

# Three Witnesses

By Dick Russell

For more than two years, New Times has explored the mysteries surrounding the assassination of John F. Kennedy. At first, our articles pointed out the holes in the Warren Commission's theory that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone in Dallas on November 22, 1963. After the House of Representatives voted—in the wake of Watergate and the exposure of FBI and CIA abuses—to investigate the assassination anew, we reported extensively on the Committee's progress. Now, of course, that investigation has been crippled by the forced resignation of Chief Counsel Richard Sprague (New Times, May 13).

What we present here is an intriguing series of tales surrounding the assassination. It is the story of three men: a baron, a gunrunner and a Cuban refugee. One was a close acquaintance of Lee Oswald; the others say they met him before the assassination. One killed himself the very day a House investigator planned to interview him; another will not let his name be used, because he fears for his life. All three talked at length to Dick Russell, the author of a forthcoming book on the Kennedy assassination. Taken alone, their stories are scenes from Raymond Chandler, snapshots of a once-incredible netherworld that has become increasingly familiar. As a whole, they may form the framework to the answer to what really happened in Dallas.

## The Baron

Like Fitzgerald's Gatsby, Baron George Sergei de Mohrenschildt was borne back ceaselessly into the past. In



WIDE WORLD

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June of 1976, a sultry day in Dallas, he had stood gazing out the picture window of his second-story apartment, talking casually about a young man who used to curl up on the couch with the Baron's Great Danes.

"No matter what they say, Lee Harvey Oswald was a delightful guy," de Mohrenschildt was saying. "They make a moron out of him, but he was smart as hell. Ahead of his time really, a kind of hippie of those days. In fact, he was the most honest man I knew. And I will tell you this—I am sure he did *not* shoot the president."

Nine months later, on March 29, one hour after an investigator for the

House Assassinations Committee left a calling-card with his daughter, the Baron apparently put a shotgun to his head in Palm Beach, Florida. In his absence came forward a Dutch journalist and longtime acquaintance, Willem Oltmans, with the sensational allegation that de Mohrenschildt had admitted serving as a middleman between Oswald and H.L. Hunt in an assassination plot involving other Texas oilmen, anti-Castro Cubans, and elements of the FBI and CIA.

But how credible was de Mohrenschildt? As an old friend in Dallas' Russian community, George Bouhe, once put it: "He's better equipped than anybody to talk. But we have an old Russian

proverb that will always apply to George de Mohrenschildt: "The soul of the other person is in the darkness."

Intrigue and oil were the two constants in the Baron's life. He was an emigrant son of the Czarist nobility who spoke five languages fluently and who, during the Second World War, was rumored to have spied for the French, Germans, Soviets and Latin Americans (the CIA's predecessor, the OSS, turned down his application). After the war, he went on to perform geological surveys for major U.S. oil companies all over South America, Europe and parts of Africa. He became acquainted with certain of Texas' more influential citizens—oilman John Mecom, construction magnates George and Herman Brown. In Mexico, he gained audience in 1960 with Soviet First Deputy Premier Anastas Mikoyan. In 1961 he was present in Guatemala City—by his account, on a "walking tour"—when the Bay of Pigs troops set out for Cuba.

Finally, when Lee and Marina Oswald returned to Texas from the Soviet Union in June 1962, the Baron soon became their closest friend. Why? Why would a member of the exclusive Dallas Petroleum Club take under his wing a Trotsky-talking sheet-metal worker some 30 years his junior?

The Warren Commission took 118 pages of his testimony to satisfy itself of de Mohrenschildt's benign intent, but among critics the question persisted: Was the Baron really "baby-sitting" Oswald for the CIA? While de Mohrenschildt told the commission he'd never served as any government's agent "in any respect whatsoever," a CIA file for the commission, declassified in 1976, admits having used him as a source. In the course of several meetings with a man from its Dallas office upon de Mohrenschildt's return from Yugoslavia late in 1957, "the CIA representative obtained foreign intelligence which was promptly disseminated to other federal agencies in ten separate reports." The Dallas official, according to the file, maintained "informal occasional contact" with the Baron until the fall of 1961.

The Warren Commission volumes, however, contain only passing reference in de Mohrenschildt's testimony to a government man named "G. Walter Moore." His true name was J. Walton Moore, and he had served the CIA in Dallas since its inception in 1947.

