

OSWALD & THE U-2...

by Larry Heagren

On May 1, Holt, Kinsbert and Winston published Operation Overflight by Francis Gary Powers, the U-2 pilot shot down over Russia in May 1960. That has attracted attention to this book is Powers' suggestion that the Russians were able to shoot down his U-2 airplane because of information supplied by Lee Harvey Oswald, who defected to Russia in October 1959.

Oswald joined the U.S. Marine Corps in 1956, and was trained as a radar operator. In September 1957, he was assigned to Alstahl Air Base, Japan, at that time a base for U-2s flying over Russia and Red China. As a radar operator, sporting for incoming foreign planes and directing U.S. planes to their targets, Oswald may have been able to observe the U-2's flight characteristics, particularly its altitude, which was one of the oldest-guarded secrets about the plane. In addition, members of his unit are known to

have performed guard duty for the U-2 while in the Far East. Oswald also had been trained in the use of electronic counter-measures; and the U-2s carried special counter-radar equipment designed to thwart attacking fighters and rockets. After returning from Japan, Oswald was stationed as a radar operator at El Toro, Calif., which, although not a U-2 base, was in an area frequented, according to Powers, by U-2 flights. Warren Commission Document 931, also Harvey Oswald's access to classified information about the U-2. It is still classified SECRET, but Oswald obviously could have learned a great deal about the

U-2. In September 1959, Soviet Premier Khrushchev visited the U.S., and he and President Eisenhower reached an agreement to hold a big Four summit conference. It was during Khrushchev's U.S. visit that Oswald, recently discharged from the Marines, embarked for Europe by ship. Arriving in Moscow in October, he immediately

took steps to defect to Russia. At the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, Oswald told the consul that he had already volunteered to Soviet officials to tell them everything he had learned as a radar operator in the Marines, intimating that he might know something of special interest.

Within a few days of his arrival in Moscow, Oswald's application to stay was rejected by the Soviet Government. He reacted by slashing his wrist, perhaps as a bone fide suicide attempt, or simply a ploy to delay his leaving the country. The Warren Commission later concluded, "Since the KGB is the Soviet agency responsible for the initial handling of all defectors, it seems likely that the original decision not to accept Oswald was made by the KGB. That Oswald was permitted to remain in Moscow after his release from the hospital suggests that another ministry of the Soviet Government may have intervened on his behalf." Although the Khrushchev mission recorded no clues as to

the identity of the other ministry we do have clues. First, the GRU (Soviet military intelligence) had been interested in the U-2 since 1958 at the latest, and must have jumped at the chance of intercepting a former Marine with powers to information about the U-2. Second, Peter Derzhina, a KGB officer who defected to the West in 1954, has pointed out that both the KGB and GRU have their respective lobbyists at the highest levels of the Soviet Government, who seek to advance the interests of their favorite intelligence service. That such lobbying was done in Oswald's case is suggested by the existence of a classified Warren Commission Document, CD 1345, entitled: "Memorandum from Mr. Dulles re assistance rendered Oswald by Nadana Tektarova Aleksandra Putikova, member of the Russian Federation, to allow him to stay in Russia."

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ependents who had been in touch with him there he was headed." The Warren Commission decided that Oswald remained in Moscow until January 1960, as Oswald claimed in his "Historic Diary." But since the accuracy of the diary, which Oswald did not transcribe until some time later, is questionable, doubt exists as to Oswald's whereabouts for a month-and-a-half, and the GRU certainly had ample opportunity to question Oswald during that period. John V. Novitsky, then American Consul in Moscow, felt that Soviet intelligence used Oswald for whatever valuable information it could elicit from him

and after that had no use for him. In January 1960, Oswald was sent to Hank, where he worked in a factory, and received as much pay as the factory director because of supplemental payments from the Soviet "Red Cross." He received these payments even though, as an ideological defector, he was a failure, never speaking, writing, or in any way contributing to Communist propaganda. Meanwhile, following Oswald's defection, the Soviet Air Force newspaper, Soviet Aviation, gave design details of the U-2 and stated flatly that it was being used for strategic intelligence.

On May 1, 1960, a U-2 piloted

by Francis Gary Powers was brought down by a near miss from a Soviet rocket near the city of Sverdlovsk. As a result of Khrushchev's refusal to apologize for the overflight, Khrushchev forced the collapse of the Paris Summit Conference later that month, ending hopes for a step towards peace.

Powers was tried in Moscow in August 1960, and it appears Oswald may have attended the trial. In a letter written in February 1962 to his brother, Robert Oswald, Lee mentioned hearing over the "Voice of America" that Powers was being released, and added, "that's big news where you are I suppose. He seemed to be a nice, bright American-type fellow, when I saw him in Moscow." Oswald seemed honestly concerned over Powers' fate, and later wrote to his brother, "I

hope they aren't going to try him in the U.S. or anything." Later, while living in Dallas, Oswald is said by his Russian wife, Marina, to have read "a book about Powers, the U-2 pilot." This may have been The U-2 Affair, by David Wise and Thomas Ross, published in 1962.

We can not tell, for certain, whether Lee Harvey Oswald's knowledge of the U-2 made it possible for the Russians to shoot down Powers' plane, nor can we tell what Oswald's motive might have been in giving such information to the Soviet Government. But they are important questions, and their answers may throw light on Oswald's actual role, whether assassin or patsy, in the shooting of President Kennedy in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963.