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ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT KENNEDY

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June 26, 1964

MEMORANDUM FOR THE COMMISSIONERS

FROM: J. LEE RANKIN

J.L.R.

Transmitted herewith is a copy of a memorandum dated June 24, 1964, concerning Yuri Ivanovich Nosenko which has been requested.

T O P S E C R E T

MEMORANDUM

June 24, 1964

TO: The Commission

FROM: William T. Coleman, Jr.,
W. David Slawson *WDS*

SUBJECT: Yuri Ivanovich Nosenko

The Commission has asked us to prepare a short memorandum outlining in what respects the information obtained from Nosenko confirms or contradicts information we have from other sources.

Nosenko's testimony to the FBI is the only information we have on what he knows about Lee Harvey Oswald. (Commission Documents No. 434 and 451.) Perhaps more useful information could be gained if we were to question Nosenko directly, but it is unlikely. Nosenko told the representative of the FBI who questioned him that he had given all the information on Oswald he possessed.

Most of what Nosenko told the FBI confirms what we already know from other sources and most of it does not involve important facts, with one extremely significant exception. This exception is Nosenko's statement that Lee Harvey Oswald was never trained or used as an agent of the Soviet Union for any purpose and that no contact with him was made, attempted or contemplated after he left the Soviet Union and returned to the United States. Nosenko's opinion on these points is especially valuable because, according to his own testimony at least, his position with the KGB was such that had there been any subversive relationship between the Soviet Union and Oswald, he would have known about it.

Nosenko's statement to the FBI confirms our information from other sources in the following respects:

1. Prior to Oswald's arrival in Russia in the fall of 1959 he had no contacts with agents of the Russian government or of the International Communist Party who were in turn in contact with the Russian government. (Our

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independent sources on this are extremely weak, however. We simply do not have much information on this particular subject.)

2. When Oswald arrived in the Soviet Union he was traveling on a temporary tourist visa but very quickly made known to the Russian authorities that he desired to remain permanently in the USSR and wanted to become a Soviet citizen. He made known his intention to his Intourist guide at the Hotel Berlin in Moscow. This Intourist guide was a KGB informer.

3. Oswald was advised through the Intourist interpreter that he would not be permitted to remain in Russia permanently and that he would therefore have to leave that country when his temporary visa expired.

4. Upon learning that his request to remain in Russia permanently had been denied, Oswald slashed his wrist in his room at the Hotel Berlin in an apparent attempt to commit suicide, was found by the Intourist interpreter when he failed to appear for an appointment that evening, and was immediately taken to a hospital in Moscow for treatment. This hospital was the Botkinskaya Hospital.

5. Oswald was questioned by doctors at the hospital and told them that he attempted suicide because he was not granted permission to remain in Russia.

6. Oswald was assigned to Minsk probably because it is above average for cleanliness and modern facilities, and would therefore create a good impression for him.

7. Oswald appeared at the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City and asked for a Soviet re-entry visa.

8. Nosenko was shown certain portions of our file on Oswald, including a section which stated that Oswald received a monthly subsidy from the Soviet Red Cross. On seeing this statement, Nosenko commented that it is normal practice in the Soviet Union to cause the Red Cross to make payments to emigres and defectors in order to assist them to enjoy a better standard of living than ordinary Soviet citizens engaged in similar occupations. (Nosenko also said that the subsidy Oswald received was probably the minimum.)

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given under such circumstances. This is news to us, although it is not inconsistent with other information we have.)

9. Oswald was in possession of a gun which was used to shoot rabbits while he was living in Minsk (Nosenko said he learned this upon reviewing Oswald's file after the assassination of President Kennedy when, under the circumstances, he took particular note of this fact.)

10. There is no KGB or GRU training school in the vicinity of Minsk.

11. All mail addressed to the American Embassy in Moscow, therefore, also including Lee Harvey Oswald's mail so addressed, is "reviewed" by the KGB in Moscow. Nosenko said that this is routinely done but he added that he personally had no part in the review of, or knowledge of such review, of Oswald's correspondence.

