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Nov. 24, 1963

William K Stuckey

Copy right, 1963

by William K. Stuckey,

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New Orleans, La.

(written before Oswald's death)

Lee Harvey Oswald, the man charged with the murder of President John F. Kennedy, was having trouble drinking his beer.

We were sitting in a bar at Royal and Toulouse in New Orleans' French Quarter at about 7 p.m., August 21, 1963. For the first time since I had met him five days before, he seemed to be relaxed while talking with me. His only discomfort seemed to be the taste of the beer, which made him wince slightly.

"I'm not used to drinking beer any more," he said. "The beer in Russia is too bad, so I got into the habit of drinking Vodka. You know, in Russia, they don't believe in sipping. They slug it down. They drink for keeps."

He choked down another swallow, and continued.

"My father-in-law taught me how to drink Vodka. I couldn't afford to buy too much of it, since I was making only about 80 Rubles a month as a factory worker. But my father-in-law could buy all he could drink. He was a Russian Army colonel, making over 300 Rubles a month. When I used to go visit his daughter (the former Marina Prosa, now Oswald's wife), he'd bring out the Vodka and we'd start slugging it down, Russian style."

On that moist Summer night in the French Quarter, Oswald's conversation had an exotic and alien ring. The same was true of his clothes — a heavy, baggy iron-gray flannel suit.

~~They still have a taste for it~~

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"They still have a lot to learn about making suits where I've been," he said with a slight smile. The ~~implication~~ implication was that he had obtained the suit in Russia or an Iron Curtain country.

Earlier that day, through my news sources, I had found that Oswald had applied for citizenship in the Soviet Union in 1959 shortly after he had been discharged from the Marine Corps. (When talking of his discharge, Oswald would produce a card from his billfold showing that he had been discharged honorably). His request for Soviet citizenship was turned down, he told me, but he nonetheless managed to live in Russia for the next three years ~~more~~ as a resident alien.

A few minutes earlier that evening, in answer to a question from me, Oswald admitted in a radio program on WDSU Radio, New Orleans, that he had lived in the Soviet Union for three years. But in earlier conversations with me, he had lied. Now, he seemed relieved that it was out.

During this five days I had known Oswald, I had ^a ~~two~~ long conversations with him, one brief initial chat, and had managed to record a still unpublished and unreleased interview with him, lasting some 37 minutes, on tape. At the time, these conversations seemed interesting to me because I had never before run across an American who had lived in Russia, a self-proclaimed Marxist who could present his views with great dialectical skill, or for that matter, an officer of the pro-Castro organization, the Fair Play for Cuba Committee.

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It's difficult, to say the least, to find people like this in a city such as New Orleans.

In retrospect, and in view of his being charged with the assassination of President Kennedy, his conversations and interviews with me ^{and possibly} ~~may be~~ the best and most recent look into the mind of a man who may be the most enigmatic presidential assassin since John Wilkes Booth.

I first met Lee Harvey Oswald at about 8 a.m., Saturday, August 17. I had heard about him, and his coming to New Orleans ~~to~~ to establish a Fair Play for Cuba Committee, the day before from a Cuban refugee, Carlos Bringuier. Bringuier, who had a shouting and ~~was~~ scuffling match with Oswald a few days before due to their differences over Cuba, gave me Oswald's address.

Oswald's small apartment was located in a lower middle-class section of New Orleans in the 4900 block of Magazine street. Since he had no phone, I had decided to go by his house and invite him to be on my radio program on WDSU, "Latin Listening Post", on that night.

"Who is it?" a sleepy voice answered from inside. When I told him, he came out onto his screened front porch.

Oswald's eyes were still clouded with sleep, and his wavy hair was disheveled. He had no shirt, and wore only a pair of Marine fatigue trousers. He was slender but wiry and well-built, with a bearing and physical appearance like that of a distance runner.

"My wife and baby are still asleep, or I would invite you inside," he said. "Let's talk here on the porch." On that porch, among the other furnishings, were a baby's stroller and an olive drab ~~trunk~~ trunk which appeared to be a Marine Corps sea locker. (I particularly noticed this since I am a former captain in the Marine Corps.)

