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Oswald may have tried to call Raleigh man from Dallas jail



Lee Harvey Oswald
... never connected

By PAT STITH
Staff Writer

Late on the night of Nov. 23, 1963 — about 12 hours before he was murdered by Jack Ruby — Lee Harvey Oswald may have tried to place a collect call to a "John Hurt" in Raleigh.

The call never went through and the two John Hurts to whom it might have been directed say they have no idea why Oswald would want to call them.

A telephone operator who helped handle long-distance calls by prisoners in the Dallas jail that night told the U.S. House Select Committee on Assassinations about the call in 1978.

The operator said she had written down two Raleigh numbers Oswald tried to reach and kept them as a souvenir — numbers listed to a John David Hurt of

Hillsborough Street and a John William Hurt of Forest Road. She said neither call was completed.

One of the men, John David Hurt, was a staff sergeant in U.S. Army counterintelligence during World War II.

"It was a disturbing story without a conclusion," G. Robert Blakey, the committee's chief counsel and staff director, told The News and Observer recently. "We could not satisfy ourselves that the call was made, that it was made from the outside in or from the inside outside."

Three committee investigators interviewed John David Hurt and his wife, Billie Greer Hurt, at their apartment in Raleigh in early 1978.

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Oswald call still mystery

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"We did look into Mr. Hurt and Mr. Hurt's background, and our judgment was that he was an honest man telling the truth as he knew it," Blakey said. "He had no idea about anything (connected with Oswald), he had not been involved in military intelligence for some time. And nothing we found contradicted what he told us."

A source with access to some unpublished committee reports said investigators concluded that the operator, Mrs. Alveeta Treon, had "no motive to invent the story" but that it could not be corroborated.

The operator's story is mentioned briefly in a new book about the Kennedy assassination called "Conspiracy." The book does not disclose the numbers kept by the operator nor does it mention either Hurt.

Oswald is alleged to have made the Raleigh call about 11 p.m. on a Saturday, the day after he assassinated President Kennedy.

The operator did not reveal her story to federal authorities until the mid-1960s, after the Warren Commission had completed its investigation.

The Select Committee on Assassinations, which investigated the assassinations of Kennedy and civil rights leader Martin Luther King, did not mention her story in its report either. Its 28-volume report was published in December 1978.

Rep. L. Richardson Preyer, D-N.C., chairman of the committee, said in a telephone interview last week that he had not been aware of the information about the call.

"Frankly, that's all news to me," Preyer said. "It would seem to me something like that ought to have been mentioned (in the report)."

Blakey, the committee staff director, said in a telephone interview from his home in Ithaca, N.Y., "It was the kind of thing that we would have written up and published in a staff report if we had had more time."

John David Hurt, 71, and his wife have lived in the same Hillsborough Street apartment since before the assassination of Kennedy.

Hurt said in an interview he had no idea why Oswald might have wanted to talk to him.

"I would like to have killed that SOB," Hurt said. "I loved President Kennedy."

Hurt was born in River Bend, Colo. He said he grew up in Louisiana and Alabama and graduated from the University of Virginia law school, but never practiced law.

He said he served in Europe and Japan during World War II, first in intelligence and later in counterintelligence.

After the war, Hurt said, he worked as an insurance adjuster, primarily in North and South Carolina, retiring on full VA disability in 1955.

John William Hurt, 41, said in an interview that no one had contacted him about the telephone call.

"All I know about him (Oswald) is what I've read in the newspapers and seen on TV," said Hurt, who lives in a motel in Wake Forest.

He said he was born in Rolesville, dropped out of school in the 10th grade, never went into the military service, and had always lived in Wake County, working primarily in the tire recapping business.

The N&O, with assistance from researcher J.G. Harris of New York, interviewed sources in five states and in Washington and learned that the story about Oswald's last call first came to the FBI's attention in the mid-1960s.

Mrs. Treon, the operator, lives now in Springfield, Mo. She told her story to Arnold Mickey Owen, the sheriff of Greene County, Mo., about 14 years ago.

"She gave me the impression she was scared to death," Owen said in a telephone interview. "Absolutely afraid, period. In my opinion, she thought she was telling the truth."

The sheriff said Mrs. Treon told him that she and her daughter and another telephone operator

were in the Dallas City Hall switchboard room on the evening of Nov. 23 when two lawmen came in. The lawmen said they expected Oswald to make a telephone call and that they wanted to listen in on the conversation.

Owen said Mrs. Treon told him that Oswald tried to make a long distance call, but that it didn't go through.

"She claimed she had a slip that had been thrown in the wastepaper basket that verified the call," he said.

Mrs. Treon, 59, could not be reached for comment. Her husband, George O. Treon, 77, said Tuesday that she had emphysema and had been hospitalized.

Mrs. Treon's daughter, who was working in November 1963 as a stenographer in the Dallas Police Department, corroborated her mother's story. The daughter asked not to be identified.

Owen, who has been sheriff of Greene County for 16 years, said he turned the matter over to the FBI and heard no more about it.

A source with access to some of the House committee's unpublished investigative reports said the call was handled by the other operator, identified as Ms. L. Sweeney.

The source said Mrs. Treon wrote the telephone call information down on a City of Dallas Long Distance Call Message sheet. Her note said Oswald tried to call a "John Hurt" in Raleigh at "834-7430 or 833-1253."

The first number was listed at that time to John David Hurt and the second to John William Hurt.

Harold A. Rose of Baltimore, a former staff investigator for the Select Committee on Assassinations, said he had interviewed Ms. Sweeney, who still works on the city hall switchboard in Dallas.

"The only thing I can tell you is the lady in Dallas I interviewed was very, very nervous. She was very upset that I had discovered her. She didn't want to get involved."

The N&O could not reach Ms. Sweeney for comment, but Harris, the New York researcher, said she told him that Mrs. Treon was mistaken. He said Ms. Sweeney told him she was alone on the switchboard that night.

"Treon wasn't there," Harris said Ms. Sweeney told him. "It wasn't that area code. It wasn't that city (Raleigh), it wasn't that name (Hurt)."

Investigator Rose observed: "I think it could have stood quite a bit more looking into."