

Summer 1980 edition

CONSPIRACY

by

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McGRAW-HILL BOOK COMPANY
New York St. Louis
San Francisco Toronto

Summary 1989 edition part 1

before the assassination. 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." On the matter of when he had last seen de Mohrenschildt, Moore was more careful about his "best recollection" when questioned by the Assassinations Committee. Its report says that — while still denying he ever discussed Oswald — Moore indicated that from 1957 on he "had 'periodic' contact with de Mohrenschildt for 'debriefing' purposes over the years. . . ." Jeanne de Mohrenschildt responds to even that statement with rather credible feminine scorn. She says that at the relevant period, Moore was so close an associate that he and his wife were dining once a fortnight with the de Mohrenschildts.

As Dallas representative of the CIA's Domestic Contacts Division, and given his established rapport with de Mohrenschildt, Moore was well placed to arrange a discreet debriefing of Oswald on his return from the Soviet Union. In his last interview on the subject, in 1977, a weary George de Mohrenschildt came up with what may well have been the truth. He said that CIA agent Moore encouraged him to see Oswald, that he would not have seen Oswald at all without Moore's encouragement. There can now be little doubt that whether he knew it or not, Oswald was monitored by the Central Intelligence Agency as soon as he returned to the United States. There is no doubt at all that George de Mohrenschildt had a direct effect on Oswald's life.

George swiftly established a man-to-man relationship with Lee, and they made a strange pair. De Mohrenschildt was thirty years older than Oswald, swashbuckling and sophisticated, a hanger-on of a well-to-do social group which Gerald Ford, a former member of the Warren Commission, had described as "conservative, anti-Communist." Oswald, in contrast, seemed inverted, consumed with idealistic notions, and grudgingly poor. Yet just as in the war George de Mohrenschildt may have played the Germanophile, infatrating friends with "Hell Hitler" salutes while privately working for the Allies, so now he was well equipped to cultivate Oswald. De Mohrenschildt was a maverick among his Dallas friends, an articulate champion of minority causes and a liberal who loved to flout convention. He had no trouble building a bridge to Lee Harvey Oswald and seems genuinely to have liked him. Years later de Mohrenschildt would

say, "Lee Harvey Oswald was a delightful guy. 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. . . ." Apart from the Soviet episode, the Baron and the "hippie" covered a lot of ground together. In a rough manuscript written after the assassination, de Mohrenschildt portrays Oswald as a young man with ideas which today would raise few eyebrows. For example, he shared with de Mohrenschildt a sense of outrage over racial discrimination in the United States and spoke admiringly of Martin Luther King. Most poignant of all today are Lee Oswald's statements about President Kennedy. As reported by de Mohrenschildt, Oswald repeatedly praised the President for his efforts to improve the racial situation and to reach an understanding with the Communist world. De Mohrenschildt quotes Oswald, who within a year would be accused of killing John Kennedy, as saying of the President, "How handsome he looks, what open and sincere features he has! How different he looks from the other politicians! . . . If he succeeds he will be the greatest President in the history of this country."

If de Mohrenschildt's main purpose was to extract information about the Russian episode, Oswald was a walkover. The two new friends talked hour after hour about Oswald's experiences in the Soviet Union, and de Mohrenschildt received one unexpected bonus. When Oswald arrived in the United States he had started collecting notes and comments on his stay in Russia and spoke briefly of getting them published. Then he seems to have had second thoughts, for he did not respond at all when a persistent local reporter tried to discuss them with him. Now, though, Oswald handed over his detailed notes to de Mohrenschildt and respectfully asked for his opinion. Possibly the papers were promptly copied and passed to de Mohrenschildt's friend in the local CIA, Jim Moore. De Mohrenschildt's son-in-law, Gary Taylor, was to tell the Warren Commission that Oswald became puffy in de Mohrenschildt's hands. "Whatever his suggestions were, Lee grabbed them and took them, whether it was what time to go to bed or where to stay." In October 1962 Oswald followed his older friend's advice in a way that changed the direction of his life.