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He told me that he would appear on my radio show since he was interested in giving the public information on the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. In this brief initial conversation, Oswald informed me that he was not the president, but the secretary, of the New Orleans chapter of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, and as such was it's "front man." He declined then, as he did later, to name other members or give their number.

Oswald went back into his apartment and returned with some literature, which he gave me. One piece was a yellow handbill which read "Hands Off Cuba!", gave a brief pitch on the Fair Play group and advised the reader that lectures and literature were available at his Magazine Street apartment. No other address for the Fair Play for Cuba Committee was given. Other pieces of literature which he gave me included two ~~pamphlets~~ pamphleted speeches of Fidel Castro, "The Revolution Must Be a School of Unfettered Thought" and "Fidel Castro Denounces Bureaucracy and Sectarianism"; a pamphlet by Jean Paul Sartre entitled "Ideology and Revolution", and a pamphlet by Corliss Lamont, "The Crime Against Cuba". He told me he would bring me more literature that night at the radio station. ~~xxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxx~~. With that, we shook hands, and I left.

At about 5 p.m. that afternoon, Oswald met me at the studios of WDSU, wearing a neat short-sleeved blue dress shirt, a dark tie, and dark blue trousers. (This attire seemed to lack the Soviet mark and appeared to be in the American style). He was carrying a loose-leafed note book containing more Fair Play for Cuba literature.

The recorded conversation which followed was never used on WDSU radio as it was too long (37 minutes). I excerpted five minutes of it and used it on "Latin Listening Post" that night. The excerpts, however, contained only brief remarks by Oswald and was largely a summary by me.

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In making such a long recording, I had hoped to convince the radio station to play it later in the week, as an excellent example of the pro-Castro view and dialectic on Cuba, Marxism and the world. The station declined, and instead suggested a panel show ~~later~~ later in the week. As a result, the station gave me the 37-minute tape which was never used.

Before taking a look at that conversation, I want to mention something about Oswald's personal characteristics.

His bearing was neat and formal. He had a curious "red-blooded American boy" style — like the college athlete who, upon graduation with a degree in finance, had decided to join a solid and substantial brokerage house. His conversation was filled with "Yes sir" and "No sir", possibly a left-over from his military service. His words were well-chosen, his answers quick, his phrases completely lacking in slang or colloquialisms. His remarks were always guarded and bore a peculiar formal air. For example, as an arbitrary illustration, he was the type who would prefer to use the ~~word~~ ^{phrase} "act of violence" rather than a more specific words such as riot, fight or murder.

He seemed to be stimulated by a penetrating or "loaded" question. All the while, he gave the impression that he was a man who had lived most of his life with intellectual inferiors. Despite this, there was little arrogance in his manner. When he laughed, it was a guarded laugh. When he was amused, his ~~mouth~~ ^{thin-lipped} mouth shifted to one side — we would say in a "squinched up" ~~way~~ way. He would ~~describe~~ ^{have} describe this characteristic in a far more academic manner.

"Where did you pick up your flair for dialectics," I asked him later.

"I wasn't aware that I was using dialectic," he answered, his mouth "squinched up" in amusement at his own statement.

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From that recorded interview, here is Oswald's account of his background in his own words:

"I was born in New Orleans in 1939 . For a short length of time during my childhood, I lived in Texas and New York. During my Junior High days, I attended Beauregard Junior High School (New Orleans). I attended that school for two years. Then I went to Warren Easton High School (New Orleans) and I attended that school for over a year. Then my family and I moved to Texas where we have many relatives and I continued ~~in~~ my schooling there. I entered the United States Marine Corps in 1956. I spent three years in the United States Marine Corps, starting out as a Private, working my way up through the ranks to the position of Buck Sergeant and I served honorably, having been discharged. Then I went back to work in Texas and have recently arrived in New Orleans with my family, with my wife and my child."

A point which he mentioned earlier was that in New Orleans he was working with a commercial photographer as an assistant. He did not give the name of the photographer.

