

BOOKS

BY ROBERT KIRSCH
Times Book Critic

The Oswald File by Michael Eddowes (Potter/Crown: \$10; illustrated)

Critics of the Warren Report and, indeed, some officials have suspected that Soviet intelligence, for its own reasons, had substituted an impostor for Lee Harvey Oswald when the ex-marine "defected" to Russia in 1959. What is new and worthy of consideration as a serious possibility is this careful, step-by-step work by distinguished British solicitor Michael Eddowes, who was instrumental in securing an investigation of the Timothy Evans case, overturning Evans' conviction for murder and winning an unprecedented exoneration, including a posthumous pardon by the Queen.

Eddowes has worked on the Kennedy assassination and
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Was 'Oswald' Really Oswald?

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its aftermath with a team of investigators, interviewing many people. He used as the basis of his study, however, the Warren Report testimony and exhibits to assemble evidence. The volume is not only readable and compelling as a detective story, it is a very persuasive legal brief. In it, Eddowes seeks to prove:

—That President Kennedy's assassination was ordered by Khrushchev through the MVD, the Soviet secret police.

—That the real ex-marine Lee Harvey Oswald never returned to the United States but disappeared in the Soviet Union.

—That the impostor, called 'Oswald' with single quotes to distinguish him from the authentic Oswald, assassinated President Kennedy in 1963, that he was a trained killer, a member of Department 13, the sabotage and assassination unit of the KGB, the Soviet state security service.

—That 'Oswald' had created a confusing chain of evidence about his politics.

—That American authorities were certain that the assassin was a Soviet impostor the day after the assassination, and that to avoid World War III, all evidence of imposture and Soviet conspiracy was withheld.

'An Act of War'

Eddowes adds "... The assassination was an act of war, and . . . the Warren Report inevitably was a declaration of peace and incidentally an admission of defeat." Further, "during the postassassination investigation by the authorities and the creation of the official Warren Report, no individual, from President Johnson to the most junior policeman in Dallas, was guilty of malfeasance; all were acting in what were thought to be the best interests of the United States."

There are weak links in the case, the weakest being the

question of motive. And Eddowes' notion that a cover-up of the truth and suppression of evidence is not malfeasance stretches the definition of the word in my dictionary ("doing what a person should not do") and offers the same sort of rationalization that was first attempted in the Watergate cover-up. He calls this the "esoteric art of omission." That the truth might have set off World War III seems to me less probable than the certainty that withholding the truth would seriously subvert the people's confidence in the probity of their own government.

Sufficient Warnings

But these are prefatory and not central to Eddowes' reconstruction of the case. It is difficult to see what the Russians would gain from the assassination, but on that point, all must be speculation.

There were sufficient warnings, some of them newly discovered in the National Archives. It appears a matter of standard intelligence procedure to question the possibility of imposture when an American defects or disappears or even is reported dead behind the Iron Curtain. J. Edgar Hoover sent a memo to the State Department on June 3, 1960: "Since there is a possibility that an impostor is using Oswald's birth certificate, any information the Department

of State may have concerning subject will be appreciated."

Edward J. Hickey, deputy chief of the Passport Office, alerted the Consular Section on March 31, 1961: "... It has been stated that there is an impostor using Oswald's identification data and that no doubt the Soviets would love to get hold of his valid passport... that... passport should be delivered to him only on a personal basis and after the embassy is assured to its complete satisfaction that he is returning to the United States."

The on-again, off-again "defection" aroused other suspicions. Secretary Rusk wrote a memo to the U.S. embassy in Moscow: "The embassy's careful attention to the involved case of Mr. Oswald is appreciated. It is assumed that there is no doubt that the person who has been in communication with the embassy is the person who was issued a passport in the name of Lee Harvey Oswald."

Eddowes takes us through the case step by step, documents each piece of evidence insofar as it is possible. According to his book, 'Oswald' was a look-alike, recruited to take over the identity of the real Oswald, probably while Oswald was taken to the Botkin Hospital in Moscow after a "suicide attempt" on Oct. 22, 1959. 'Oswald' the impostor

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was the man who married Marina, Eddowes claims, and brought her back with him to the United States. The resemblance was enough to gain acceptance rather than recognition by his family, who hadn't seen very much of Oswald since he left home to join the Marines at 17.

Some of this evidence is, of course, retrospective and must be weighed in view of events. The stronger evidence is that Oswald had a mastoidectomy scar but 'Oswald' after his arrest showed no scar or depression; that Oswald was 5 ft. 11 and 'Oswald' was 5 ft. 9; and that in his working record, at several firms doing secret work for the government, his zigzag political trail showed 'Oswald' was performing classic espionage functions.

Eddowes names at least five persons in the conspiracy, including a man who substituted for 'Oswald' on a visit to the Soviet Embassy in early October before the assassina-

tion (there are CIA surveillance photographs of this). His most important conclusion is that Jack Ruby and the impostor Oswald, and George De Mohrenschildt, who recently died under very strange circumstances in Florida, "were the three primary operatives at work in Dallas for the purpose of killing President Kennedy" and that this was a Soviet-organized action the evidence of which was "suppressed in the name of national security."

Some of the links are tenuous—for example, it must be posited that the fingerprints of 'Oswald' were slipped into FBI files to protect the impostor from exposure—and some lingering doubts remain. But, in view of recent events, we must consider carefully Eddowes' case before it is ruled out as another improvised fiction on the assassination.

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