12. No publicity appeared in the Soviet press or Soviet radio regarding Oswald's arrival or departure from the Soviet Union or on his attempted suicide. (Our evidence on this is simply negative, that is, we have no evidence that there was any such publicity.)

13. Oswald was regarded as a "poor worker" by his superiors in the factory at Minsk.

The following information obtained from Nosenko is not available to us from any other source. As will be seen, it generally does not add much to our knowledge about Oswald but rather supplies background information on Soviet activities relating to his residence in Russia.

1. The KGB in Moscow, after analyzing Oswald through various interviews and confidential informants, determined that Oswald was of no use to them and that he appeared "somewhat abnormal."

2. The KGB did not know about Oswald's prior military service and even if they did, it would have been of no particular significance to them.

3. When the KGB was advised by some other Ministry of the Soviet State that the decision had been made to permit

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Oswald to stay in Russia and that he was to reside in Minsk, it brought Oswald's file up to date and transferred it to its branch office in Minsk. The cover letter forwarding the file to Minsk, prepared by one of Nosenko's subordinates, briefly summarized Oswald's case and instructed the branch office to take no action concerning him except to "passively" observe his activities to make sure he was not an American intelligence agent temporarily dormant. (Oswald did tell an American friend once that on one or two occasions in Minsk he had heard that the MVD had inquired of neighbors or fellow workers about him.)

4. According to the routine of the KGB, the only coverage of Oswald during his stay in Minsk would have consisted of periodic checks at his place of employment, inquiry of neighbors, other associates, and review of his mail.

5. When the KGB was asked about Oswald's application for a re-entry visa made in Mexico City, it recommended that the application be denied.

6. Shortly after the assassination, Nosenko was called to his office for the purpose of determining whether his Department had any information concerning Oswald. When a search of the office records disclosed that information was available, telephone contact was immediately made with the KGB branch office in Minsk. The branch office dictated a summary of the Oswald file to Moscow over the telephone. This summary included a statement that the Minsk KGB had endeavored to "influence Oswald in the right direction." This statement greatly alarmed the Moscow office, especially in view of their instructions to Minsk that no action was to be taken on Oswald except to "passively observe" his activities. Accordingly, the complete Oswald file at Minsk was ordered to be flown at once via military aircraft to Moscow for examination. It turned out that all this statement referred to was that an uncle of Marina Oswald, a lieutenant colonel in the local militia at Minsk, had approached Oswald and suggested that he not be too critical of the Soviet Union when he returned to the United States.

7. Marina Oswald was once a member of Komsomol but was dropped for nonpayment of dues. (Marina told the Commission she was a member of Komsomol, but she has been inconsistent on why she was dropped.)

8. The Minsk KGB file on Oswald contained statements from fellow hunters that he was an extremely poor shot and that it was sometimes necessary for them to provide him with game.

9. After the assassination, the Soviet government provided about 20 English-speaking men who were assigned to the immediate vicinity of the American Embassy in Moscow to insure that no disrespect was shown by the Soviet citizens during this period.

10. Some other agency, just which agency Nosenko says he does not know, subsequently decided that Oswald would be permitted to stay in Russia, on its responsibility. Nosenko speculates that this other agency was either the Soviet Red Cross or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (This bit of information fits in especially neatly with Oswald's own statements that the Soviet officials he met after his suicide attempt were new to him, and did not seem to have been told by his earlier interrogators anything about him.)

The following information given by Nosenko tends to contradict information which we have from other sources:

1. Nosenko says that after Oswald was released from the hospital where he was treated for an attempt to commit suicide, he was told again that he would have to leave the Soviet Union and thereupon threatened to make a second attempt to take his own life. Oswald's own diary of this time contains no mention of a threat to make a second attempt at suicide or of any post-hospitalization statement by the Soviets that he would still have to return to the United States. Of course, Oswald's own account of these activities is not entitled to a high degree of credibility.

2. Nosenko says that there are no Soviet regulations which would have prevented Oswald from traveling from Minsk to Moscow without obtaining first permission to do so. We have information from the CIA and the State Department that such regulations exist, although they are apparently rather easily -- and frequently -- violated.

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