the CIA so ~~simple~~ minded that it saw no possible connection between Oswald and the U-2? Did it see one but forget to follow up on it by debriefing him? Or did it already know precisely what Oswald had told the Soviets?

Powers was eventually returned to the U.S. in February 1962 in exchange for Soviet spy master Rudolf Abel. This occurred while Oswald was still in the U.S.S.R. If Powers told his CIA employers the same story he would later tell, the Agency's interest in Oswald should have been peaked, to say the least. According to Powers, his Soviet interrogators were surprisingly knowledgeable about certain matters.⁶⁹ The Agency should have entertained the notion that Oswald had provided the information, unless the CIA knew better.

Powers lied to his captors about the spy plane's altitude, insisting that he flew at 68,000 feet (much lower than the U-2's actual capability). He believed that since the aircraft could fly higher than the Soviets could monitor, they would be ignorant of the actual altitude. Not only did they correctly state his altitude but ~~also~~ showed him his actual flight path. This is data that Oswald had access to.

Powers also claimed that he was questioned extensively about

Atsugi air base. He denied ever being there (even though that is where the U-2 flights originated and Oswald's Atsugi squadron commander recalled that Powers was at the base). But he asserted that the questions put to him by the Soviets reflected considerable knowledge about U-2 flights from Atsugi.

After Powers' return to the U.S., Oswald should have been high on the mail-surveillance list of U.S. intelligence. He wrote to his brother Robert in February 1962 (after Powers' return) and commented that Powers "seemed to be a nice bright American type fellow when I saw him in Moscow."⁷⁰ Lee never explained when or how. He had moved from Moscow to Minsk by the time the U-2 was downed. His "diary," allegedly chronicling his Soviet sojourn, states that he was attending a party in Minsk on May 1, 1960 when Powers was captured. Back in the U.S., however, Oswald would tell a co-worker that he had been in Moscow for the big May Day celebration honoring the Communist Revolution. Of the three May Days Oswald spent in Russia, he was accounted for as being out of Moscow on the other two. We have only his diary--a suspicious artifact in its own right, as will be discussed later--to preclude his being in Moscow when Powers was shot down. This should have alerted the CIA to the possibility that Oswald played some U-2 role after the plane was downed as well as possibly having a hand in its demise. He was, after all, presumably the only person in the U.S.S.R. who had first-hand knowledge of the spy plane and its base, besides the prisoner who was being interrogated.

In February 1961, after nearly two and a half years in Russia, Oswald had a wife (the former Marina Prusakova), a baby

daughter, and a yen to return to the U.S. Our embassy in Moscow responded to the latter request with expeditiousness and generosity. Oswald wrote the embassy and asked for guarantees against prosecution upon his return to the U.S. At the request of Richard Snyder, the State Department officer who had handled Oswald's defection, Lee and Marina traveled to Moscow and appeared at the embassy.⁷¹ There Oswald recanted, saying that he had learned his lesson the hard way, that he had been, "completely relieved of his illusions about the Soviet Union."⁷² Snyder returned Oswald's passport to him and recommended to Washington that it agree to Marina's application for a visa.⁷³

While at the embassy, Marina was given a physical exam by the embassy doctor, ~~Air Force~~ Captain Alexis Davison.⁷⁴ Davison was evidently so moved by Oswald's recantation that he went out of his way to befriend the ex-Marine. He suggested that Oswald might contact Davison's mother (if Oswald ever got to Atlanta). There is no evidence that Oswald ever saw Mrs. Davison, but he did go out of his way to go to Atlanta. The plane that he took from New York to Dallas after returning from the Soviet Union stopped briefly in Atlanta to exchange passengers. There were direct flights to Dallas, but Oswald chose one that stopped in Atlanta.⁷⁵ Inexplicably, the Oswalds started for Texas with five suitcases and arrived in Dallas with only two; the three missing suitcases are unaccounted for.⁷⁶ Could Oswald have been performing some sort of courier function for materials originating in the U.S.S.R.?

When arrested in Dallas following the assassination, he had

the name of Captain Davison's mother listed in his notebook.⁷⁷ Oswald's Dallas patron George de Mohrenschildt made a cryptic but unexplained comment in an unpublished manuscript concerning, "Lee's activities in Atlanta, new Orleans, and Mexico City."⁷⁸ There are no known Oswald activities in Atlanta or even visits to Atlanta, except the brief stopover.

Captain Alexis Davison was declared persona non grata by the Soviet Union in May 1963 in connection with his alleged involvement in the sensational Penkovsky spy case. Colonel Oleg Penkovsky was a Russian spying for the West. He revealed secrets that turned out to be of crucial importance to the U.S. during the subsequent Cuban Missile Crisis.⁷⁹ The Soviets claimed that Captain Davison's phone number was found on Penkovsky when he was arrested for spying. Penkovsky was executed after a swift trial. The Soviets named eight foreigners as his spy contacts. Davison was one.⁸⁰

After the assassination Davison told the Secret Service that he did not remember the Oswalds; but he subsequently recalled the embassy meeting quite clearly when talking with the FBI. He also admitted that he had not provided his mother's address to anyone else going to the U.S. besides Oswald.⁸¹

Davison told the House Assassinations Committee that his only involvement with intelligence work was the one for which he was kicked out of the U.S.S.R. The CIA asserted that his involvement in the Penkovsky affair was a "one shot" deal. Davison flatly denied any intelligence-related linkage to Oswald.⁸²

It seems that the U.S. Embassy in Moscow (or some of its

officials, at least) could not get Oswald back home quick enough. Richard Snyder returned the former defector's passport to him several months ahead of his scheduled departure, although the embassy had been specifically instructed, in writing, not to do so. The Passport Office in Washington had ordered that Oswald's passport be returned to him only after his travel plans were finalized, to prevent the document from being used in the interim by the Soviets as part of some espionage scheme.⁸³ Snyder and the embassy were either: 1. very careless 2. very trusting of the Soviets or 3. very trusting of Oswald. The best explanation for his favorable treatment is that he was finishing one mission for U.S. intelligence and was about to be debriefed before undertaking other assignments.

On the recommendation of the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, Marina was exempted from the usual immigration quotas and was allowed to come to the U.S. with her husband.⁸⁴ The Immigration Service objected, but the State Department made a "strong case" on Marina's behalf: the Service acquiesced.⁸⁵

The State Department loaned Oswald \$435 to help ~~out~~ him *get* home. Upon receiving that loan, his State Department file should have been flagged with a "look-out card" posted by the Passport Office until the loan was repaid. No look-out card was ever placed in his file. The State Department told the Warren Commission that this resulted from human error.⁸⁶ Oswald's interactions with the State Department and the Passport Office produced not one but a series of alleged errors or coincidences.

According to standard procedure, a look-out card should also

have been posted at the time of Oswald's defection to Russia.⁸⁷ The purpose of this procedure was to alert all U.S. embassies and passport offices not to issue the defector a new passport. No such card was posted for Oswald. There was another chance, according to standard operating procedure, to post a look-out card. By March 1960 the Embassy in Moscow had lost track of Oswald's whereabouts. The State Department in Washington typed up a refusal sheet, as it was bound by law to do in such cases. This sheet was the first bureaucratic step toward the posting of a look-out card. Once again, because of alleged human error, the look-out card never appeared. Three missed chances--defection, whereabouts unknown, loan outstanding--to flag the file of the U-2 defector.

Human error/coincidence continued to shape Oswald's interactions with the Passport office even after his return to the U.S. In New Orleans in 1963, when he applied for a new passport with which to go back to the Soviet Union, he got it without a hitch within twenty-four hours.⁸⁸ He wrote on his application that his destination was the Soviet Union, and he practically red-flagged his status as a former defector by referring to a previous "cancellation" of his passport.⁸⁹

His fast, favorable treatment is all the more conspicuous given the organizational subculture of the Passport Office during that era. It was headed by Miss Francis Knight, whose strident anti-communism was legendary with the Washington bureaucracy. One of her assistants, Otto Otepka, was a zealous red-hunter.⁹⁰ Knight and Otepka were known to challenge the loyalty of ordinary citizens, but they managed to allow the Soviet defector to slip

through their bureaucratic net three times.⁹¹

With regard to Marina, the State Department was so anxious to have her admitted to the U.S. that it disregarded or failed to notice aspects of her case which normally would have caused great concern. She had spent the previous few years of her life living with her uncle who was an MVD colonel (Soviet secret police). In her youth, she had been a member of the Komsomol, the youth apparatus of the Communist party. The U.S. government was so concerned about being infiltrated by Russian communists that the visa application form specifically asked entering Russians if they were or had been a member of the Komsomol. Marina Oswald solved that problem by simply answering no.⁹² In keeping with the general pattern of good will/incompetence that marked the response of government agencies to her defector husband, Marina was let in without any problem concerning the information on her visa application.