On October 7 a group of Russians, including the de Mohrenschildts with their daughter and son-in-law, visited the

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Oswalds at their rundown apartment in Fort Worth. Oswald announced that he had lost his job at a nearby metal factory, a claim that was not true, and thus sparked a discussion as to what he should do next. It was George de Mohrenschildt who volunteered what seemed a ready-made plan. He suggested that Oswald would have a better chance of finding work in Dallas, thirty miles away, and that Marina would be better off staying awhile with one of the emigré families. Everyone present had been aware of tension between Oswald and Marina, and some believed Oswald had been beating his wife. De Mohrenschildt's proposals seemed reasonable and were accepted. Much later, some of those present would remember that George de Mohrenschildt was overdoing things a bit, that he seemed strangely clear about Oswald's job prospects in Dallas. He even gave the impression that he was personally supplying Oswald with funds. Perhaps significantly, Oswald — for all his apparent poverty — had just finished repaying the \$200 his brother had lent him to help with the travel from New York. The day after the meeting at his apartment, Oswald followed de Mohrenschildt's advice to the letter. He walked out of his perfectly good job in Fort Worth, without notice or explanation, and traveled to Dallas. Apart from a few days at the city YMCA, it is not known where Oswald stayed for the best part of the next month.

He rented a post-office box, a system which — assuming no official surveillance — ensured the receipt of mail with absolute privacy. Oswald used a post-office box wherever he went from now on. Four days after arriving in Dallas he also secured a new job — one which paid, within a few cents, exactly the same as his old job in Fort Worth. Although technically the work was found for Oswald by the Texas Employment Commission, George de Mohrenschildt's wife and daughter both say de Mohrenschildt organized it. Instead of factory chores the job involved photography, a skill Oswald was keen to learn. It was to be an odd setting for a young man who had sullied his name by defecting to the Soviet Union and offering to give away military secrets.

Oswald's new employment was with a graphics-arts company called Jaggars-Chiles-Stovall. The firm not only prepared advertisements for newspapers and trade catalogues but also handled contracts for the U.S. Army Map Service. Much of the Army work

involved material obtained by the very U-2 planes Oswald had once watched in Japan, and only employees with a special security clearance were supposed to see it. In practice everybody — including Oswald — worked in cramped conditions which made secrecy impossible. He worked side by side with a young man named Dennis Ofstein who had previously worked in the Army Security Agency. Oswald was closemouthed about his background, but loosened up a little when he found Ofstein knew some Russian. Ofstein later recalled the curiously professional way his new colleague discussed matters of military interest he had observed in the Soviet Union. Oswald mentioned "the dispersment of military units, saying they didn't intermingle their armored divisions and infantry divisions and various units the way we do in the United States, and they would have all of their aircraft in one geographical location and their infantry in another. . . ." Once, when Ofstein helped Oswald enlarge a picture, he said it had been taken in Russia and showed "some military headquarters and that the guards stationed there were armed with weapons and ammunition and had orders to shoot any trespassers." Over a period of six months at Jaggars-Chiles-Stovall, Oswald became acquainted with sophisticated camera techniques. He also acquired items of photographic equipment which seemed unlikely possessions for a youngster living on a pittance. When police seized Oswald's effects in November 1963, after the assassination, they found a Minox camera — the sort usually referred to as a "spy camera." This fact remained obscure until very recently.

Dallas police detective Gus Rose says he found the Minox camera in Oswald's old Marine seabag. It was listed with other confiscated possessions in Dallas police headquarters and kept there until the FBI took over the inquiry and carried off all evidence, including the camera, to Washington. Two months later the FBI contacted the Dallas police and tried unsuccessfully to have the manifest of Oswald's possessions changed. They now claimed that the equipment found had not been a camera at all, but a Minox light meter. The police declined to change the manifest, and today Detective Rose remains adamant that it was indeed a Minox camera he found. He is emphatically supported by Assistant District Attorney Bill Alexander, who saw the Minox camera just after its seizure. He scoffs at FBI attempts to say the

