

Death Surprises

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By BOB BRINK

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Edward Epstein of New York got something for his book on Lee Harvey Oswald that he hadn't bargained on.

Part of the book was to be devoted to a discussion of George de Mohrenschildt, a French professor at a Dallas college who once was a friend of the Oswalds and their child.

Epstein, author of several other books, wasn't sure how much of the book on the John F. Kennedy assassin would be about de Mohrenschildt, and still isn't. But after events Tuesday, that segment will take on a new twist.

For the 65-year-old geologist-turned-professor blew the back of his head off with a shotgun only one-and-one-half hours after a meeting with Epstein.

Epstein said he was in Palm Beach for a four-day series of interviews with de

Mohrenschildt. They met in Epstein's room in The Breakers in morning and afternoon sessions Monday, and on Tuesday until 1 p.m., when they broke for lunch.

At that time, Epstein said, "Everything was very friendly. The rest — he killed himself — I don't know anything about that."

De Mohrenschildt gave no hint that he would kill himself, the author said. "There was no indication in the world."

But when the professor didn't return for a resumption of the interview at the agreed time of 3 p.m., Epstein telephoned the home of Nancy Tilton in Manalapan, an oceanside community south of South Palm Beach. She is the sister of de Mohrenschildt's first wife, and "he's good friends with her," Epstein said.

"She said he had taken his own life."

That evening, Epstein was asked by investigating officers to meet with them in the Palm Beach County State Attorney's Office.

Oswald Book Author

"They just wanted to know what he was doing, and what was his state of mind . . ." said Epstein.

"I don't mean to be evasive," said he as he walked down a hall of the courthouse accompanied by a young woman friend and a Palm Beach County sheriff's detective. "It's just that they told me not to talk about it to anybody."

At the hotel almost two hours later, however, he had no objections to sitting down and discussing the day's events. But he declined to reveal what de Mohrenschildt had told him about Oswald, saying he had a policy not to discuss his books before they were finished.

Of de Mohrenschildt, Epstein said, "This man de Mohrenschildt is a very suspicious and mysterious man. He was cooperating, and we were trying to figure out certain things."

The Post learned that de Mohrenschildt be-

came exceedingly upset when he went to the home of Nancy Tilton after leaving Epstein Tuesday and learned that a House Assassinations Committee investigator had come for him minutes before. Minutes later, de Mohrenschildt found the shotgun and shot himself, authorities said.

Epstein said he knew nothing of the presence of the investigator, Galton Fonzi, in South Florida. But when the officer summoning him at The Breakers asked if he knew Fonzi, Epstein said, he remembered having read the investigator's name in a newspaper account.

Of the book he is writing, Epstein said, "It's a very big project and involves a lot of money. We've had an 18-month investigation." He said he got advance financing from Reader's Digest for the magazine's right to do a serialized account of the book before it is published in book form. He expects to finish it by the end of summer.