As we would by this time expect, the Oswalds' return trip manifested its own mysteries. According to the Warren Commission, Lee and Marina crossed the Soviet border at Jelmstedt, one of the most sensitive and security-conscious checkpoints along the iron-curtain border between East and West Berlin.⁹³ Marina's passport stamp reflects that crossing; her husband's does not.⁹⁴ How did Oswald pass from East to West? Was it that his very presence somehow caused any government bureaucracy he came in contact with to suddenly become non compos mentis, so that his passport was not stamped? Or did he cross somewhere else?

The Oswalds made an unexplained stop in Amsterdam. As Warren Commission Chief Counsel Rankin noted in an executive session, "When they came back, they went to Amsterdam and were there for, I think it was two days, before they went to Rotterdam to take a boat, and it is unexplained why they happened to go there and stay, and got a place to live, some little apartment, and what they were doing in the interim."⁹⁵

The mysterious stopover, in a private apartment rather than a public hotel, is viewed by some researchers as the opportunity for Oswald to have been debriefed by U.S. intelligence, perhaps in a CIA "safe house."

The Oswalds departed the U.S.S.R. June 2, 1962 and finally arrived in the United States on June 13. Lee Harvey Oswald was met not by the CIA or the FBI or Military Intelligence or a Marine Corps representative, any or all of whom might be expected to have an interest in him. Instead he was met by a man the Warren Commission described as, "a representative of a travelers' aid society which had been contacted by the Department of State."⁹⁶ It may have been a welcome-home gesture on the part of a very hospitable State Department, but the greeter had odd credentials for the role. Spas Raikin was a former secretary of the American Friends of Anti-Bolshevik nations, an anti-communist lobby with extensive ties to U.S. intelligence agencies.⁹⁷

By far the most conspicuous and significant element of Oswald's return is that the Central Intelligence Agency claims never to have debriefed him. He should logically have been of prime interest to the Agency. During this same period, the CIA saw fit to debrief American tourists who had been anywhere behind

the iron curtain. Eastern European émigrés were extensively debriefed as prime sources of information concerning communist-block countries.⁹⁸ Yet, CIA Director William Colby would insist in 1975 that, "We had no contact with Mr. Oswald.... No contact with him before he went to the Soviet Union, no contact with him after he returned from the Soviet Union, no contact with him while he was in the Soviet Union."⁹⁹

Why not? One of the first answers floated unofficially by defenders of the Warren Commission's conclusions was that the Agency did not want to further embarrass the U.S. by focusing attention on someone who had defected to the Soviets. Needless to say, that did not quell suspicions about the handling of Oswald's case. In 1975 CBS-TV correspondent Dan Rather put the question of debriefing directly to Colby. Rather reported that, "Mr. Colby indicated that CIA might have passed up Oswald because the FBI interviewed him."¹⁰⁰ While it is true that the FBI did interview him upon his return, Colby's wishy-washy claim of CIA lethargy still rings hollow.

Firstly, the FBI did not interview Oswald until he had been in the United States for three weeks.¹⁰¹ The CIA's U-2's continued to soar through unfriendly skies while the U-2 defector sat in Texas without being debriefed. Secondly, the Bureau's interest in Oswald was to check him out as a possible subversive threat (i.e. did the Russians send him back here to spy or commit acts of sabotage?) The Bureau had no technical competence by which to discern what, if anything, Oswald may have told the Russians about U-2. The FBI agents who interviewed him did not

get into detailed, technical interrogation.¹⁰² They found him to be "cold, arrogant, and difficult to interview."¹⁰³ But he did deny that he gave radar secrets to the Soviets.¹⁰⁴ Perhaps this blanket assurance was all the CIA needed to hear, second-hand, in order not to worry about the fate of its spy planes around the world.

Three years after Colby's comment about "passing up" Oswald because of the FBI, the House Select Committee on Assassinations came up with the explanation that the CIA did not debrief returning defectors: "It appeared to the Committee that, in fact, the CIA did not contact returning defectors as a matter of standard operating procedure. For this reason, the absence of contact with Oswald on his return from the Soviet Union could not be considered unusual."¹⁰⁵ In fact the CIA is known to have debriefed at least three defectors--an Air Force man, a soldier who deserted in Germany, and a Rand Development Corporation employee.¹⁰⁶ It is difficult to imagine that these three men were of more significance to the Agency than the man who might have spilled numerous Atsugi-related secrets.

Even putting aside the U-2 and radar secrets, there was another very important intelligence dimension in which the Agency should have had a burning interest: Oswald was a walking data bank regarding Soviet techniques of debriefing and of handling defectors. After all, the Agency claimed that it did not believe for a moment ~~that~~ the KGB's assertion that it was not interested in Oswald. After the assassination the Agency claimed to harbor suspicions that Oswald was a Russian spy. It is beyond credulity that in 1962, with all the double-agent machinations involving

"defectors," the CIA would not be suspicious of his ideological change of heart until after he had assassinated a president of the United States. CIA counterintelligence has not been noted for either its sanguine attitude toward the Soviets or its willingness to simply sit back and let the FBI handle important cases. The Agency was known to view the Bureau's competence in such matters as less than adequate.¹⁰⁷

In 1948, only a year after the CIA's creation, it negotiated a "delimitation agreement" with the FBI. The pact sought to codify the domestic responsibilities of the two organizations, and it gave the Agency specific rights to deal with defectors.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, the CIA has never been shy about pursuing intelligence wherever and with whomever it deems necessary, even in the absence of specific authorization, and sometimes in the presence of laws and policies to the contrary (as in its illegal domestic surveillance activities during the 1970s).

Regarding Oswald's case, a senior State Department official wrote in March 1961 that the "risk" involved in his returning would be more than compensated for by "the opportunity provided the United States to obtain information from Mr. Oswald concerning his activities in the Soviet Union."¹⁰⁹ Still, the Agency continues to steadfastly assert that it had no interest in him as a source, a risk, or anything else. As recently as 1976, the illogical and tortured explanations concerning the CIA's alleged disinterest were still being embellished. In preparation for a television appearance, former CIA Director Colby was provided with an Agency briefing paper which sought to help him

answer some difficult questions. Of Oswald's non-debriefing, the paper stated that if he had come to the attention of the Agency's ^{DCD} [^] [Domestic Contacts Division] he would easily have been bypassed: "he did not have the kind of information that this division was seeking."¹¹⁰

The paper went on to claim that there was so much tourist traffic to and from communist countries in 1962 that the Agency simply could not talk to all of them.¹¹¹ One is led to wonder what kind of information did catch the fancy of the CIA's DCD during this period, if a man who spent nearly two and a half years in the Soviet Union was presumed not to have relevant information. The Agency would have us believe that its efforts were so casual and ineffective that a defector was viewed as no more important than a tourist and was simply lost in the crowd of travelers to communist countries.

In the three decades before the 1960s there were only two U.S. defectors to the Soviet Union.¹¹² The year before Oswald showed up there was a bumper crop--four in all. Two more followed close behind Oswald.¹¹³ Eventually six of the seven had a change of ideological priorities and returned home.¹¹⁴ Most of this group followed the same route of entry into the Soviet Union as did Oswald.¹¹⁵

One of these was Robert Webster, a plastics expert who worked for the Rand Development Corporation. Rand Development's offices were located in New York City just across the street from the supposedly separate, more-famous Rand Corporation (a think tank that had the CIA as a client).¹¹⁶ Rand Development Corporation itself held several contracts with the Agency.¹¹⁷

Its president, Henry Rand, had been a senior officer in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the CIA's predecessor organization of which so many CIA officers were alumni.¹¹⁸ Another of Rand Development's top executives was also a former OSS man; the corporation's onetime Washington representative had been a CIA agent.¹¹⁹

While Robert Webster was in Moscow representing Rand Development at a plastics exhibition, he went to the U.S. Embassy and announced his intention to defect. Like Oswald, he did so in the presence of Richard Snyder, the CIA-linked State Department official who handled Oswald's Soviet entrance and exit.¹²⁰ When Oswald was arranging to return to the U.S. he was heard to inquire about the fate of another young man who had come to the U.S.S.R. shortly before he did--Robert Webster.¹²¹

Colonel Fletcher Prouty, who served as "focal point officer" (liaison) between the Pentagon and the CIA during the period of Oswald's Marine Corps service and his defection, revealed in 1979 his first-hand knowledge of CIA agents using military cover.¹²² Prouty asserted that an agent would be given a regular Marine file created by fabricating duty assignments and by inserting the usual personnel reviews and promotions. Prouty said his office would tend to the ^{see} records in concert with CIA.