Note that in Oswald's first description of his background, he pointedly omitted mentioning his three years in Russia. Later in the interview he admitted, despite his being associated with ~~xxxx~~ the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, that he had never been to Cuba and had made only one visit to Latin America — to Mexico. Here is his rationalization of that fact, again taken from the recorded interview and in his own words:

"I have been only to Mexico in my life, sir. I am not fully acquainted with Latin America personally but then I am not the president of this organization either, I am only a volunteer, a secretary of this local chapter. I do not claim to be an expert on Latin America. Certainly it is obvious to me, having been educated here in New Orleans and having been instilled with the ideas of democracy and objectiveness, that Cuba and the right of Cubans to self determination is more or less self evident and one does not have to travel through Central and South America. One does not have to travel through these countries to see the poverty in Chile or ~~Peru~~ Peru or the suppression of Democratic liberties between

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the Somoa (~~mix sic~~) brothers in Nicaragua in order to draw one's conclusion about Cuba."

The above is an ^{an} ~~excellent~~ illustration of Oswald's reference to American institutions of Democracy for his own purposes, of his ability to distort a question into a propaganda point — and of his ^{partial} ~~general~~ ignorance of Latin America (by referring to the Somoza brothers as the "Somoa brothers".)

In answering my questions, Oswald ~~xxx~~ did not address his answers, in a personal way, to me. Instead, he ~~xxx~~ adopted the tone of one making a speech at a meeting.

His answers were salted with the words "non-intervention", "independent revolution", "fuedalism" and "imperialism. His words acknowledged the existence of only three world political and economic orders — imperialism, Marxism-socialism and Communism (which he said had not been attained by any nation).

The twists and turns, the half-truths and the three-quarter truths, the disarming use of a complete truth or ~~and~~ an occasional favorable reference to the United States — mixed with a strategically placed complete lie — showed a mind which was completely at home with ~~xxx~~ dialectic and propaganda techniques. Here are sample questions and answers on that recorded interview:

Q. What is your definition of Decmocracy?

A. My definition, well the definition of Democracy, that's a very good one. That's a very controversial viewpoint. You know, it used to be very clear, but now it's not. You know, when our forefathers drew up the Constitution, they considered that democracy was creating an atomosphere of freedom of discussinn, of argument, of finding the truth . The rights, well the classic rights of having life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. In Latin America they

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have none of those rights, none of them at all. And that is my definition of democracy, the right to be in a minority and not to be suppressed. The right to see for yourself without governmental restrictions such countries as Cuba, and we are restricted from going to Cuba."

Another version of Oswald's definition of Democracy, from the interview:

"We believe it is a necessity in supporting democracy to support Fidel Castro

X AND HIS RIGHT TO MAKE HIS COUNTRY ANY WAY HE WANTS TO (emphasis mine)."

Q. Mr. Oswald, does it make any difference to you if any of the activities of the local branch of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee benefit the Communist Party or the goals of international Communism?

A. Well, that is what I believe you would term a loaded question. However, I will attempt to answer it. It is inconsistent with the ideals of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee to support ideals of international Communism. We are not occupied with that problem. We are occupied with the problem of Cuba. We do not believe under any circumstances that in supporting our ideals about Cuba, our pro-Castro ideals, we do not believe that that is inconsistent with believing in democracy. Quite the contrary."

Q. ... Are you a member of the American Communist party?

A. ... In regards to your question about whether I, myself, am a Communist, as I said I do not belong to any other organization.

This was a classic example of the Oswald dodge. Below is an sample of Oswald's skill in omission.

Q. Does your group believe that the Castro regime in Cuba is not actually a front for a Soviet colony in the Western Hemisphere?

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A. Castro is an independent leader of an independent country. He has ties with the Soviet Union, with the Eastern bloc, however, I think it is rather obvious as to why and whom they are because of the fact that we certainly don't have any trade with them. We are discouraging trade with that country, with our allies and so forth, so of course he has to turn to Russia. That does not mean however that he is dependent upon Russia. He receives trade from many countries, including Great Britain to a great extent, France, certain other powers of the Western hemisphere. He is even trading with several of the more independent African States so that you cannot point at Castro and say that he is a Russian puppet. He is not. He is an independent person. An independent leader in his country and I believe that was pointed out very well during the October crisis when Castro very definitely said that although Premier Khrushchev had urged him to have on-site inspection at his rocket bases in Cuba, that Fidel Castro refused.

