

Lee Harvey Oswald in

Mexico: new leads

The conspiracy trail is littered with unresolved leads, but few can be more important than Lee Harvey Oswald's visit to Mexico shortly before the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. What was the purpose of Oswald's visit to Mexico City? Was it Oswald or an imposter who visited

The Cuban and Soviet embassies? And what was the role of the local CIA station in all this?

Such questions remain unanswered partly because the House Select Committee on Assassinations refused to release its 300 page report. Lee Harvey Oswald and Mexico City (1), which would have resolved some of the queries. We are left to pick the available material clean, a process which still has its rewards, and waiting for the occasional drip of new material from unsuspecting quarters.

In 1976 the HSCA began a search of Department of Justice and FBI files in connection with the assassination inquiry. During the search the Justice Department discovered in FBI files a copy of a memorandum prepared in 1964 for J. Edgar Hoover. In substance the memo stated that the FBI Director had learned from a reliable informant that Oswald had told two officials of the Cuban Consulate, more than a month before the assassination, that he planned to kill the American president. According to the memo (of June 17 1964), the informant said that he learned of Oswald's threat from Fidel Castro. (2)

The memo was addressed to Warren Commission Chief Counsel J. Lee Rankin (3), but nobody on the Commission has owned up to seeing it. The potentially explosive material contained in the memo was secret for 12 years, and even now the full text has not been released. Curiously, support for the memo's claims came in an article written by the British Journalist Comer Clark in 1967. (4) Clark claimed to have had an interview with Castro during which Castro said he had known in advance of a threat made by Oswald against Kennedy whilst he was at the Cuban Consulate. Castro said he hadn't taken the threat seriously so didn't bother informing the American authorities.

The House Select Committee decided, in the end, that "On balance, the Committee did not believe that Oswald voiced a

threat to Cuban officials." (5)

It dismissed Clark's account, largely on the basis that he had written for the 'sensationalist press' in England. On the surface they were correct to be wary. The manner of the supposed interview was peculiar, apparently taking place casually, in the street. Clark's career by then was on the rocks, and since he died in 1972 there appeared to be little chance of checking the facts. But the HSCA should have searched a little deeper. (6)

Clark had been a reasonably respected journalist in Fleet Street in the 1950's working on the News Chronicle. In 1954 he joined the hugely successful Sunday Pictorial, and later, the Daily Sketch. According to colleagues he was a good journalist, producing articles which were well researched. He made the headlines with stories on the terrorist war in Malaya, interviews with Cabinet Ministers and such like. It seems his career started to slide when his wife was taken ill with cancer. He took to drinking heavily as it became worse.

Much of the background material for the articles was actually provided - so it is claimed - by Nina Gadd, a well-known London 'party girl'. (7) Gadd, a graduate of York University, did the research for four books (8) which Clark wrote in the early sixties. She read out the notes while Clark typed away. The books were completed in a matter of days. They were particularly proud of one of the books, Me The Hangman, which Clark believed played a part in the anti-hanging movement. By this time, the early to mid sixties, Clark was not too well-regarded in Fleet Street, though Gadd stoutly defends him against any attack on his journalistic worth. The articles were becoming more and more sensationalist, and, according to one ex-colleague, he lost all credibility. What is important for us is that Gadd claims that it was she who provided Clark with the Oswald story.

Gadd says that she obtained

the information from a friend, who was the foreign minister of a Central American country (not a banana republic) of which he was a member of the ruling family. She visited the country from South Africa, though when is not clear. The information on the Oswald threat came up during conversations with the diplomat (who retired in 1982).

It wouldn't be fair to say this story is one hundred percent reliable as there appears to be little way of checking the facts, and the interviews with Gadd weren't undertaken in the best of circumstances. But it does have a ring of truth about it. The National Engineer, in which the original article appeared, isn't the most respected of journals. They wouldn't have seen it as being too dishonest in concocting a story from various sources, and Clark had been known to put dialogue into people's mouths.

Which country Gadd is referring to we don't know yet (she refused to name it), but it is known that some Central American countries were involved in putting out stories linking Oswald to Cuba. A Nicaraguan named Gilberto Alvarado claimed, a few days after the assassination, that he had seen Oswald at the Cuban Consulate receiving a large amount of money after making an offer to kill someone. Alvarado's claims found support from the American Ambassador in Mexico City who believed that "Castro was somehow involved in a plot to assassinate President Kennedy." The story turned out to be a disinformation exercise - Alvarado was a Nicaraguan intelligence officer. (9) - though the real reason it was dropped was probably because the Nicaraguan was too close to CIA officers like David Phillips.