An internal CIA memo released in 1976 reveals that there was evidently another Marine enlisted man (a technician like Oswald) who was in Russia in 1958 and 1959. The man's identity is blanked out. Whoever he was the memo reveals that he lived in the city of Minsk (as did Oswald), departed the Soviet Union

before Oswald, and was debriefed by the Agency in Copenhagen on his way home (calling to mind Oswald's unexplained stop in Amsterdam).¹²³

A former chief Security Officer for the State Department, Otto Otepka, claims that in 1963 his office undertook a study of U.S. defectors to determine which were real and which were spies. The study was necessitated by the fact that neither the CIA nor military intelligence would tell State which defectors were genuine. One of the cases under study was Oswald's. According to the Security Officer, only months before the assassination the State Department was still pondering whether his defection was real or only a cover.¹²⁴

It has been suggested that Oswald was simply too young and volatile to be recruited as a U.S. spy, or perhaps not smart enough. Yet we have heard officials from Moscow to Dallas take note of what a cool customer Oswald was. For what it's worth, his records from school and the Marines indicate that he was far from intellectually deficient. At age thirteen he had registered an IQ of 118 on the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for children (described as being "in the upper range of bright, normal intelligence"). He was three years ahead of his class in several subjects. His general intelligence had been taken note of by his Marine Corps superiors. All of this is less relevant than the composure he seemed to manifest in difficult situations from Moscow to New Orleans to Dallas.

In October 1962 Oswald took a series of tests offered by the Texas State Employment Commission. Helen P. Cunningham, a counselor with the Employment Commission's Dallas office,

60 followed by 60A

described the nature and results of the tests to the Warren Commission. These were not IQ or personality tests but ones seeking to discover an "occupational aptitude pattern." By noting which of twenty-three areas applicants tested well in, counselors offered career advice. Oswald met the minimum

standard in twenty areas, failing to qualify in only three.¹²⁵ His "G" score ("general ability") was 127: fifty percent of those taking this test scored less than 100. He also scored "quite high" on verbal and clerical tests. According to Cunningham, "there are some things in it [his test results] that would tend to say that he could do college work.... If I recall correctly, 100 is thought to be sufficient to do junior college or possibly in some [people] a four-year course, that 125 is required on the G score for professional schools and 110 is quite good for finishing a four-year college."

The counselor concluded, "In general I would say that his tests indicate potential for quite a broad number and range of semi-skilled or skilled occupations." He demonstrated "outstanding verbal and clerical potential," according to a 1962 notation in his file. Oswald also "scored high" on an aptitude test designed for the position of insurance claims adjuster. In addition, it is relevant to his scholastic potential to note that he became very fluent in Russian in a short period of time while in the Marine Corps (as previously described).

We have it from former CIA Director Allen Dulles that agents are not required to have formidable intellects but only to be smart enough to navigate within the operational context of their assignments. As for Oswald's youth, one presumes that youthful ideological zeal may have been an important element in his cover. The Soviets, who were being bombarded with "defectors" at the time, almost decided to reject Oswald. Had he been a thirty-year-old Marine or a Marine officer, they might have been even

more suspicious and probed his cover more intensely.

Oswald was no slouch when it came to observing the things around him. Back in Dallas a fellow worker remembers him commenting that the Soviet dispersement of military units was different than the American pattern: the Soviets did not intermingle their armor and infantry divisions, and they would have all of their aircraft in one location and all of their infantry in another.¹²⁶ These are curious interests for a befuddled young ideologue. With an eye for detail like that it is indeed a shame that the CIA missed talking to him.

But perhaps such data was communicated to U.S. intelligence by Oswald. Among his effects found in Dallas after the assassination was a Russian novel that he had apparently brought back from the Soviet Union. On page 152 of the book, seven letters had been cut out from different locations. The National Security Agency analyzed the book but reached no conclusion about the status of the missing letters. The excising of letters from printed pages is one of the classic techniques used in espionage coding. The excisions refer to broader, more complex codes, perhaps involving the page number or line or word in which the excision occurs. Thus, one excision could cue a number of additional references to a prearranged code. The missing letters were never found.¹²⁷

Once back in the States Oswald settled in Dallas under the wing of George de Mohrenschildt, the right-wing Russian with CIA ties. The Marine Corps, which could have court-martialed Oswald by calling him back to duty to face charges of disclosing secrets, did not do so.¹²⁸ The Marines gave him an undesirable

discharge, not dishonorable. Oswald wrote then Texas Governor John Connally to protest that his discharge was a "gross mistake or injustice."¹²⁹ Perhaps it was: U.S. Health, Education and Welfare Department records in Dallas casually asserted that Oswald went to Russia "with State Department approval" to work as a radar technician.¹³⁰ For a year after his defection, military records failed to reflect his ~~new~~ status as a traitor. Was the bureaucracy just slow, or was there an impression somewhere in its data systems that Oswald was still in government service.

Even the FBI seems to have entertained this possibility. A post-assassination memo explaining why the Bureau did not order Oswald's passport to be segregated by the State Department after his defection asserts, "We did not know definitely whether or not he had any intelligence assignments at that time."¹³¹

It is extremely difficult to analyze accurately a distant espionage situation, which is what makes counterintelligence work so challenging. Still, some logical speculation is possible based on the conclusion that Oswald was not a genuine defector but a spy, which would explain ~~why~~ he was not punished as a traitor for revealing secrets to the Soviets. Certainly he would be extensively debriefed upon his return but not through normal, overt channels: a cover of feigned disinterest would be appropriate. But it is likely that the mysterious stopover in Amsterdam allowed for debriefing at a CIA safe house. Oswald had a lot to tell. His observations about the deployment patterns of the Soviet military would, by themselves, justify such a stop.

The CIA would not have sacrificed its prized U-2 just to

provide a cover for a fake defector. Either Oswald told the Soviets other, more expendable radar secrets or managed to give the Soviets whatever they already had on the plane or gave them disinformation. If he had turned around on his U.S. handlers and given the Soviets the data to catch the U-2, he would not have been treated so favorably nor would he have continued in a domestic-spying role for the CIA on his return to the U.S. (as will be described later), nor would he continue to have CIA contacts. The only way Oswald could be accepted as not being the traitor who downed the spy plane is if the Agency had precise control over the substance and number of the "secrets" he delivered to the KGB. Back in the U.S. Oswald launched himself into another leftist political context as an ardent supporter of Castro's Cuba--or so it appeared.

Chapter 3

Oswald in New Orleans: Marxist or Mole*

"Was his [Oswald] public identification with the left a cover for a connection with the anti-Castro right?"

--Senator Gary Hart, Senate Intelligence Committee, 1976¹

To the Warren Commission, Oswald's pro-Castro activities in New Orleans were further evidence of his leftist mentality. They helped to form what appeared to be a consistent pattern of anti-American, pro-Communist political beliefs. Behind the facade of Oswald's pro-Castro involvements was another very consistent pattern--extensive links with CIA-related activities, organizations, and people, including anti-Castro activities in which the Agency had a proprietary interest.

The main elements of Oswald's pro-Castroism in New Orleans took place from April to August of 1963.² He founded a chapter of the Fair Play For Cuba Committee (FPCC), a pro-Castro organization headquartered in New York. He printed up some pro-Castro leaflets and handed them out to sailors from the USS Wasp before police ordered him off of the dock. He again handed out

* In intelligence jargon, a mole is an agent who penetrates an organization or context while under cover, in order to spy and/or perform covert missions.

his leaflets, this time on a downtown street. There he got into a scuffle with some anti-Castro activists and was hauled off to jail. The third time he passed out leaflets, near the New Orleans Trade Mart, the local TV news cameras were there. He engaged in a radio debate in which he upheld the pro-Castro position against two anti-communists. As with most of Oswald's life, none of these events were what they appeared to be.

To begin with, Oswald was the only member of the New Orleans Fair Play For Cuba Committee.³ He founded the chapter in spite of the cautions given by the FPCC national director in New York, who wrote Oswald that New Orleans' right-wing political culture was not hospitable ground on which to start a chapter. The director warned him not to create "unnecessary incidents which frighten any prospective supporters."⁴

Oswald disregarded the advice. He was so outrageously provocative that he created precisely these kinds of incidents. He walked into the lair of the enemy, visiting Carlos Bringuier, a militant anti-Castro activist.⁵ According to Bringuier and his associates, Oswald showed up unannounced at Bringuier's store and started talking. He portrayed himself as a compatriot of these anti-Castro exiles and boasted that he could train men to fight against Castro. He returned the next day and left behind an old Marine Corps manual as proof of his ability to help in the fight against Castro.

What was Oswald up to? Was he that determined to taunt the anti-Castro Cubans? Was he really trying to infiltrate them in order to advance his pro-Castro cause, or was he simply a political schizophrenic?

