

7/4/70 4. W.B. 1802

ELROD TALKED AND IT'S ABOUT TIME

By Raymond Carroll

"The actual facts of the matter are secondary, however. It's the illusion we need to work out first..."
(Oswald Talked p.175)

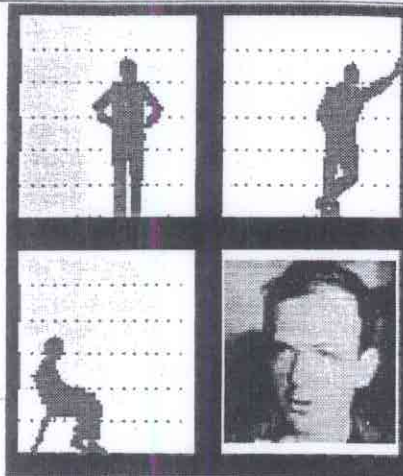
A police phone log shows that shortly after the 3 pm shift began in Dallas city jail on November 22, 1963, prisoner Daniel Douglas, assigned to cell F1, made a call. Douglas was a 19-year-old kid from Tennessee whose conscience made him confess that he had stolen a car in Memphis. Twenty phone calls later, toward the end of the 3 to 11 shift, the log shows that Lee Oswald, assigned to cell F2, also made a call. Ray and Mary La Fontaine have published this phone log in their new book Oswald Talked.

The La Fontaines believe in a universe without a Time dimension. In their "Space Only Continuum" you disregard the seven hours or so between the two phone calls. The log then proves that Oswald and Douglas were in adjoining cells at the same time.

Today, Daniel Douglas has no desire to exploit the sins of his youth, but a gentleman named John Franklin Elrod claims that, although his name is nowhere in the phone log, he was in a cell next to one occupied that day by a young car thief from Tennessee. Elrod himself had a cellmate, and the La Fontaine bombshell is that his cellmate was none other than Lee Harvey Oswald. Oswald talked, Elrod listened. Now Elrod has talked to the Fontaines reportedly and sold an exclusive T.V. interview to Hard Copy.

Elrod's story is corroborated by close members of his family (Ask my brother: am I a liar?) at least to the extent that they now say he told them a similar story at the time. But all other evidence contradicts him. All the official accounts are consistent: Oswald was held in complete isolation; all the adjoining cells were cleared of other prisoners before he was brought up, following interrogation and lineups; and a policeman stood guard outside his cell at all times. By early evening, before he was ever brought to a cell, Lee Oswald was known to be the most important prisoner in Dallas, or any other city, on this planet at least.

Late on the night of August 10, 1964, in Memphis Tennessee, John Franklin Elrod picked up a sawed-off shotgun, planning to kill his wife. He ended up in the Shelby County Sheriff's office and in the course of a colloquy with Deputies he volunteered that he had "information concerning the murder of Lee Oswald." The Memphis bureau of the FBI was called in, and agents Norman Casey and Francis Cole interviewed Elrod on the morning of August 11th. They reported that Elrod



said he was a prisoner in Dallas on November 22nd, 1963; that a cellmate told him about a transaction involving Jack Ruby; that the transaction occurred in a motel room; and that apparently weapons were involved. The La Fontaines did not see fit to publish this two-page FBI report, but we have their word that the report noted Elrod was an

alcoholic; that he was "confused at the time concerning the events which occurred"; that he said his cell was numbered 10; and that he did not know his cellmate's name.

Sergeant Alton C. Gilles, Jr., of the Memphis Sherriff's office learned from FBI headquarters that they showed five offenses listed against Elrod, including two in Dallas, but nothing on a November 22nd arrest. The FBI did not follow up on Elrod's story.

In 1989, the Dallas police released certain records including actual arrest records of John Elrod and Daniel Douglas for November 22, 1963. Three years later the La Fontaines, beginners in the field of assassination research, stumbled across these records and discussed them with Elrod. Elrod said the FBI report was wrong. He said he distinctly told the Memphis agents that his cellmate was Lee Oswald. The La Fontaines say they believe him, but there is nothing in Oswald Talked to show that the authors checked back with Agent Casey, Agent Cole, Sergeant Gilles or indeed anyone in the Memphis Sherriff's office. Elrod and his brother claim that a Dallas police officer named H.R. Arnold can vouch for Elrod's presence in a cell with Oswald. When approached by the La Fontaines, however, H.R. Arnold said he didn't know Elrod from a hole in the wall.

When and how did Elrod first become aware of the Douglas arrest record, with its reference to a Memphis car theft? When and how did he first become aware of the telephone log?

The timing of Elrod's first knowledge of these records would be a significant issue if his Oswald story was otherwise credible. We have the La Fontaines' assurance about this little Time conundrum, but we have doubts about their concept of Time, and so we look for something which might assure us that Elrod talked before he learned about these records. We find that the authors give a blow-by-blow account of how they tracked down Harold Doyle, who is irrelevant to their story, and we find verbatim conversations with government officials, documenting the thoroughness of the authors' search for Oswald's PX card, but we remain in the dark about the precise circumstances in which they found and questioned Elrod, and we search in vain for transcripts of their initial (or any) Elrod interview.

With nothing more than the phone log and the arrest record, and in the face of overwhelming evidence that Oswald was a late substitute for Elrod's possibly real cellmate, the La Fontaines decided they had found the Rosetta Stone to the JFK assassination--the first true link between Oswald and Ruby--and upon this rock they have built their story:

Once upon a time, Lee Oswald went to Russia as a U.S.

agent. The proof lies in a Department of Defense card which entitled him to PX privileges at any U.S. military base. There were no American bases in Russia, of course, but U2 pilot Francis Gary Powers also had a PX card. Powers was a spy, therefore Oswald was a spy. If anyone you know has a PX card, you may be sure that person, too, is a spy.

