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Operation Overflight

Lee Oswald Linked To Downing of U-2

(First of a Series)

By FRANCIS GARY POWERS

In September of 1957 a 17-year-old Marine Corps private was assigned to Marine Air Control Squadron No. 1 (MACS-1) based at Atsugi, Japan.

MACS-1 was a radar unit whose duties included scouting for incoming foreign aircraft. Its equipment included height-finding radar. The private, a trained radar operator, had access to this equipment.

He remained in Japan until November 1958, at which time he was returned to the United States and assigned to Marine Air Control Squadron No. 9 (MACS-9) at the Marine Corps Air Station at El Toro, Calif.

El Toro was not a U-2 base, but U-2s frequently flew over this portion of Southern California. At El Toro he had access not only to radar and radio codes but also to the new MPS 16 height-finding radar gear.

'Hardship Discharge'

In September of 1959 he obtained a "hardship discharge" from the U.S. Marine Corps. The following months he defected to the Soviet Union.

On Oct. 31, he appeared in the American Embassy in Moscow to state his intention of renouncing his U.S. citizenship. According to Richard E. Snyder, the Second Secretary and senior consular official, and John A. McVickar, Snyder's as-

sistant, who was also present, during the course of the conversation he mentioned that he had already offered to tell the Russians everything he knew about the Marine Corps and his specialty, radar operation. He also intimated that he might know something of "special interest."

His name was Lee Harvey Oswald.

Six months later my U-2 was shot down.

Mentioned in Testimony

Oswald's familiarity with MPS 16 height-finding gear and radar and radio codes (the latter were changed following his defection) are mentioned in the testimony of John E. Donovan, a former first lieutenant assigned to the same El Toro radar unit as Oswald, on page 298 of Volume 8 of the Warren Commission Hearings.

According to Donovan, Oswald "had the access to the location of all bases in the West Coast area, all radio frequencies for all squadrons, all tactical call signs, and the relative strength of all squadrons, number and type of aircraft in a squadron, who was the commanding officer, the authentication code of entering and exiting the ADIZ, which stands for Air Defense Identification Zone. He knew the range of our radar. He knew the range of our radio. And he knew the

range of the surrounding units' radio and radar."

'Offered to Tell'

Oswald's conversation with Snyder is mentioned at least three times in the Report of the Warren Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy (page references are to The New York Times edition, published by McGraw-Hill, October 1964).

Page 618: "Oswald told him
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that he had already offered to tell a Soviet official what he had learned as a radar operator in the Marines."

Page 665: "Oswald stated to Snyder that he had voluntarily told Soviet officials that he would make known to them all information concerning the Marine Corps and his specialty therein, radar operation, as he possessed."

Page 369: "He stated that he had volunteered to give Soviet officials any information that he had concerning Marine Corps operations, and intimated that he might know something of special interest."

Tantalizing Lead

During the six months following the Oct. 31, 1959, Embassy meeting there were only two overflights of the USSR. The one which occurred on April 9, 1960, was uneventful. The one which followed, on May 1, 1960, wasn't.

Here the trail ends, except for one tantalizing lead, discovered during the research for this book.

Among the Warren Commission Documents in the National Archives in Washington, D.C. is one numbered 931, dated May 13, 1964, CIA National Security Classification Secret.

In response to an inquiry, Mark G. Eckhoff, director, Legislative, Judicial and Diplomatic Records Division, National Archives, in a letter dated Oct. 13, 1969, stated "Commission Document 931 is still classified and withheld from research."

The title of Document No. 931 is "Oswald's Access to Information about the U-2."

NEXT: Powers' connection with the C.I.A., and apprehension about the upcoming flight.

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