Only three days after he had made his overtures to the anti-Castro group, he was in downtown New Orleans handing out pro-Castro leaflets. Most intriguingly, Bringuier was tipped off by a "friend" that Oswald was doing this.⁶ Infuriated by Oswald's apparent double-dealing, Bringuier searched him out and found him. Bringuier then began to yell to passersby that Oswald-the-communist had tried to join in the fight against Castro. A crowd gathered. Bringuier continued his harangue and proceeded to lose his temper. A scuffle ensued. Oswald, Bringuier, and a couple of Bringuier's associates were arrested.⁷

It would be interesting to know the ultimate source of the "tip" that brought Bringuier into a confrontation with Oswald. Where did Bringuier's "friend," alleged by Bringuier to have been Celso Hernandez, get the information? Bringuier and his associates were extensively involved with the CIA. He was the New Orleans head of the Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil, an outgrowth of a militant anti-Castro student group that was heavily involved with the Agency during the Bay of Pigs invasion and which received CIA funding long after the invasion.⁸ At the time of the incident with Oswald, Bringuier was the publisher of a right-wing New Orleans newsletter. It was funded by the Crusade to Free Cuba Committee, yet another CIA-funded, anti-Castro organization.⁹

Were Oswald's appearances at Bringuier's store, followed by the "tip," calculated to set up an incident that would provide Oswald with a crisp pro-Castro image? One of the New Orleans policemen who broke up the scuffle had the distinct impression

that Oswald had things intentionally "set up to create an incident."¹⁰

Upon his arrest, Oswald did another very strange thing: he requested that an FBI agent come to visit him in jail. A local agent came to his cell, whereupon Oswald spun out a wildly fictitious story (he had apparently told the New Orleans police that he had been born in Cuba, according to the FBI report). He described himself to the FBI agent as having a long history in the pro-Castro movement.¹¹ Why would Oswald go out of his way to lie to the FBI? ~~One~~ explanation is that he was salting the Bureau's files as part of establishing his pro-Castro cover, a cover he needed in order to pursue certain intelligence activities (which will be described in the next chapter). He made sure that the FBI man left with samples of the FPCC leaflets.¹²

Oswald pleaded guilty to disturbing the peace, paid a ten dollar fine, and was back on the street. One week after he left jail, he put together another pro-Castro incident. Not demanding that his recruits possess ideological fervor, FPCC-chapter president Oswald went to the waiting room of the Louisiana State Unemployment Office ~~look~~ing for demonstrators. This was necessitated by the fact that he was president of an organization that had no members. He offered money to anyone who would help him pass out leaflets for a few minutes. His two-dollar offer had only one taker. As advertised, the job lasted but a few minutes: he and his lone helper passed out leaflets just long enough to be photographed by a mobile unit from a local TV station.¹³

Oswald's foray into Cuban politics was short lived. It ended in August of 1963 after beginning in the spring of that year. Once he left New Orleans in late August, he would never again engage in public activities on behalf of Castro's Cuba.

As the data presented here will seek to demonstrate, the events in New Orleans were designed to establish Oswald's pro-Castro credentials, the immediate purpose of which seems to have been to allow him to spy on and/or discredit the Fair Play For Cuba Committee. The FPCC national director's warning to Oswald about not creating embarrassing incidents was well founded: the FPCC was having more troubles than even its unpopular stance could generate, courtesy of the U.S. intelligence agencies that had targeted it for surveillance and disruption.

In 1976 the Senate Intelligence Committee's investigations revealed that in the early 1960s the CIA's domestic spying in general and its domestic spying on Cubans in particular underwent a dramatic escalation.¹⁴ Though much still remains secret, we now know that the CIA had extensive networks of spies in place in the Cuban-exile community, especially in Miami but elsewhere as well. At the time of President Kennedy's assassination, the Agency's efforts in Miami may have outstripped those of the FBI:¹⁵ by 1963 the CIA actually had more domestic agents there than did the Bureau.¹⁶

This key fact was unknown to the Warren Commission. It asked the FBI to investigate Cuban political groups (including the FPCC) as part of the general check on Oswald's background, but it neglected to ask the CIA for any information concerning

these groups.¹⁷ FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover implicitly acknowledged the CIA role when he wrote the Commission that the Agency may have "pertinent information concerning these organizations."¹⁸ Another FBI document, not given to the Warren Commission but discovered by the Senate Intelligence Committee in 1976, notes that Army Intelligence and CIA had "operational interests" in Cuban political groups, including the FPCC.¹⁹ The Senate Committee defined these operational interests as using groups or individuals for "intelligence collection or covert operations."²⁰

The CIA had specifically targeted the FPCC for covert activity. Moreover, the timing of Oswald's pro-Castro activities precisely coincided with their targeting.

Behind Oswald's pro-Castro facade lay numerous linkages to the Byzantine world of the anti-Castro movement. The war against Castro was a massive one, though primarily covert. It involved a bizarre coalition of interests united by an opposition to Cuban communism that seemed at times to border on fanaticism. Elements of the FBI, Army Intelligence, organized crime, Cuban exiles, and right-wing businessmen were, to varying degrees, involved in the efforts to overthrow Castro. By far, however, the broadest, most intense involvement was that of the CIA--the prime mover in anti-Castro politics.

The literature that Oswald distributed in New Orleans included a pamphlet entitled The Crime Against Cuba. This rather moderate exposition against U.S. policy was hardly noteworthy, except for the address stamped inside the back cover:²¹ FPCC, 544 Camp St., New Orleans, La. Additional copies of the

pamphlet, bearing the same address, were found among Oswald's possessions in Dallas after the assassination.²² In his correspondence to the national director of the FPCC, Oswald proposed setting up an office for the local chapter, then wrote implying that he had done so.²³

544 Camp Street was an odd address for a pro-Castro organization. On the ground floor of this shabby, elongated, three-story wooden structure located in a blighted section of New Orleans were the offices of Guy Banister.²⁴ He was an ex-FBI agent whose stellar career had included a role in the capture of John Dillinger, the notorious public enemy number one. He served with Naval Intelligence during WWII. Banister rose to become the head of the Bureau's Chicago office. He left the FBI and went to New Orleans in early 1950s: the mayor had asked him to serve as deputy police chief. His sudden retirement from the force at age fifty-eight came shortly after he allegedly threatened a waiter with a pistol during a dispute in a New Orleans restaurant.

Banister's superpatriotism led him to take up a personal campaign against communism upon his relatively early retirement from law-enforcement work. He was a leading figure in the local John Birch Society. He joined the Minutemen, a paramilitary anti-communist organization, and founded the Anti-Communist League of the Caribbean. Banister was a virulent racist, an alcoholic and was prone to violence (he reportedly pistol-whipped the head of a man who drew his ire).²⁵ This volatile combination did not prevent him from being a pivotal figure in the shadowy world of New Orleans anti-Castroism.

He set up his own "detective agency," Guy Banister Associates--located on the ground floor of 544 Camp Street. Banister was a very active anti-Castro organizer. He helped to establish the CIA-backed Cuban Revolutionary Democratic Front.²⁶ He was also one of the founders of an organization called the Friends of a Democratic Cuba, yet another CIA-backed group. It was this group that in 1961 obtained a bid from a New Orleans Ford dealer for the purchase of ten trucks, just before the Bay of Pigs invasion. After the assassination two employees of the Bolton Ford Co. told the FBI that one of the Cuban Revolutionary Democratic Front representatives called himself "Lee Oswald." The form for the bid bore the printed name "Oswald." The real Oswald was in Russia at the time.²⁷ Perhaps Banister knew Oswald, or knew of him, even before he arrived back in the U.S. and came to New Orleans. After Banister's death, some of Oswald's FPCC leaflets were found among his effects.²⁸

One of Banister's roles seems to have been that of arms supplier. Members of his detective-agency staff recall that during the time Oswald was in New Orleans the Camp Street offices were strewn with guns of all kinds.²⁹

No wonder that a group called the Cuban Revolutionary Council (CRC) had its headquarters in the same building as Banister's "detective agency." The CRC was a CIA-supported anti-Castro group, and a very key one at that. The Agency urged its creation then gave it millions of dollars. Its original purpose was to recruit young Cuban exiles in Florida and along the Gulf Coast and train them as soldiers in the war on Castro, under the direction of such CIA agents as E. Howard Hunt of Watergate

fame; CRC served as the Agency's main front organization for the Bay of Pigs invasion.³⁰

New Orleans was the CRC's second most-important base (Miami was the first). The organization rented 544 Camp Street--the same address as on Oswald's pamphlets--as its New Orleans headquarters. The group rented the office before Oswald came to New Orleans.³¹ Though the CRC had theoretically vacated by the time Oswald arrived in New Orleans--the group was no longer paying rent--CRC members continued to use the office throughout the entire summer of Oswald's stay in New Orleans, throughout all of his FPCC activities.³²

Was Oswald again manifesting a penchant to confront the enemy, as with his visit to Carlos Bringuier's store; or was the real Lee Harvey Oswald right at home in the anti-Castro enclave that was 544 Camp Street? If pro-Castroite Oswald was looking for unfriendly turf, he could not have done better than Camp Street. The area was a veritable Disneyland of anti-Castroism. The New Orleans offices of the FBI and the CIA were nearby. In addition to the CRC and Banister's offices, there was the Reily Coffee Company located around the corner. William Reily, the company's owner, was a patron of the anti-Castro Free Cuba Committee.³³ The latter was a fund-raising group for the Cuban Revolutionary Council (CRC) located at 544 Camp Street.³⁴

The Reily Coffee Company is notable for another reason: it employed Lee Harvey Oswald shortly after he arrived in New Orleans.³⁵ He greased the coffee machines. Oswald's first, public pro-Castro activity, passing out literature near the

U.S.S. wasp, occurred in mid June while he was still employed at Reily.