When Oswald returned to Texas, James Hosty blackmailed him into working undercover for the FBI, without pay or benefits, and Oswald was sent to spy on the DRE, the Cuban student directorate. He also spied on Guy Banister, a "probable gunrunner" for the DRE. Jack Ruby was somewhere in the arms supply line. Also involved in the activities of the DRE was a young exile poetess named Sylvia Odio. Sylvia Odio became subject to fainting spells after her husband abandoned her and her four small children. She began seeing a psychiatric counsellor in Dallas. Despite her youth, her handicap, and being up to her neck in earning a living for herself and her four children, Sylvia--according to the La Fontaines--was also up to her neck in the plot to murder the 35th President of the United States.

So, Sylvia lied to the Warren Commission when she said Oswald, a complete stranger to her, visited her apartment with two members of JURE, the Cuban organization supported by the Odio family. The truth according to the La Fontaines is that Sylvia knew Oswald well and concocted the story of the two JURE members in a clever ruse to shift suspicion from Oswald's true associates, the DRE.

Some sceptics may wonder why Sylvia Odio, assuming she was involved in a plot and assuming she wanted to deflect investigators, would choose to point suspicion at the very group to which she and her parents belonged. That, as the La Fontaines like to say about such sceptics, is their problem.

The DRE had asked the CIA to fund their plan for a campaign against Castro. On November 19th, the CIA informed the DRE that their plan was rejected because they lacked manpower and training. Ted Shackley, the Miami station chief of the CIA, was willing to provide financial support for fifteen or twenty of the Student Directorate members "provided they were fully matriculated at a junior college or college in the JM/Wave area." The students decided to kill JFK, surely triggering a U.S. invasion of Cuba. Sylvia Odio may have helped set up Oswald for his role of *the patsy*.

The La Fontaines have a problem with the concept of Time but they have enough savvy to know that no one will buy the theory that a plot to murder the president of the United States was perfected on three-days-notice. They solve this problem by speculating that the DRE somehow had advance notice of the CIA's decision.

Oswald warned the FBI about the plot, and the FBI arrested two gunrunners but accidentally overlooked the upcoming assassination. Afterwards the FBI scrambled to cover its involvement with Oswald, leaving the Secret Service to conduct the only real investigation. The poor old Secret Service was no match for the wily Cuban poetess and Sylvia Odio got away with murder.

But she didn't fool our Mary, nor our Ray. Oswald's role in the assassination is unclear. The case against him has improved with Gerald Posner's new evidence confirming the Magic Bullet theory, although the real magic bullet was not

CE 399. If Oswald did it, he was not alone. He may or may not have killed J.D. Tippit who may or may not have been one of Ruby's cronies. Ruby's motive is one of the La Fontaines' really strong suits: Ruby may have killed Oswald to sever his own recent ties with him and to conceal a planned invasion of Cuba.

There's more, but that's basically the scoop from Ray and Mary La Fontaine, described by their publishers as "front page investigative journalists." Before they discovered Mr. John Elrod, the La Fontaines solved the mystery of the three tramps. It seems the muscular and menacing-looking tramp known as Frenchy was really a harmless hobo named Harold Doyle. The La Fontaines sold his story to T.V.'s A Current Affair, but reportedly had to hire a lawyer to get their money. They sold the Elrod story to Hard Copy and now lament that

"one of the major historical events of our fast-closing century" was chronicled on tabloid television. In fairness to Hard Copy it should be said that, while they bought the Elrod story, to the best of this writer's knowledge they have not broadcast the La Fontaine's defamation of Sylvia Odio.

Oswald Talked has a strangely split personality: it disagrees with the Warren Report but respects the Commission

for placing the national interest above the cause of Truth; it professes admiration for Sylvia Meagher and Peter Dale Scott but trivializes their conclusions; and it considers Posner's Case Closed a breakthrough book. Most curious of all, the authors propose a conspiracy theory of the JFK assassination yet boast that they successfully used the threat of legal action to make UPI stop calling them "conspiracy theorists." It appears the La Fontaines detest the "dry bureaucratic memos and sappy conspiratorial tomes" of the "amateur sleuths" who have for long pursued the truth about the assassination. Among those targeted for mockery are Harold Weisberg, Jim Marrs, Gary Shaw, Gary Mack, Dave Perry and Jerry Rose. It was "blood libel" when UPI associated the likes of these with our Mary. And our Ray too, for that matter.

The authors thank David Lifton in the acknowledgments, but it is Lifton for whom they reserve their special brand of malice. The La Fontaines show signs of having looked at some of the pictures in the 1988 edition of Lifton's Best Evidence, but Oswald Talked does not, of course, attempt to deal with the weighty matters raised in Lifton's text. Instead, the authors manufacture a rumor intended to discredit Lifton's powers of observation and slyly insinuate that Best Evidence was written for the money.

Why are the La Fontaines so disdainful of assassination researchers? Is it because they know that their entire scenario is just a tissue of speculations grafted on to other theories or stuff already discredited by serious writers? Why, while embracing him as their benefactor, do they slip the knife so deftly between Lifton's ribs? Perhaps they really did read Best Evidence and found the discipline of real research was not for them.

The La Fontaines are capable of dramatic and imaginative writing, as they demonstrate in the passage dealing with the last days of George de Mohrenschildt. But it is telling that the authors can write convincing prose only when they find a subject which they believe has no direct connection to assassination.

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