- 226 Orlov interview: with E. J. Epstein for *Legend*, p. 314.
Bouhe: VIII.355 (testimony of Bouhe).
Note 62: de Mohrenschildt discussed his meetings with Moore when visited in Haiti after the assassination by FBI agent James Wood. He documented his "harmless lunatic" quote in a letter to a Dallas associate. Jeanne de Mohrenschildt's version of the de Mohrenschildt/Moore exchange comes from her interviews with the author in 1978. De Mohrenschildt stated in his Warren testimony that he asked Moore and Fort Worth lawyer Max Clark whether it was "safe" to help Oswald (HSCA XII.54). Moore: (background) HSCA Report p. 217-; HSCA XII.54; (interview in 1976) from "Three Witnesses," article by Dick Russell in *New Times*, June 24, 1977; (de Mohrenschildt last comment) *Dallas Morning News*, March 30, 1978; and see main sources for de Mohrenschildt.
- 228 Ford: Ford/Stiles, *op. cit.*
- 229 Oswald "delightful": from "Three Witnesses," article in *New Times*, June 24, 1977.
Reporter: John Tackett of *Fort Worth Press*, interviewed by the author, 1979.
Taylor: IX.96; testimony of Gary Taylor; author's interview, 1978.
230 \$2000 repaid to brother: Warren Report pp. 741-42.
YMCA and post-office box: Report pp. 719-720.
Jaggars-Chiles-Stovall: Report p. 719 and sources to same.
- 231 Ofstein: X.202; testimony of Dennis Ofstein.
Minox: *Dallas Morning News*, Earl Golz article, August 7, 1978; (Alexander) interviewed by author, 1978; (HSCA) HSCA XII.390 and 373.
- 232 Micro dots: XVI.53.
Note 63: Oswald may have used equipment available at Jaggars-Chiles-Stovall to forge the "Hidell" draft card. An FBI expert has said that the forgery involved a very accurate camera "such as are found in photographic laboratory and printing plants." (IV.388)

12. "Hunter of the Fascists"

- 234 Oswald quote: I.233 (Marguerite Oswald).

- New Year greeting and reading material: Report p. 722; (*Time*) CD 1231; XXIII.270.
Suggestion Marina return to U.S.S.R.: 1.35 (Marina testimony).
Letter to Soviet Embassy: 1.35; XVI.10.
- 235 Mail orders: Report p. 723 and Chapter IV.
Reports on Walker shooting: Warren Report p. 20 and HSCA Report p. 61.
- 236 JFK on extremism: speech in Los Angeles, November 18, 1961, "Public Papers of the President," 1961 (p. 735), U.S. Government Printing Office.
Oswald conversations on right wing: IX.256—George de Mohrenschildt, *op. cit.*, p. 259, citing Marina; FBI interview with Volkmar Schmidt, in National Archives (unrecorded).
- 237 Reconnaissance photographs: Report p. 185.
Note 64: The money order for the rifle was purchased on March 12. The mail-order coupon for the revolver was filled in, ostensibly by Oswald, under the date January 27; however, mail-order company records show the revolver was not being processed until March 13, which suggests the coupon for it was sent off at the same time as the order for the rifle, March 12 (see Report p. 174, 119).
Marina on rifle at home: Report pp. 723-24.
Photograph with guns and newspapers: Report pp. 125-28.
Oswald fired: Report p. 724; for unsatisfactory work — CD7.128; CD 6 and 8; XXIII.696; use of Oswald — XIII.529 (time cards); XXIII.278 (pay checks).
Walker incident: Report pp. 183-187.
- 238 Walker ballistics: Warren Report p. 186; HSCA VII.370, 1.472; (neutron tests) HSCA I.502; (press reports) *Dallas Morning News*, April 11, 1963, p. 1; and April 12, 1963, p. 5; *New York Times*, April 12, 1963, p. 12; (police report) HSCA Report p. 98n4; Warren XXIV.39.
Note 65: General Walker has added his own note of confusion on the question of the bullet. After seeing the exhibits shown in the Assassinations Committee hearings, the general said it was not the bullet he recovered in his house in 1963. He said the original projectile was so battered it was hardly recognizable as a bullet at all — far less so than the bullet shown in the Committee hearings. While the general has been an irascible eccentric on political matters, he was a soldier of distinction and experience, and he is talking about the bullet that nearly killed him. For the record, a check should be made of the chain of possession. (Walker interviews with the author, 1978, and see photograph of bullet, HSCA VII.390.)
- 239 de Mohrenschildt remark about Walker shooting: Report p. 724;