Guy Banister died, reportedly from a heart attack, seven months after the assassination. He was never officially questioned about Oswald or the assassination. His former secretary, Delphine Roberts, said that her boss had access to a large amount of money in 1963: she believed that he received money from the CIA.³⁶ She remembers that a variety of anti-Castro types visited Banister's office.³⁷ One was Sergio Arcacha Smith, a prominent figure in the CRC. Smith told a friend that Camp Street was a "Grand Central Station" for exiles.³⁸ He also claimed privately that he was controlled by the CIA.³⁹ Another CRC member, Frank Bartes, was an associate of Carlos Bringuier and had witnessed Oswald's appearance in court after the street scuffle.⁴⁰

The Camp Street locale was not only a hotbed of anti-Castroism but also, consequently, of hatred toward President Kennedy. Cuban exiles and many of their CIA sponsors felt betrayed by the President. After approving the April 15, 1961 invasion of Cuba by the Agency's exile army, Kennedy had cancelled an air strike by U.S. planes, fearing the diplomatic and military consequences of overt U.S. involvement. The strike had been designed to knock out Castro's planes and tanks before the invaders hit the beaches. Pinned down in salt marshes without effective air cover, the exiles were defeated, incurring heavy casualties. Several hundred were taken prisoner. The reaction against Kennedy was exceedingly bitter and long lasting.

--Mario Kohly, whose father claimed to be Cuba's President in exile said that Kennedy was "a traitor" and "a communist."⁴¹

--In October 1963 at a Dallas meeting, a surviving Bay of Pigs veteran lashed out at Kennedy. "Get him out! ... I wouldn't even call him President. He stinks!

"We are waiting for Kennedy the 22nd [November], buddy. We are going to see him, in one way or the other. We're going to give him the works when he gets in Dallas."⁴²

--In April 1963 a flyer circulated within the exile community in Miami said, "Only through one development will you Cuban patriots ever live again in your homeland as free men.... [Only] if an inspired Act of God should place in the White House within weeks a Texan known to be a friend of all Latin Americans."⁴³

A list of index cards obtained from Banister's office files by New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison provides some insight into the nature of Banister's operations.⁴⁴ Garrison did not obtain the files themselves, only the titles and classification numbers:

| | |
|-----------------------------------------|-------|
| American Central Intelligence Agency | 20-10 |
| Ammunition and Arms | 32-1 |
| Anti-Soviet Underground | 25-1 |
| B-70 Manned Bomber Force | 15-16 |
| Civil Rights Program of JFK | 8-41 |
| Dismantling of Ballistic Missile System | 15-16 |
| Dismantling of Defenses, U.S. | 15-16 |

| | |
|--------------------------------------------|-------|
| Fair Play For Cuba Committee | 23-7 |
| International Trade Mart | 23-14 |
| Italy, U.S. Bases Dismantled in General | |
| Assembly of the United Nations | 15-16 |
| Latin America | 23-1 |
| Missile Bases Dismantled--Turkey and Italy | 15-16 |

Banister's secretary also claims to have seen Oswald visit Banister at Camp Street⁴⁵ Her daughter, who used a room above Banister's office as a photo studio, claims that she too saw Oswald visiting Banister.⁴⁶

A notebook found on Oswald by the Dallas police the day of the assassination contained some mysterious addresses. Listed on the same page as Carlos Bringuier (the anti-Castro Cuban who was involved in the street scuffle with Oswald) were three addresses with no names attached: 117 Camp, 107 Decatur, 1032 Canal.⁴⁷ At first glance the listings seem to be nonsensical: 117 Camp was the address of a dress shop, 107 Decatur did not exist. But by juggling the numbers, assassinologist Harold Weisberg and others found that two of the listings were significant.⁴⁸

107 Camp was the address of one Ronnie Caire, a prominent anti-Castro^{ive} and a leader of the Free Cuba Committee (the group patronized by Oswald's employer, William Reily).⁴⁹ 117 Decatur was the address of Orest Pena, a prominent Cuban exile and anti-Castroite.⁵⁰ The significance of the Canal-Street listing remains unknown.

The scrambled addresses could have been the product of careless writing or a defective memory (the latter of which

Oswald was not known for); or they could have been a crude form of coding. In any case, they are consistent with Oswald's entire New Orleans experience: behind a facade of behavior that seems to be the product of pro-Castro sentiments lies a pattern of linkages with anti-Castro groups and individuals directly or indirectly involved with the Central Intelligence Agency.

Again, the CIA's failure to monitor Oswald--or, at minimum, to generate file data on him--is nearly impossible to imagine from the perspective that he was a Russian defector engaging in pro-Castro activism. But it is easily explained by his working for the Agency. The CIA's extensive network of spies within the Cuban political sphere had as one of its prime targets the FPCC, yet the Agency claims never to have noticed Oswald. So catholic was CIA spying that Cuban exiles spied on their neighbors and reported to the Agency. As one Cuban described it: "As far as I know they haven't discovered a single Castro spy here, but they made many detailed reports, including gossip, about personal lives of prominent Cubans, if anything usurping the functions of the FBI."⁵¹ Yet, when a potential left-wing spy walked right into the nerve center of anti-Castroism in New Orleans and tried to palm himself off as an anti-Castro activist, the network supposedly missed him completely. It is not as if Oswald didn't give the Agency a fair chance: he was extremely public in his pro-Castro activities and went out of his way to be noticed by the media. One can almost imagine former CIA Director William Colby saying, "We thought Army Intelligence or the FBI would take care of it."

Prior to the assassination, Carlos Bringuier put out a "press

relief"

~~release~~ and an "open letter" to the exile community. These items could well have been sent to intelligence agencies or officers as well. The missives sought to call attention to Oswald and his activities.⁵² This markedly increased the likelihood of his coming to CIA attention as a red menace or potential mole. Yet, he allegedly remained a domestic-political-unknown to the Agency.

The CIA never seemed to be able to gather data on Lee Harvey Oswald when he passed through their nets, whether in New Orleans or, as we will see, in Mexico. Yet Agency-linked persons and organizations were always around him--from Moscow to New Orleans to Dallas.

It is not as if the CIA had no apparatus in New Orleans. ~~It~~ is now known that the Agency's operational presence there in 1963 was an extensive one. In order to administer to its array of Cuban-exile groups and activities, as well as to monitor international shipping in the port of New Orleans, the CIA established a very large domestic station--one of the key stations in the country.⁵³ A distinguished New Orleans attorney is believed to have served as a station chief in the early 1960s. His name has never been publicly revealed nor (to the author's knowledge) has he ever been questioned by any official investigation.⁵⁴ A 1967 CIA memo obtained by the author under the Freedom of Information Act states that in that year the Agency had twenty-six employees in New Orleans.⁵⁵ In 1976 the Senate Intelligence Committee discovered that as far back as 1957 the Agency's New Orleans station was running its own mail-intercept program, Project SETTER, apparently with no approval

from any executive or legislative oversight bodies.⁵⁶

~~In conclusion~~

~~Thus,~~¹ Oswald's ostensible pro-Castro involvements were firmly enmeshed in the city's anti-Castro subculture. Moreover, as will soon be described, the nature and substance of his activities fit nicely, if not perfectly, with the role of agent-provocateur.

Chapter 4

The Case of the Mohair Marauder

"He oughta be shot!" --David Ferrie referring to President John F. Kennedy after the Bay of Pigs invasion

It is only fitting that Lee Harvey Oswald's clandestine tableau has in it at least one character colorful enough to have sprung from a John LeCarré spy novel. His name is David Ferrie, and his strange career rivals anything in fiction.¹ Rejected by two seminaries because of behavioral problems, Ferrie founded his own church, the Orthodox Old Catholic Church of North America, and appointed himself Bishop. A master hypnotist who studied psychology and philosophy as well as religion, the library of his apartment was stuffed with 3,000 volumes.² He became a senior pilot with Eastern Airlines, but his ~~on~~-the-job homosexual activities caused him to be fired. Ferrie lost not only his airline pilot's job and his two chances to become a Catholic priest, but all of his hair as well. He was hairless from head to toe.

