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OSWALD LINK TO C.I.A. SUGGESTED AT INQUIRY

Ex-Employee of Agency Tells Panel
That He Heard Oswald Was an
Operative in Japan in the '50's

By NICHOLAS M. HORROCK

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WASHINGTON, March 26—A former finance officer for the Central Intelligence Agency has testified before the House Select Committee on Assassinations that his colleagues had told him that Lee Harvey Oswald was a secret operative for the agency in Japan in the late 1950's.

The witness, James B. Wilcott, who said that he had served in low-level jobs with the C.I.A. from 1957 through April 1966, contended in an interview that conversations with colleagues in the agency's Tokyo station after President Kennedy's assassination on Nov. 22, 1963, convinced him that Oswald, who had been recruited by the agency to infiltrate the Soviet Union as a marine in the Far East, had rate the Soviet Union.

Mr. Wilcott, who acknowledged that his memory of events 15 years ago was often sketchy, said that he testified under oath at a closed session of the House committee on Wednesday, supplying the names of several officials of the C.I.A. who might be able to give further details on the matter.

Robert Blakey, the chief counsel and staff director of the committee, declined to comment on the testimony. However, an interim report issued by the committee indicated that, although the staff had conducted some 1,400 field interviews, the committee chose to fly relatively formal, sworn testimony like that supplied by Mr. Wilcott.

Projects Called 'Cryptos'

According to several sources, the committee was investigating Mr. Wilcott's testimony.

Mr. Wilcott said that he joined the C.I.A. as a low-ranking finance officer in 1957 and was sent to Tokyo in 1960. At the Tokyo station, which was in a building that ostensibly housed United States Air Force personnel, Mr. Wilcott said, his responsibilities included making cash disbursements for projects identified only by code names called "cryptos."

He said that his wife was a clerical employee of the agency at that time and that he stood "watch shifts" to earn extra money.

Mr. Wilcott said that although the traditions and the regulations of the agency separated members of the support staff such as himself from intelligence officers and other officials, he fraternized with operational personnel while he was on night-watch duty, in occasional off-duty conversations and at the teller's cage where he made his disbursements.

He said that in the months after Kennedy's death he had several conversations with personnel involved in covert operations. Those talks, he said, convinced him that Oswald, who had been stationed at Atsugi Air Base, Japan, had been recruited to infiltrate the Soviet Union as a spy.

Only One Conversation

Mr. Wilcott said that he could recall only one specific conversation, which occurred shortly after Jack Ruby shot Oswald in Dallas. In an account of the conversation that he prepared for publication, Mr. Wilcott noted, "I was talking with someone, I can't recall who for sure, and I expressed disbelief about Oswald even being a C.I.A. project. I was told something like, 'Well, Jim, so and so drew an advance sometime in the past from you for Oswald' or 'for that project under such and such a crypto.'"

"It was a familiar cryptonym to me at the time, which I have since forgotten, as well as the time that the advance of funds was drawn," he wrote.

There appear to be several discrepancies in the recollections of Mr. Wilcott, a gray-haired man of medium height. For instance he remembered having learned of the Kennedy assassination on an afternoon flight of a private plane. However, Kennedy was shot at midday in Dallas, which would have been early the next morning in Japan.

Oswald served in the Far East from 1957 until November 1958 and was discharged from the Marine Corps before Mr. Wilcott was sent to Tokyo. Mr. Wilcott said that he had been told that Oswald had been taken to Japan for questioning after returning from the Soviet Union in 1962.

Interest in Russian

There has been speculation about whether Oswald came under the control of the intelligence agency in Japan. In a recent book, "Legend, the Secret World of Lee Harvey Oswald," Edward Jay Epstein describes Oswald's interest in the Russian language and his strange contacts with Japanese civilians.

But officials of the agency have denied under oath having ever recruited, trained or manipulated Oswald, and former senior officials of the agency have angrily denounced as irresponsible attempts to connect the agency to the assassination.

The agency will not say whether it has employed individuals. Mr. Wilcott said that after leaving Tokyo in June 1964 he served at the agency's offices

in Rossly, Va.; at the main headquarters in McLean, Va., and at the station in Miami. He said that he resigned in April 1966.

Mr. Wilcott said that after leaving the agency he became active in the movement against the Vietnam War and developed an interest in left-wing political causes. He said that he began circulating his account of the conversations concerning Oswald several years ago but that they were never published.

According to one source, the House committee learned about Mr. Wilcott's story from Philip Agee, a former agent of the C.I.A. who published several years ago a book attacking the agency's operations in Latin America.

Mr. Wilcott was represented at the committee hearing by William H. Schaap, one of Mr. Agee's lawyers.