

Oswald's mother dies of cancer

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Staff Writers

Marguerite C. Oswald, mother of accused presidential assassin Lee Harvey Oswald, died early Saturday of cancer in a Fort Worth hospital.

Mrs. Oswald, 73, had staged a fiery, sometimes bitter campaign against the findings of the Warren Commission, which concluded her son had acted alone in killing President John F. Kennedy in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963. She contended he was framed.

"The Warren Commission was wrong," she told a reporter on her 70th birthday in 1977. "I'm going to defend Lee Harvey Oswald until

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Sunday, January 18, 1981, DALLAS TIMES HERALD

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"She would stand around and call all the press. She was an opportunist and the rest of family didn't have much to do with her at all," Aynesworth said.

She also had tried to sell her story in recent years, but found no book publishers interested in the idea, she had said.

In the years following the assassination, Mrs. Oswald, a retired nurse, actively sought to have her son's name cleared. But in her later years, she became less active, occasionally granting interviews, sometimes for a fee, or giving speeches for pay.

Her first major attempt to argue against the Warren Commission's findings came before the commission itself in 1964.

"Human beings are not infallible," she said on that occasion. "They are subject to error. I can prove my son's innocence."

But after her six-hour testimony before the commission, Chief Justice Earl Warren said she had added nothing to the "picture as I see it."

She was later barred from the trial of Jack Ruby, the man accused of shooting her son in the basement of the Dallas police station.

Mrs. Oswald also charged local police with following her whenever important political figures came to the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Her most heated charge came after Vice President Hubert Humphrey visited Fort Worth in 1965.

"No sooner had I driven away from my home than I noticed this car right behind me," Mrs. Oswald said at the time. "I took all sorts of unusual streets and made a lot of funny turns and still they were behind me."

"It's a sad thing when you are suspected like this."

Mrs. Oswald fought recent attempts



Marguerite Oswald

by an English assassination theorist to exhume the body in Oswald's grave to determine if it was Oswald or a Soviet imposter buried there.

During that controversy last year, Mrs. Oswald telephoned an Associated Press reporter to contend it was, indeed, her son and Marina's husband buried at Rose Hill. She said, however, it was possible that Oswald's body could have been removed from the casket before burial.

Although she opposed the most recent attempts to exhume the body in the grave, in 1967 she had told a reporter she favored an exhumation to

discredit portions of the Warren Commission report. A state district judge in Fort Worth refused to allow the exhumation.

Johnson, a Fort Worth internist, said Mrs. Oswald had been "quite alert" in her last days although she often had been sedated.

"I thought she faced death with a great deal of courage," he said.

"She was a very friendly and talkative person, but a very lonely person."

Kate Morris, a former neighbor of Mrs. Oswald, said, "She would share what she had with anybody that was in need. Most people didn't know she was barely getting by."

She said Mrs. Oswald rarely discussed the assassination.

"I thought she faced death with a great deal of courage," he said.

A recluse in recent years, Mrs. Oswald in one of her last requests asked that she be buried next to her son in Fort Worth's Rose Hill Cemetery, said John Johnson, her personal physician. Oswald was buried at Rose Hill after he was shot and killed by Jack Ruby while being transferred from City Jail to Dallas County Jail two days following the president's assassination.

Johnson said Mrs. Oswald had been in and out of Fort Worth's Harris Hospital for more than a year in her losing battle with cancer. He declined to describe the type of cancer she suffered, but a spokesman for Baumgardner Funeral Home, where her body was taken, said she had been receiving radiation treatment.

She died "with a great deal of aplomb," Johnson said. She died about 5:45 a.m. in a private room, where Johnson said he had placed her in isolation because of her preoccupation with "the whole Oswald thing."

Mrs. Oswald's presence at the hospital had been kept secret and only a few staff members knew she was undergoing treatment since her admittance on Nov. 21, one day before the 17th anniversary of Kennedy's assassination.

One of her surviving sons, Robert Oswald, of Wichita Falls, declined to discuss his mother's death with a reporter as he stood at the front door of her neat brick house in the Arlington Heights section of Fort Worth.

Marina Porter, the widow of Lee Harvey Oswald, learned of the death from her husband, Kenneth Porter, when she came home shortly before 8 p.m. Saturday.

"It's sad news," Mrs. Porter said. She said she was unaware that Mrs. Oswald had been in the hospital suffering from cancer.

"We didn't have anything to do with each other since all of this happened 16 years ago."

She said she has felt sorry for her former mother-in-law "all along. She's old and it must have been hard for her to find a job."

Hugh Aynesworth, a Dallas journalist who interviewed Mrs. Oswald several times in the 1960s, said Mrs. Oswald would go to her son's grave every year on the anniversary of his death.