Interestingly enough a small claim was resurrected at about the same time the Clark article appeared, during the Garrison enquiry. Clare Booth Luce, ardent anti-communist and wife of Time-life publisher, claimed that on the night of the assassination she received a call from New Orleans which informed her that Os-

wald had returned from Mexico with a substantial sum of money and was the hired gun of a Cuban assassination team. The intriguing part of all this is that at the time Oswald's trip to Mexico City was known only to Oswald himself, possibly Marina, and the intelligence agencies. (10)

If Clark's article was another attempt to throw suspicion back to the Cubans and link Oswald to them, where does it leave the 'reliable informant' of Hoover's original memo? The HSCA chief counsel told a public hearing in 1978 "even though there may be considerable doubt as to the fact of Clark's interview with President Castro, the Committee has been informed that the substance of the Clark article is supported by highly confidential but reliable sources available to the US government. However reliable the confidential source may be the Committee found it to be in error in this instance." (11)

At first it was believed that the informant was Rolando Cubeja, aka Amish, a high-level Cuban official and Castro intimate who was recruited by the CIA in 1961. It is now known that it was in fact Morris Childs, code-named 'Solo'. (12) Childs, a member of the CPUSA, and an informant for the FBI, was sent by Hoover to Cuba in early 1964 as an undercover agent to learn what he could about the assassination from Castro. 'Solo' returned to tell Hoover that Castro said Oswald in Mexico City "vowed in the presence of Cuban Consulate officials to assassinate Kennedy." In 1978 Castro told the HSCA that no one had ever told him that Oswald had made such a statement, denying not only what Childs attributed to him in 1964, but also the Comer Clark interview in 1967. But how could Childs be "in error in this instance"?

Morris Childs and his brother Jack had been long-term members of the CPUSA and were recruited by the FBI sometime between 1951 and 1954 after a bitter internal power battle in the party. They were to provide the FBI with much

of his best material on the financial affairs of the party, mainly through Jack who was the conduit for Soviet funds to the party. Morris travelled extensively meeting both Brezhnev and Mao Tse Tung, at one time briefing President Nixon on some of his foreign travels and contacts. All three presidents of the 1960's were aware of the Solo project and Hoover obviously regarded them as vital in his paranoid fight against the CPUSA, and later, Martin Luther King. (13)

It sounds impressive, but as with all Soviet contacts one can't get away from the 'spy' and 'mole' debate, however much one wants to. The Bureau had become worried when another Soviet source 'Fedora' notified the FBI that Jack Childs was about to meet with Soviet contacts. The FBI were worried that this might be a KGB attempt to determine whether the FBI knew about the Childs link in the CPUSA/Soviet financial affairs. In the end the ren-devous went ahead and nothing untoward appeared to happen - or at least that's the official story.

Fedora, Victor Lesslovski, was a top UN diplomat and had been providing the FBI with information since 1962. He was the person to whom the Bureau went in 1964 to confirm the credentials of Nosenko, the Soviet defector who provided the Warren Commission with details on Oswald's time in the Soviet Union. (14) The problem is, of course, that to all sensible people Nosenko was a Soviet disinformation source providing the FBI with innocuous material on Oswald which supported the 'no conspiracy' line. In the end the FBI had to conclude that Nosenko was a fake defector and it recently had to admit that 'Fedora' was a double agent working for the Soviets. (Really, a triple agent). But it may not stop there. "One of these days a story of a small operation (to Fedora) will come out. In Solo we thought we had two men penetrating the Communist Party apparatus. With one of these triple agents (emphasis added) dead, and the other

dying, we can only surmise the extent of the disinformation operation." (15) That meeting noted by 'Fedora' now looks a little less 'untoward'.

The CPUSA has since said that the Childs were definitely not informants. It is interesting to note that they were kept on with the FBI at Morris' insistence at a time when many FBI officials believed that they had been compromised. So it seems from this slim evidence that 'Solo' was not the reliable informant that Hoover believed. It is worth noting that Hoover sent Childs to see Castro after Nosenko's story of Soviet non-involvement in the assassination had been accepted. Perhaps Childs felt he should tell Hoover what he thought he wanted to hear. Perhaps it had to do with CP attitudes to Castro's Cuba. No answers, but certainly more to investigate.

Our own 'mole' hunt in Britain, spurred on by the recent efforts of ex chief molehunter for MI5, Peter Wright, has recently produced a new piece in the jigsaw of Oswald in Mexico City. In 1963 James Angleton, head of the CIA's counter intelligence branch, following up the revelations of Anatoli Golitsyn, informed MI5 that Harold Wilson, then leader of the Labour Party, was a spy. After a few enquiries Sir Roger Hollis, MI5's boss, told John McConne, then head of the CIA, "There is nothing in it." In 1964 Angleton returned to the subject and said that he had new information from a new source, whose code-name was 'Oatsharf'. In 1965 MI5 decided to follow-up the 'Oatsharf' material. "Angleton convinced us he had some kind of source", one intelligence official in Mexico City working for the CIA. We did our own inquiries and found a good candidate - an embassy KGB man who was probably a 'walk-in', volunteering information to the CIA." (16)

So, in 1963, when Oswald went to the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City, it seems that Angleton could have had an agent there. The significance of this is

heightened when we learn from high-level internal CIA memos that Angleton was the key CIA official dealing with matters relating to the Kennedy assassination. (17) The 1976 Senate Intelligence Committee reported that at a meeting in December 1963 Angleton had requested that he be allowed to take over CIA responsibility for dealing with the Warren Commission inquiry. "Angleton suggested that his own counter-intelligence division take over the investigation and Helms acceded to the suggestion." (18)

Angleton's deputy, Raymond Rocca, served as the CIA case officer in charge of handling all inquiries and issues relating to the assassination.

