

OSWALD DID IT ALONE

IN HIS REVIEW of my book, *Oswald's Game* (*Book World*, October 30), George Lardner Jr. asserts that I have overlooked the "most trenchant" of the Dallas conspiracy books and chides me for writing, "Like his fellow radar operators, Oswald had a low security clearance." He cites the testimony of Oswald's former crew chief, Lt. John Donovan, that Oswald must have had at least a Secret clearance "because that was a minimum requirement for all of us." But the House Assassinations Committee determined that while Donovan had a classification of Secret, Oswald and fellow enlisted men had a low clearance of Confidential. Donovan was wrong. Lardner's criticism illustrates a central point of my book: all conspiracy theories are built on sinister interpretations of innocuous or unexplained discrepancies. Since this method is demonstrably unreliable, a more rational alternative is to attempt to weave the hard evidence into a credible scenario, using the known to judge the unknown and not the other way around.

Like it or not, all the hard evidence points to a single gunman, Lee Harvey Oswald. My book provides a new basis for the old theory that he was inspired by Castro's public warning about American assassination plots. Lardner's most damning charge—that the book contains nothing new—is therefore baffling, since I never claimed that the theory was "original." Lardner doesn't mention my analysis of Sylvia Odio's important testimony, which has never before been plausibly explained. Seen in the context of Oswald's life, Odio's account is a strong indication that he had heard of the plots to kill Castro and wanted to intervene. I strengthened the case that he made a verbal threat against President Kennedy at the Cuban Embassy in Mexico City some three weeks after Castro's warning appeared in Oswald's local newspapers. And I showed that from age 15 Oswald often got ideas for his actions from news reports. Lardner concedes that my conclusion is "plausible enough." If there is a more likely reconstruction of these events, what is it?

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George Lardner Jr. replies:

Lieutenant Donovan testified not only that Oswald must have had a Secret clearance, a point on which Jean Davison tells us he was wrong, but also that Oswald had some knowledge of the U-2, of a device to transfer radio and radar signals called the TPX-1, of "the then-new MPS 16 height-finding radar equipment which could locate planes, such as the U-2, at extremely high altitudes," and of various codes and call signs that had to be changed after his defection. Does Davison think all that was classified Confidential? What matters is what Oswald had access to, not what some bureaucratic records say he was entitled to have access to.

I hold no brief for or against conspiracy theories, but I think Davison's approach, which largely ignores the crime, is basically flawed. As for the Odio visit, it would seem to raise as many problems for Davison as it solves. Who were those two men who "helped [Oswald] try to gull Sylvia Odio"? Davison hypothesizes that Oswald managed to get from New Orleans to Dallas, where Odio lived, on Sept. 24, 1963, just before his trip to Mexico City, by private car. Who drove him? According to uncontradicted testimony before the Warren Commission, Oswald didn't know how.