Ferrie dabbled in cancer research, an interest which led him to keep hundreds of mice in his apartment. He reportedly built two miniature submarines in hopes of attacking Havana Harbor. He developed ties to organized crime and, at the time of the

assassination, was employed by an attorney who worked for New Orleans crime boss Carlos Marcello. The day President Kennedy was killed, Ferrie was in a federal courtroom in New Orleans watching as Marcello was being cleared of charges that had resulted in his temporary deportation.³ Ferrie's precise relationship with Marcello is not known, but he may have piloted him on occasion.⁴

Physically, Ferrie was an unforgettable figure. He rejected a commercial hairpiece in favor of a homemade device: a reddish wig cut out of mohair, glued to his scalp with plastic cement. This was accompanied by outsized "eyebrows" which were drawn on with greasepaint.⁵ These adornments looked eminently unnatural. Coupled with his slim, intense visage and small, beady eyes, they created an image that most people found difficult to forget--a cross between a sad clown and a heavy from a grade-C horror flick.

Ferrie did have friends. He worked sporadically as an investigator for Guy Banister, whose Camp Street "detective agency" was occasionally employed by crime boss Marcello.⁶ Organized crime patronized a variety of anti-Castro endeavors and certain of its bosses were in league with the CIA in plots to assassinate Castro.

Banister and Ferrie were close associates. In 1961, when the forty-three-year-old Ferrie was in the process of being fired by Eastern Airlines, Banister flew to Miami to appear on Ferrie's behalf at his dismissal hearing.⁷ Banister's secretary, Delphine Roberts, asserts that Ferrie was one of Banister's "agents." He worked out of a private office located behind Banister's. She

was told that Ferrie did "private work."⁸

The two men were very compatible politically: Ferrie, like Banister, was a right-wing zealot. He was as intense about his superpatriotism as he was about his appearance, with results only slightly less grotesque. Ferrie once wrote to the United States Air Force: "There is nothing I would enjoy better than blowing the hell out of every damn Russian, Communist, Red, or what-have-you.... Between my friends and I we can cook up a crew that can really blow them to hell.... I want to train killers, however bad that sounds. It is what we need."⁹

Ordinarily such self-advertisements might lead to offers of psychoanalysis rather than job offers. But Guy Banister's was not the only agency to hire the weird-looking chap with the virulently anti-communist views. The organization^{that} did not shrink from hiring men "of the worst moral character," as Allen Dulles admitted, found a place for Ferrie's high-flying militaristic fantasies.

Ferrie's work for the CIA involved, among other things, his considerable skills as a pilot. There are reports that in 1961, before the Bay of Pigs invasion, he flew missions to Cuba, sometimes conducting bombing raids, sometimes executing bravado landings in which he rescued anti-Castro commandoes.¹⁰ In the summer of 1963, according to a number of witnesses, Ferrie also served as an instructor at the Cuban-exile training camp outside New Orleans where recruits were taught guerrilla warfare techniques to be used against Castro.¹¹ This camp was raided by federal agents seeking to enforce President Kennedy's order

forbidding anti-Castro military activities on U.S. soil.¹²

Banister's secretary told journalist Anthony Summers that she believed Ferrie's work to be CIA connected rather than FBI connected.¹³ Besides Banister, Ferrie's anti-Castro, CIA-linked associates included Sergio Arcacha Smith, the leader of the Cuban Revolutionary Council (CRC) who had an office at 544 Camp Street at the same time Oswald used this address on his pamphlets. Ferrie approached Arcacha Smith and offered to train exiles for the invasion of Cuba.¹⁴ Smith helped Ferrie get out of jail after being arrested for homosexual assault.¹⁵

Former CIA man Victor Marchetti, who served as executive assistant to the deputy director, claims to have observed that then CIA Director Richard Helms and other senior Agency officers became disturbed when Ferrie's name was linked to the President's assassination by New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison in 1967. Marchetti asked a CIA colleague about Ferrie and was told that he had worked for the Agency as a contract agent in the early 1960s and was involved in some of the Cuban operations.¹⁶ Marchetti now believes that Ferrie was "involved in some rather nefarious activities" as a contract agent.¹⁷

In 1967 the Justice Department posed a series of questions to the CIA regarding allegations stemming from Garrison's investigation. A Deputy Assistant Attorney General in the Justice Department's Criminal Division asked the Agency in writing: "What was the exact relationship between CIA and David Ferrie? What was the extent of CIA's file on him before the assassination?" The Agency's terse reply was, "There was no relationship, and there was no file before the assassination."¹⁸

In 1963 Ferrie seems to have been a suspect in the President's murder, because of his links to Oswald and his anti-Kennedyism (to be described shortly). He was taken in for questioning by the FBI but was released.¹⁹ Even his telephone records provided a possibly coincidental but intriguing tidbit. Two months before the assassination he made a call to a Chicago apartment building. It has not been established whom he talked to, but the building was the residence of one Jean West. The night before the assassination West was staying at the Cabana Motel in Dallas with Lawrence Meyers, a friend of Jack Ruby. Ruby visited Meyers at the Cabana around midnight: twelve hours before the President's assassination.²⁰

An FBI document indicates that ^{Ferrie} ~~he~~ admitted to being publicly and privately critical of President Kennedy's withholding of U.S. air support during the Bay of Pigs invasion. In one instance, ^{he} ~~Ferrie~~ gave a speech to a men's civics club in New Orleans after the Bay of Pigs debacle. He had to be removed from the podium by his hosts when he launched into an offensive verbal attack on President Kennedy.²¹ Ferrie further admitted to using expressions such as, "He ought ^a ~~to~~ be shot," in reference to the President.²² The FBI decided that Ferrie did not mean that ^{is} ~~that~~ literally.²³

Although he was in federal court in New Orleans at the time of the assassination, his strange and ~~un~~explained movements immediately afterward have aroused suspicion among many analysts. The night of Nov. 22, 1963 Ferrie and two companions left New Orleans in the midst of a torrential rainstorm. They drove all

night (a four hundred mile drive) and arrived in Houston around 5:00 a.m. Ferrie gave the FBI an interesting assortment of reasons concerning why he went to Texas. It was to "merely relax."²⁴ He and his friends wanted to do some "goose hunting," he said.²⁵ Downtown Houston, where Ferrie and friends checked into a hotel, is not renowned as a mecca for goose hunters. Perhaps that's why Ferrie was smart enough not to bring along any guns.²⁶ The trip did not appear to be particularly relaxing either: a gas station attendant who waited on the trio on November 24 said that they seemed to be "in somewhat of a hurry."²⁷ They did stop long enough to watch television at the gas station: the news was of Oswald's murder at the hands of Jack Ruby.²⁸

The day after the assassination Ferrie et al drove to a skating rink near Galveston. Naturally, they didn't skate. Ferrie told the FBI that he had been "considering for some time the feasibility and possibility of opening up an ice skating rink in New Orleans," and that this accounted for his visit to the rink.²⁹ Chuck Rolland, the proprietor of the Winterland Skating Rink, remembers differently. He told the Bureau that a man introducing himself as "Ferris" or "Ferry" asked for the skating schedule and indicated that he had come from out of town to do some skating.³⁰ Rolland said Ferrie mentioned nothing about equipping or opening a rink.

Skating and goose hunting aside, one of the main activities of the trip seems to have been telephoning. There were four calls placed from Ferrie's Houston hotel room to New Orleans, as well as one local call.³¹ At another stop a call was made to

Alexandria, Louisiana (number unknown).³² At the skating rink, Ferrie spent the entire two hours hanging around the pay telephone. When it rang, he answered; after talking, he departed the rink with his two companions.³³

By far the most significant of Ferrie's activities and associations are those involving Lee Harvey Oswald. In 1955 Ferrie was already a pilot of some renown. He led the New Orleans unit of the Civil Air Patrol (CAP). The local CAP unit became a forum for his homosexual activities. There were reports of homosexual orgies involving the young cadets, of nude gambling at Ferrie's residence, of free-flowing liquor.³⁴ Eventually he lost his CAP command.³⁵

In 1955, while Ferrie led New Orleans CAP, Lee Harvey Oswald joined. Oswald was living in the city with his mother.³⁶ House Assassinations Committee investigators found six witnesses whose statements confirmed that Oswald was in Ferrie's CAP unit.³⁷ One witness believed Oswald had attended at least one of Ferrie's parties.³⁸

The House Committee noted that homosexuality and liquor aside, Ferrie seemed to exert "tremendous influence" on the air cadets who were his pupils.³⁹ The Committee discovered that Ferrie "urged several boys to join the armed forces." At age sixteen, immediately following his experience in Ferrie's CAP unit, Oswald tried to enlist in the Marines.⁴⁰ He was so anxious to join that he lied about his age. When he was rejected by the Corps for being under age, he began studying his older brother's Marine Corps manual until he "knew it by heart."⁴¹ He succeeded

in joining the Marines shortly after his seventeenth birthday.

One might think this would be the end of any relationship between Ferrie and Oswald, since Ferrie went on to become an even more extreme right-wing militarist and Oswald ostensibly became a Russophile, a Marxist, a traitor to his country, and a supporter of Castro. But Oswald was again in Ferrie's company after returning from Russia, and immediately after he appeared to become a pro-Castro activist. Despite Ferrie's announced desire to "blow the hell out of every damn Russian, Communist, or Red," which might well have included Oswald and his wife Marina, the two men must have found a common ground. They were seen together by a variety of witnesses.