The pertinent omission, of course, was that Khrushchev, in violation of Castro's sovereignty, made a unilateral deal with President Kennedy to remove the missiles from Cuba — without consulting Castro.

Below is an example of the disarming admission.

Q Does the Fair Play for Cuba Committee have any opinion about the suppression of Democratic liberties in Hungary in 1956 or the poverty in any of the Eastern bloc countries today?

A. Officially no, but of course we have our own opinions about such situations. We consider that Russian imperialism is a very bad thing. It was a bad thing in Hungary. We certainly do not support dictatorship or the suppression of any peoples anywhere, but as I say and as I must stress, we are preoccupied only with the problem of Cuba, officially.

No action of the U.S. regarding Cuba was correct. In Oswald's view, we are damned if we did, damned if we don't. A sample to illustrate:

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Q. Do you think that the United States government, under President Eisenhower, ever wanted to help the Castro regime? Ever offered or showed any help to it?

A. True to our democratic policies, certain policies were adopted, very late, but adopted, but the government (U.S.) helped Fidel Castro while he was still in the ~~xxx~~ mountains, that is very true. We cut off aid to Batista just before the revolution, just before it. That was too late. We had already done more harm than we could have done before. ~~That's~~ We were just rats leaving a sinking ship, you see.

In digested form, taken from that taped interview, here are other propganda points emphasized by Oswald

- All Cuban refugees are either Batista supporters, are lazy or are uneducated.
- The U.S. drove Castro into Russian arms by first cutting the Cuban sugar quota.
- The U.S. and U.S. private companies completely controlled the economy of Cuba before Castro, and complete controls the economy and political life of most Latin nations today. ~~The~~

- The countries which have abstained, in Organization of American States meetings, in supporting anti-Cuban resolutions are those larger countries which are relatively self-sufficient and which are not subject to the control of the U.S. — Mexico, Brazil, Chile, etc. (It is interesting that he left out Bolivia, which is almost completely subject to ~~the~~ U.S. aid for its day-to-day federal operating budget.)

Following this taped interview, Oswald left. In reflection, I was struck by his accent. It was not a Texas or a conventional New Orleans or southern ~~xxx~~ accent. Instead, it bore a closer resemblance to a mid-Western accent.

The following Monday, I asked WDSU news director John Corporan if he was interested in playing the entire 37-minute tape. Eventually, he said he was not. Instead, he suggested that I arrange a panel show for the 25-minute WDSU radio program "Conversation Carte Blancher" for the following Wednesday.

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For the panel, I invited the Cuban refugee Carlos Bringuier, who was also the New Orleans delegate of the ~~Student~~ ^{STUDENT} Revolutionary Directorate, a violently anti-Castro group based in Miami, and Mr. Edward Scannell Butler. Mr. Butler ~~is~~ is the director of a New Orleans-based organization called the Information Council of the Americas, (INCA), which makes and sends Spanish-language tape recordings of interviews with refugees from Cuba or other red nations to 126 radio stations in 16 Latin American nations. These are called "Truth Tapes." Mr. Butler is also an advocate of conflict management — counter-propaganda, action groups which are trained to seized control of Communist demonstrations — as the answer to reducing the Communist advance in the Americas.

When Oswald called me that Monday to see if he was to appear on another show, I told him about the panel.

"How many of you am I going to have to fight?" he said, with a touch of humor.

On the day of the panel, I first discovered through news sources that Oswald had lived in Russia. Later that day, Butler called me and said his own sources had ~~told him~~ given him similar information. We agreed then to confront Oswald with this while the panel was on the air.

News announcer Bill Slater of WDSU asked me to give a brief introduction on the panel, and I reviewed the highlights of the previous 37-minute conversation, then confronted Oswald with the information on his residence in Russia. He admitted this on the air. Later, after he denied being a Communist, I asked, "Are you a Marxist?" and he answered affirmatively.

Oswald never lost his composure.

(the transcript of that "Conversation Carte Blanche" broadcast has already been released.)

We had some uncomfortable moments before this "Conversation Carte Blanche" broadcast.

