

## TV Preview

## 'Oswald': Shedding No Light

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It is surely one of the more maddening quirks of history that in his brief, bumbling life, Lee Harvey Oswald brushed up against agents of virtually every organization—from the KGB to the Mafia—that might conceivably have had an interest in murdering John F. Kennedy. Tonight's "Frontline" special, "Who Was Lee Harvey Oswald?" (at 9 on Channel 26) mines this oddity for all it is worth, spinning endless webs of intrigue and tantalizing us with dollops of new evidence as it retraces Oswald's steps from his stint as a young Marine stationed at a supersensitive CIA base in Japan to those final bloody days in Dallas 30 years ago next week.

But at some point during this three-hour "investigative biography," viewers not already obsessed with Kennedy assassination lore may begin to wonder what the point is. G. Robert Blakey, former chief counsel for the House Assassinations Committee, early on steals from Churchill, describing Oswald as a "mystery wrapped in an enigma hidden behind a riddle." But despite some intriguing research, "Frontline's" report ultimately does little unraveling. While employing the atmospherics of conspiracy—eerie-sounding music and a few too many hokey reenactments—this documentary winds up advancing no particular thesis at all, its much-ballyhooed new leads pointing everywhere and nowhere at the same time.

Consider what conspiracy buffs will certainly view as the most significant new discovery: A 1955 photograph showing a teenage Oswald in a white T-shirt at a Louisiana Civil Air Patrol barbecue with a group of fellow cadets. One of them turns out to be none other than the equally enigmatic David Ferrie. For decades, assorted conspiracy theorists have argued that Ferrie must have been a pivotal figure in any assassination plot. An erratic former Eastern Airlines pilot and rabid anti-Communist, he had been both an organizer of anti-Castro guerrillas and an associate of Guy Bannister, the ex-FBI agent hired as a

private investigator by Carlos Marcello, the mob boss of New Orleans.

But despite apparent propinquity (in the summer of 1963, Bannister and Ferrie worked out of the same New Orleans office building as did Oswald's one-man Fair Play for Cuba Committee) no one has ever been able to prove definitively that Ferrie and Oswald even knew each other. Now for the first time, "Frontline" has uncovered hard evidence of . . . well, who knows? For what it's worth, Ferrie is standing at the other side of the picture from Oswald and the two are not looking at each other. Indeed, the limits of this new information are quickly suggested by Layton Martens, another cadet. "Of course we've all been photographed with people" who years later we might not remember, he says. "It's just someone who happened to be in that picture. But it's interesting."

That, of course, is the trouble with most morsels of Kennedy assassination evidence—they tease the imagination without ever really proving anything. Another of "Frontline's" finds are notations on a recently unearthed CIA document suggesting that Oswald was interrogated by the agency after he returned from his ill-fated defection to the Soviet Union in 1962. The CIA has always denied that it contacted Oswald. Do these scribbled notations mean a coverup? Or was there a routine interrogation that somehow got lost in the files? More mystery, bigger riddle.

The most revealing segments of the show are the least melodramatic: glimpses of Oswald as less the shadowy operative than a sad, somewhat pathetic loser. A social worker named Evelyn Siegel, who was assigned to Oswald when he was a truant junior high student in New York City, remembers him—"vividly," she says—as a lonely youth who spent his days reading magazines and who never "really interacted with anyone." A KGB case officer assigned to Oswald during his Soviet stay recalls that the agency considered and then rejected recruiting him because he had no useful information or "any ability at all."

In perhaps the most chilling—and prophetic—segment, "Frontline" plays for the first time a tape of Oswald in Russia playacting with students



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**Lee Harvey Oswald in handcuffs after his arrest.**

interested in learning English. Asked in one mock dialogue about his most "famous" accomplishment, Oswald replies: "Well, the time I killed, ah, eight men on the Bowery that were on the sidewalk there. . . . It was very famous. All the newspapers carried the story."

That sounds suspiciously like the fantasies of a future assassin. And if anything, "Frontline" actually strengthens the already strong forensic case against Oswald, reporting that newly found police photographs of fingerprints taken from the trigger lock of the assassination weapon (overlooked by the FBI) definitely match those of Oswald. As for the never-ending hunt for possible co-conspirators, the final word should probably belong to Oswald's surprisingly levelheaded older brother, Robert. Noting the overwhelming physical evidence against Lee, Robert Oswald says: "You can't reach but one conclusion. . . . It's good that people raise questions and say . . . 'let's take a second look at this.' . . . I think that's great. But when you take the second look and the third and the 40th and the 50th, hey, enough's enough. It's there. Put it to rest."

Thanks to programs like this one, however, don't count on it.