Guy Banister's secretary claims that Ferrie not only met Oswald at 544 Camp Street but, on at least one occasion, took him to the anti-Castro, guerrilla-warfare training camp on the outskirts of New Orleans where Ferrie was alleged to have been an instructor.⁴² One friend of Ferrie's, Dante Marachini, worked at Reily Coffee while Oswald worked there. Marachini was hired on the same day as Oswald.⁴³

Solid evidence of a post-defection association between Oswald and Ferrie stems from an incident that took place in Clinton, Louisiana. It occurred in late August or early September of 1963--at the end of Oswald's FPCC summer in New Orleans and only three months before the President's murder. The incident was not known to the Warren Commission. It was discovered by the Garrison investigation in 1967 and confirmed by the House Assassinations Committee in 1978.

The Clinton event unfolded as follows.⁴⁴ The summer of 1963

was dominated by political activism and racial tension. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had proclaimed it "civil rights summer." Political mobilization and voter-registration drives were underway all across the deep South. President Kennedy had invited black civil rights leaders to the White House and had committed his administration to the passage of a civil rights bill.

Clinton, Louisiana, then a small town of about fifteen hundred people located a hundred miles north of New Orleans, was caught up in the political swirl. There had been several arrests of blacks who were engaged in civil rights activities. The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) was conducting a voter-registration drive among local blacks. On the day of the incident there was a long line of blacks waiting to register to vote. Police watched anxiously for anything that might spark violence in racially tense Clinton. According to the composite accounts of the Clinton witnesses--chief among them being two CORE organizers, the mayor, the town marshal, and the registrar of voters--the incident began when a black Cadillac (conspicuous by its appearance in poor, rural Clinton) arrived in town during the morning. It parked near the registrar of voters' office. There were three men in the vehicle. One of them, a slim, young white man, got out of the car and stepped into the long, slow-moving line of blacks waiting to register. The young man, conspicuous by his color, stood in line for several hours. After the assassination the Clinton witnesses were positive that it was Lee Harvey Oswald.

Registrar of voters Henry Palmer dealt with Oswald personally. After spending hours in line, Oswald finally entered the registrar's office. Palmer asked the stranger for identification. The man produced a Navy ID card bearing the name Lee H. Oswald. According to Palmer, Oswald claimed that he was seeking work at a nearby state hospital in order to enhance his eligibility to become a registered voter in Clinton. Palmer thought it was odd that a white stranger was trying to register in the midst of a voter-registration drive centering on indigent blacks. He told Oswald that he was not eligible because he had not lived in town long enough. Oswald thanked Palmer and left. It was indeed odd.

While Oswald was waiting in line to see the registrar, the black Cadillac stayed parked on the street. The CORE activists worried that the mysterious vehicle might harbor men who had come to disrupt the registration drive. A CORE worker asked the town marshal, John Manchester, to check out the car. He had already been eyeing the Cadillac, and he complied with the request. The marshal approached the vehicle and questioned the man behind the wheel long enough to conclude that the strangers presented no threat to local peace. The Cadillac stayed well into the afternoon as its occupants continued to observe civil rights activities.

The marshal and other witnesses described the driver as a big man with grey hair and a ruddy complexion. Several Clinton witnesses identified the man as Clay Shaw, the New Orleans businessman who was unsuccessfully prosecuted for conspiracy to assassinate the President by District Attorney Jim Garrison in

1969. The witnesses made this identification at the 1969 trial and to the House Assassinations Committee a decade later. Still, the possibility that it was Guy Banister cannot be ruled out. In their photographs, Banister and Shaw are not strikingly dissimilar in general appearance. Neither Garrison nor the Committee has indicated that the witnesses were shown photos of Banister. His presence in Clinton would certainly be in keeping with the Camp-Street interconnections among Oswald, Ferrie and himself and also with one of the interests reflected in Banister's files. The reader will recall that among an array of file categories dealing mostly with missiles, bombers, and national security was the title "Civil Rights Program of JFK."

The third man, the passenger in the Cadillac, was more easily identifiable than the driver. In fact, he was downright unforgettable. According to the CORE chairman, his most salient features were his hair and eyebrows. "They didn't seem real."⁴⁵ The CORE chairman had no trouble identifying the bizarre stranger as David Ferrie.

It is a provocative incident: the mohair marauder and the pinko Marine together in rural Louisiana only months before the assassination. The House Assassinations Committee (HSCA) found the Clinton witnesses very credible and believed that the incident did occur as they described. Moreover, Oswald is remembered by other witnesses beyond the scene of the registration drive.

The town barber in Jackson, Louisiana, another small town near Clinton, remembered Oswald. The appearance of strangers was

a rare event in these thinly populated, rural environs. The barber recalled that Oswald asked for advice about how to get a job as an electrician at the local hospital (Oswald had told the registrar in Clinton that he was seeking work at the hospital). The friendly barber sent Oswald to see a local politician who might help in obtaining a job at the hospital. Louisiana State Representative Morgan Reeves confirmed that Oswald did visit him. Two people at the hospital also remembered Oswald: he appeared there and actually applied for work. All of this occurred before he tried to register to vote.

Like much in Oswald's life, these activities seem inexplicably strange, perhaps even nonsensical. If we dispense with the explanation that he had a sudden and compelling urge to be a hospital electrician in rural Louisiana and that his old CAP buddy David Ferrie, and some other guy, drove upstate to help Lee settle in, then what was he doing? The House Assassinations Committee treated the Clinton incident as significant only in that it linked Oswald to Ferrie. But the Committee could not make any sense of the event itself. Implicitly, the HSCA leaves us hanging with the notion that Clinton was yet another serendipitous meander by a confused left-wing ideologue who had a curiosity about civil-rights politics.

Professor James W. Clarke offers another explanation of Oswald's association with Ferrie, an explanation grounded on the flawed assumption that Oswald was genuinely pro-Castro. "Thus," says Clarke, "Oswald was probably in contact with Ferrie in an attempt to obtain information on anti-Castro activities that he hoped to relay to the Castro government."⁴⁶

Some researchers who suspect that Clinton may have had a domestic-intelligence dimension to it point to the FBI's infamous COINTELPRO program.⁴⁷ COINTELPRO was a massive counterintelligence effort conducted by the Bureau against radical and left-wing groups in America. Although the FBI was the organization with the broadest official mandate for domestic spying and while COINTELPRO is perhaps the most pervasive and well known project of that era, there are problems in leaping to the conclusion that Oswald might have been working for the Bureau. Guy Banister--if it was he in Clinton--once was an FBI agent. But his Camp Street operation was firmly enmeshed in anti-Castro activities that were CIA-related, not Bureau. There has never been any suggestion that Ferrie worked for the FBI, only the CIA. Moreover, investigators have failed to notice that the Clinton incident related very logically to a lesser known involvement in domestic spying in the early 1960s--that of the CIA.

The Agency's 1947 charter forbade domestic spying; but, from its very inception, the CIA did spy inside the U.S.⁴⁸ Sometimes it negotiated agreements with the FBI for strictly limited domestic activities; sometimes, as in the case of its Cuban-exile networks, the Agency simply muscled into the Bureau's turf and expanded domestic spying without any specific authorization from Congress and in spite of its charter. The justification for a limited domestic role for the Agency was based on the argument that the CIA could not end its pursuit of foreign agents and of matters relating to foreign intelligence simply because the trail

led back to the United States (except, of course, in Oswald's case). With this as an entrée the CIA developed an appetite for domestic spying that was voracious if not insatiable, expanding into surveillance and covert action activities that had little or no connection with international spying. This is precisely why the CIA and FBI were such bitter rivals. It is why the most ardent watchdog of the CIA's domestic role was not Congressional oversight committees or the White House but J. Edgar Hoover, whose bulldog countenance was perfect for the role.⁴⁹

The CIA's domestic activities of the early 60s included organizing consumer boycotts against U.S. firms that traded with Castro and organizing demonstrations in Washington outside the foreign embassies of governments who supported Cuba.⁵⁰ But what of Clinton and CORE? No Cuban connection there.

The CIA steadily increased its domestic spying throughout the early 1960s. This peaked with operation CHAOS, which was formally constituted in 1967 and ended in 1975.⁵¹ It was a massive effort to monitor and penetrate left-wing or radical organizations such as the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). CHAOS also included a mail-opening program in which the Agency diverted ~~and checked~~ twenty-eight million pieces of mail belonging to U.S. citizens and organizations.⁵² The Watch List of targets for mail opening included organizations as tame as the American Friends Service Committee and individuals such as writers Edward Albee and John Steinbeck. The Agency opened CHAOS files on over seven thousand Americans.⁵³

Long before CHAOS was formalized as a project in 1967, the CIA was gradually increasing its domestic spying toward the

massive levels reached in late 1960s and early 1970s. Networks of spies are built fairly slowly, whether in the domestic or foreign arena. Getting them in place ("building assets" as it is called in clandestine parlance) takes time, especially for an operation of the magnitude of CHAOS

In 1967 the CIA formalized project MERRIMAC.⁵⁴ Its stated purpose was to provide advance warning of demonstrations by left-wing or anti-war groups--specifically, only those demonstrations that might "threaten" CIA personnel and facilities in Washington, D.C. While there were protests which at times threatened to block traffic or shut down certain government agencies, the CIA had not been subjected to them (perhaps one of the advantages of being located on a 125 acre tract out in the Langley, Virginia woods). MERRIMAC's narrow mandate to gather intelligence about forthcoming disruptions to CIA headquarters was used as an excuse to infiltrate the left-wing/liberal political arena.