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Oswald was punctual, as usual. We arrived at the station about 45 minutes before the panel was to begin. The ~~xxx~~ conversations between he, Bringuier and Butler were frosty and strained. Bringuier said, as I recall, "you made a very good impression on me at first. How ~~xxx~~ could a nice boy like you get involved with an organization like that? Any time you want to renounce ~~xxxxxxxx~~ your ties and join my group (The Revolutionary Student Directorate) you will be welcome."

Oswald replied that his conviction ^{was} that his own ~~causes~~ causes were just ^{and were} just as deep as Bringuier's .

They all remained seated in the lobby and waited without talking ^{further} until the time of the ~~xxxxxxxx~~ broadcast.

But it was after the broadcast that I had my most revealing conversation with Oswald.

He looked awkward and uncomfortable in his iron-gray, Iron Curtain flannel suit.

He asked me if I was going home, and then I invited him for a beer. We went to a nearby bar at Royal and Toulouse, in the French Quarter, on that night of August 21, 1963. For the first time, the conversation was casual. I asked Oswald if any event in his personal life had led him to Marxism, to Russia and to the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. He answered:

"It wasn't from my family. They were pretty typical New Orleans types and don't understand ideas like these. For any one who is interested in the subject, though, all he has to do is to go to the public libraries. There are many books on these subjects there."

He said he had began reading Marx, Engels and others at the age of 15. But possibly his most significant comment on his background was this:

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He said it was when he was stationed in Japan with the Marine Corps — "and saw the terrible conditions of life there, how the people lived" — that he made up his mind to go to Russia. Marxism, he concluded then, was the best means evolved to date to solve such human problems.

His comments ~~was~~ on life in Russia, again, were candid and disarming.

"I was disappointed with Russia," he said. "It wasn't what I expected. In many ways, it's just as bad as it is here. In the factory where I worked, I saw a lot of selfishness and pettiness. It seems like they are trying to copy many of our ideas about the economy and about production, many capitalist ideas. They are a long way from true Communism."

I then got the idea that Oswald was possibly a young man who was shopping for the perfect revolution. This tendency, his conversation indicated, led him to espouse the ~~perfect~~ "revolution" of Fidel Castro.

At home, he said, he was also reading books on Indonesian Communism and on Sukarno. He added that he felt Sukarno was only an opportunist who was using the Communists, not a Communist himself.

He was having trouble drinking his beer, and declined a second. He didn't appear to have much money.

In trying to explain some of his views to me, he sometimes adopted the attitude that he was wasting his time because "you couldn't of course understand this." This also strengthened my impression that Oswald regarded himself — but without really offensive arrogance — as a man living among intellectual inferiors.

"You know, most of you think that Russia and the Iron Curtain countries are all alike," he remarked. "That's not true. Each country — Poland, Hungary, China, Cuba — have their own separate national identities."

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Since President Kennedy's murder, there have been many news reports indicating that Oswald was "gun happy." This was never apparent during our conversations. If it had been, I can assure you that there would have been no conversations.

In that meeting, I almost felt a little sorry for Oswald. His Russian background had been exposed to the public earlier that evening, and in the minds of New Orleanians who might have otherwise believed this neat and intelligent young man, the Fair Play for Cuba Committee was inextricably connected with Russia. He even made the comment, "well, you've done your job."

With that, we shook hands. Oswald said he was going home by bus and left me at the corner of Toulouse and Royal in New Orleans' French Quarter, walking off into the moist night in his heavy iron-gray, Iron Curtain flannel suit.

I never saw him again.

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Addenda

Oswald admitted to me, in our private conversation following the "Conversation Carte Blanche" program that "In Russia, they never would permit something like the Fair Play for Cuba Committee to exist. Life is very bland there. They have eliminated all the dissenters."

On the morning of Aug. 17, Oswald showed me his membership card in the New Orleans chapter of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. It was signed by _____ Hiddell, president. (The Dallas District Attorney said yesterday that the gun that killed Kennedy was purchased through the mail by Oswald - using the assumed name of Hiddell.

Make reference to cheap sugar in Russia.
"AZACAR Cubinski was offered in the store while I was in Russia. I guess that one benefit Russia has gotten out of Russia!