Angleton handled several controversial CIA matters relating to the assassination, such as the mysterious series of photographs taken in Mexico City by the CIA in which a man, initially identified as Oswald leaving the Soviet Embassy, turned out not to be Oswald at all. (19) It now looks as if Angleton played a role in an even more astonishing episode. According to Anthony Summers (author of *Conspiracy*), who has actually seen the 300 page HSCA report on Oswald in Mexico, there was a photograph taken of Oswald in Mexico City. Its existence was confirmed in the report by five former CIA officers, and by a memoire left by former CIA Mexico Station Chief, Winston Scott. It appears to have been preserved until the station chief's death, along with his written record, when both of these were removed from his Mexico safe by a "senior and renowned counter-intelligence chief." The photograph has now, to all intents and purposes vanished. (20)

Notes

1. For a good critique of the HSCA's work in this area see The HSCA Report and Lee Harvey Oswald in Mexico City by Mark allen
2. Washington Post 13 November '76; New York Times 14 November,

- Los Angeles Times 17 Nov.
3. FBI 105-82555-4117: AB 465: CD 1354
4. National Enquirer 15 October '67. Clark was not employed by the Enquirer and I believe this was the only article he wrote for it.
5. *Conspiracy*, Anthony Summers (London 1980) pp 399-391 HSCA Report p122/123; HSCA Vol 3 p 283

6. There is an interesting quote from the head of the FBI in London on his retirement, something on the lines of "my most exciting time in London was involved in investigating the assassination of Kennedy." Who knows what that entailed. I cannot find the reference, but I believe it may be Eddowes. Any ideas?

7. I traced Gadd through an ex-colleague of Clark's who worked on the National Enquirer for a time. (Incidentally, he was in Dallas on the day of the assassination and had many tales of anti-Castro groups' involvement in the conspiracy). He is now editor of the Daily Star. I had 3 difficult conversations with Gadd over the telephone.

8. The War Within. Me, The Hangman, If The Nazis Had Come and The Savage Truth (World-wide Distributors, Manchester) Gadd mentioned that she believes additional books were published under Clark's wife's maiden name, unknown at this time.

9. *Conspiracy* ibid p440
10. *Conspiracy* ibid p445
11. HSCA Vol 3 p 283 September 19 1978
12. It was FBI agent Hosty, involved in the pre-assassination FBI reports on Oswald, who first claimed that it was 'Solo', Morris Childs. AP report in Washington Post May 26/27 1982. Did Hosty know about this or did someone feed him the information? See *Echoes of Conspiracy* Vol 4 No 3 June 28 '82
13. See The FBI and Martin Luther King Jnr., David Garrow, W.

W. Norton New York 1981. P 35 onwards.

14. See Confidential: The FBI's File on JFK, Earl Goltz in Gallery November 1982

15. New York Times September 17 1981, piece by William Safire, a right-winger.

16. Why MI5 Suspected Harold Wilson Was a Soviet Spy Observer July 22 1984

17. New York Times January 17 1975

18. Senate Intelligence Committee Report on the Kennedy Assassination 1975 p 65

19. Angleton was also involved with the investigation of the curious phone call to the Cambridge Evening News (See Unsolved No 17 1984, Chapman Pincher p 346). About 25 minutes before Kennedy was shot an anonymous caller told the newspaper that if it contacted the American Embassy in London it would get some 'big news'. When the information about the call eventually reached CIA headquarters in the States Angleton dealt with it and sent a memo on it to Hoover. It seemed to implicate the Soviet Embassy. Michael Eddowes has taken this up but another investigator could find little confirmation for the story and the staff at the paper knew nothing about it.

20. See transcript (by Paul Hoch 4th December '83) of WBAI panel November 22 '83 : Oswald In Mexico - excerpt, Anthony Summers talking. Summers comes up with many new points which are all worthy of investigation. Unfortunately they seem to have gone unnoticed.

21. It has been rumoured that the National Security Agency bugged the Cuban and Soviet Embassies. One would naturally assume that since it has always claimed that the embassies were the centres of KGB and communist activities in South America. But if they did in 1963 we are unlikely to see the results."..."The existence of NSA'S involvement in the James Earl Ray (alleged assassin of King) investigation

seems to have been one of the Agency's best kept secrets. Not only were the NSA's actions never revealed in any subsequent court procedures involving Ray, they were apparently never revealed even to the HSCA." (The Puzzle Palace, James Bamford, London 1983, p252)

I find it surprising that, as far as I know, no one has interviewed Philip Agee in connection with Mexico. His CIA Diary (London 1975) provides revealing background material on the CIA in Mexico City, and particularly actions against Soviet and Cuban embassies including: photo and audio surveillance, and the use of the Mullen Agency for 'cover'.

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