In all probability MERRIMAC was created as a formally approved project not to begin legitimate domestic, surveillance activities but, rather, to serve as a cover for illegitimate activities some of which pre-dated the project itself. The Agency used MERRIMAC as an excuse for spying having nothing to do with possible demonstrations at Langley. One of the project's directors admitted, with considerable understatement, "I think it started out legitimately concerned with the physical security in installations...it just kind of grew into areas and perhaps it shouldn't have."⁵⁵

Under the guise of MERRIMAC the CIA justified its

infiltration of no less than ten political organizations, most of which never even considered trying to demonstrate against the CIA or harass its employees. Agency operatives shadowed the leaders of target groups, photographed the faces and license numbers of demonstrators, reported on the "attitudes" of group members and on their relationships with the group--even on their sources of income.⁵⁶

The ten groups targeted for surveillance and infiltration were not, by and large, coteries of bomb-chucking radicals. Four were targeted right away (in February 1967) as soon as MERRIMAC opened up shop.⁵⁷ The Agency claimed that these four were "bellwethers."⁵⁸ Bellwethers of what was not clear: ostensibly, of efforts to disrupt the Agency. The four were, the Women's Strike for Peace, the Washington Peace Center, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee(SNCC), and CORE, whose civil rights activities never did include demonstrating against the CIA.

MERRIMAC's formal targeting of CORE occurred three and a half years after the Clinton incident. But it establishes the CIA's special interest in CORE. From the rest of what we know about the Agency's domestic operations, this interest surely did not start with MERRIMAC. In sum, MERRIMAC can be logically viewed as a device by which the Agency could justify and further expand its ongoing domestic spying under the caché of self-protection.

Former CIA administrator Victor Marchetti has described the many tactics "used by the CIA to cover its tracks" in domestic spying--deceptions designed to conceal its "numerous activities

inside the United States."⁵⁹ Marchetti points to CIA training of local police (in the late 1950s and early 1960s) as a typical example of Agency duplicity in domestic operations. The Agency first tried to cover up its training of police, then chose to mislead the public, the press, and Congress about the scope and nature of its involvements. The Agency tried to use a provision of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 as legitimizing its domestic-police-training program. But this provision, which encouraged federal law-enforcement agencies to assist local police, was clearly inapplicable to the CIA because it was superseded by the Agency's charter which forbade any "police" or "internal security" functions. Moreover, the CIA had been conducting police training long before the anti-crime bill was passed in June of 1968.⁶⁰ In part, the Agency was forced to cover up this linkage in order to keep the FBI at bay: the Bureau maintained special facilities for police training and had a legal authorization for such activity.

From this perspective, the Clinton incident need not be viewed as FBI-related, as it has been by many analysts who have not understood the breadth of the CIA's domestic activities. A description of the Agency's modus operandi in MERRIMAC is provided by the Rockefeller Commission's investigation into CIA domestic spying.

They were instructed to mingle with others at demonstrations and meetings open to the public, to listen for information and pick up literature...to attend meetings of the organization, to show interest in their purpose, and

to make modest financial contributions.... They were directed to report on how many persons attended the meetings or demonstrations, what they said and what activities were conducted or planned.⁶¹

The mind reels at the vision of the U.S.'s premier foreign-espionage Agency dispatching its operatives to monitor poor blacks and a few white organizers involved in voter registration in rural Louisiana. It would sound like the paranoid speculations of those who see CIA agents behind every bush if it were not for the fact that CORE was targeted as a potential threat to the Agency.

The Agency itself seemed almost paranoid about the direction of black politics in the early 1960s. In 1978 the Center for National Security Studies in Washington, D.C. obtained, through the Freedom of Information Act, internal CIA memoranda revealing the extent of the Agency's domestic spying on blacks. The documents show that the CIA infiltrated black political groups in the D.C. area, took photographs of a Malcolm X Day rally, infiltrated the Resurrection City encampment in 1968, and had informants inside the D.C. school system to spy on black youths.⁶² One informer, who was identified only as "a teacher and a department head," warned the Agency in 1969 that black students were becoming increasingly militant and that some carried weapons. The CIA also maintained a minute-by-minute log of the riots that took place following the April 1968 assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. One Agency memo admits that at the time of these surveillance activities, black

militant groups posed no threat to CIA property or personnel.⁶³

A CIA memo obtained by the Washington Post in 1978 clearly manifests the Agency's fears concerning black power groups.⁶⁴ The CIA allegedly found that some of these groups had hostile attitudes toward it. It worried that this posed "a new threat" to its operations abroad--although how remains unclear--and a threat to its "image in the United States." Recognizing that threats to image did not exactly fall under project MERRIMAC's legal mandate of threats to property or personnel, the Agency memo cynically notes that it is the latter threats "which must be our official concern."

The Clinton incident is often dismissed as a harmless manifestation of Oswald's catholic curiosity about leftist causes, as further indication of the flightiness of his political involvements. The Clinton activities all occurred within forty-eight hours and seemed to be disconnected from Oswald's other involvements. Moreover, he was not an electrician; he did not move to Clinton, etc. From the perspective of domestic spying a la MERRIMAC, some of what Oswald and his associates did does make sense as a one-shot intelligence-gathering foray--observing CORE's activities, actually testing out the registration process. As for the other activities--the job hunting, the intimations of staying around Clinton--they could have been part of the forty-eight hour probe of CORE or they could have been something more. It has always been assumed that Oswald never intended to do anything further in Clinton or anything more vis-a-vis CORE. Perhaps not. But the mistaken assumption is that the proof of this lies in the fact that he never followed up on anything.

There is another possibility. When the Clinton incident occurred (in late August to early September of 1963) Oswald's last public FPCC ritual had been performed: his role as a pro-Castro activist was over. He may have been in the process of getting into another role, to be played out in Clinton and elsewhere--another domestic spying assignment. But his plans changed. Instead of going back to Clinton, or getting closer to CORE somewhere else, or continuing in his old role as FPCC activist, he departed for Mexico within weeks after Clinton. His assignment had apparently been changed.

Oswald went to Mexico City in late September. There, as will later be described, some of the most important espionage activity relating to his relationship to the President's assassination took place. What may have prevented further surveillance activities relating to Clinton or CORE was that Oswald was suddenly being moved back to Dallas via Mexico, along the trail that would lead to the Texas School Book Depository on November 22nd.

Ferrie's exact association with Oswald remains shadowy. Of course, he denied any association. When FBI agents showed him pictures of Oswald four days after the assassination, he said that the profile view of Oswald had "a very vague familiarity," but the full-face and full-length photos were not familiar.⁶⁵ In a personally-typed statement submitted to the FBI two and a half weeks after the assassination, Ferrie tiptoed around his links to Oswald as if he were an apprentice lawyer who had not quite mastered the syntax of legal newspeak.

In 1955, or thereabouts, I assisted, for a time, the Moisant Squadron of Civil Air Patrol, at Moisant Airport, New Orleans, Louisiana, though I cannot establish through personal records or recollection the exact dates of this connection. I have no records, or recollection, to my knowledge, to show that LEE HARVEY OSWALD was, or was not, a member of this particular unit of the Civil Air Patrol. To my best knowledge and belief I do not know LEE HARVEY OSWALD, and have no personal recollection of ever having met him. If I did ever meet him it was very casual and to my best recollection have definitely not seen him in recent years.⁶⁶

Two witnesses asserted that Ferrie seemed to be in a state of panic immediately following the assassination, about--of all things--a library card. One of Oswald's former neighbors in New Orleans told the House Assassinations Committee that Ferrie visited her after the President's murder and inquired about Oswald's library card.⁶⁷ A second panicked inquiry about the card was reported by Oswald's former landlady in New Orleans, who stated that Ferrie visited her within hours of the assassination (just before he set off to Texas to hunt and ice skate).⁶⁸

Why the concern? According to official records, no library card of any kind was found on Oswald when he was arrested in Dallas. But one of Ferrie's associates claimed that while Ferrie was on his Texas sojourn, Ferrie's lawyer, G. Wray Gill, showed up at his client's home and reportedly remarked, "when Lee Harvey Oswald was arrested by the Dallas police, Oswald was carrying a