In two brief, cryptic interviews with me in the 18 months before his death, de Mohrenschildt claimed he would not have struck up his relationship with Oswald "if Jim Moore hadn't told

me Oswald was safe." The Baron wouldn't elaborate on that statement, except to hint that it constituted some kind of clearance.

J. Walton Moore is now a tall, white-haired man in his middle sixties, who continues to operate out of Dallas' small CIA office. Questioned at his home one summer evening in 1976 about de Mohrenschildt's remarks, he conceded knowing the Baron as a "pleasant sort of fellow" who provided "some decent information" after a trip to Yugoslavia. "To the best of my recollection, I hadn't seen de Mohrenschildt for a couple of years before the assassination," Moore added. "I don't know where George got the idea that I cleared Oswald for him. I never met Oswald. I never heard his name before the assassination."

For sure, the CIA did maintain an interest in de Mohrenschildt at least through April of 1963. That month, Oswald left Texas for New Orleans and de Mohrenschildt prepared to depart for a lucrative geological survey contract in Haiti. On April 29, according to a CIA Office of Security file, also declassified in 1976, "[Deleted] Case Officer had requested an expedite check of George DE MOHRENSCHILDT for reasons unknown to Security."

There is one alleged ex-CIA contract employee, now working for an oil company in Los Angeles, prepared to testify that de Mohrenschildt was the overseer of an aborted CIA plot to overthrow Haitian President Francois ("Papa Doc") Duvalier in June 1963. The existence of such a plot was examined, but apparently couldn't be substantiated, by the Church Committee. Herb Atkin is sure the plot did exist.

"I knew de Mohrenschildt as Philip Harbin," Atkin said when contacted by telephone a few days after the Baron's suicide. "A lot of people in Washington have claimed that Harbin did not exist. But he's the one that ran me from the late fifties onward. I'm certain that de Mohrenschildt was my case officer's real name."

If so, the Harbin alias may have a readily identifiable origin. De Mohrenschildt's fourth wife, Jeanna, was born in Harbin, China.

One summer day in 1976, still in her bathrobe, she sat at a dining room table cluttered with plants and dishes and watched her husband begin to pace the floor. "Of course, the truth of the assassination has not come out," she said. "It will never come out. But we know it was a vast conspiracy."

The Baron turned to face her. "Oswald," he said, "was a harmless lu-

natic."

At our first interview, I had asked de Mohrenschildt what he knew about the recurring reports of Oswald in the presence of Cubans. He had nodded agreement. "Oswald probably did not know himself who they were," he replied. "I myself was in a little bit of danger from those Cubans, but I don't know who they are. Criminal lunatics." When I broached the subject now in the presence of his wife, de Mohrenschildt said something to her in Russian. She then answered for him: "That's a different story. But one must examine the anti-Castro motive of the time. After the Bay of Pigs."

A few months later, de Mohrenschildt was committed by his wife to the psychiatric unit of Parkland Memorial Hospital. There were rumors of a book naming CIA names in connection with Oswald, squirreled away with his wife's attorney. According to journalist Oltmans, upon leaving the hospital de Mohrenschildt told him: "They're going to kill me or put me away forever. You've got to get me out of the country." In March, the Baron took a leave-of-absence from his French professorship at Dallas' virtually all-black Bishop College. He flew with Oltmans to Belgium, wandered away during lunch, and wound up in Florida at his daughter's home. There, a tape machine being used to transcribe a television program is said to have recorded his suicide.

## The Gunrunner

Robert Ray McKeown lives with his only daughter in a little wooden house in south Miami. There is a pane of glass missing from the front door so that, from the rocking chair where he sits inscrutably behind his sunglasses, he always knows who's knocking. At 65, the same age George de Mohrenschildt was, Robert McKeown hasn't worked in five years because of lung trouble. Now, he says, he's going to write a book about some people he once knew. Two of them—de Mohrenschildt and ex-Cuban President Carlos Prio Socarras—apparently committed suicides within a week of each other. Two more died some time ago. Their names were Jack Ruby and Lee Harvey Oswald.

In the fall of 1975, McKeown surfaced briefly on a CBS special about the Kennedy case, telling Dan Rather about Oswald and a Latin man coming to see him concerning the purchase of four high-powered automatic rifles in the fall of 1963. CBS didn't ask about McKeown's earlier association with Jack