

MEMORANDUM

July 15, 1964

To: J. Lee Rankin

From: W. David Slawson

Subject: Proposed references to the "confidential Soviet Union source, the reliability of which has not been established" in the Foreign Conspiracy and Russian sections of the report

You have asked that I quote those sections of the report in which I propose to use the confidential Soviet Union source described above. The portions which will be included in the section on the existence of a foreign conspiracy are:

1. The agency with primary responsibility for examining all defectors arriving in Russia is the KGB, and Oswald was presumably brought to its attention as soon as he made known his intention to defect. In 1959, at least, virtually all Intourist guides were KGB agents or informants, so we can also assume that Oswald's guide, Rima Shirakova, was following orders from the KGB or at least was guided by her training in KGB methods. As Oswald's Historic Diary notes, she informed her superiors of his desire to defect and helped him draft his letter to the Supreme Soviet on October 16 asking for Soviet citizenship.

The KGB made use of the time provided by Oswald's waiting in Moscow to learn as much as they could about him through Rima and through virtually everyone else at the Hotel Berlin where he was staying, in an attempt to assess his possible usefulness to the Soviet Union as a defector. (As you can see, I have not felt it was necessary to attribute the following to the Soviet Union source, even though that source is the one I used for this information. I believe that we could easily obtain a letter from the CIA stating that in their opinion the foregoing is true, as a matter of general operating procedures in Russia.)

2. A confidential Soviet Union source, the reliability of which has not been determined, has stated that Oswald, after he was given the usual examination the KGB gives to all defectors, was rejected because he was considered not mentally stable and not too

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intelligent. The suicide attempt, according to the same source, only confirmed the KGB in the correctness of its opinion. The KGB supposedly never reversed its decision not to accept Oswald, and so informed him when he was released from the Botkinskaya Hospital. Oswald then allegedly threatened to attempt suicide again, but before the situation reached the crisis point another Soviet ministry--probably the Ministry of Foreign Affairs--intervened and took the responsibility for approving Oswald's application for permission to stay. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was presumably interested in Oswald for his potential propaganda benefit and therefore was not deterred by the KGB's diagnosis of him as mentally unstable. Although the Commission has no way of testing the reliability of this source, it is interesting to note that the purported shift of Oswald's case from the KGB to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, shortly after his release from the hospital fits well with an entry in Oswald's Diary commenting that the officials he met after the hospital treatment were different from those he had dealt with before. The Diary entry expresses some irritation at the fact that the new officials asked him many of the same questions he had already answered two weeks earlier. (The foregoing is taken from the very end of my discussion on whether Oswald was accepted unduly soon for permanent residence in the Soviet Union. I do not rely at all upon the paragraph just quoted for the conclusion I came to, that Oswald was not accepted unduly soon. The foregoing is just put in for its general interest and to show that we are aware of the source.)

The following quotes are taken from Oswald's Life in Russia.

3. On the third day after his arrival, October 19, Oswald was probably interviewed in his hotel room by a reporter from Radio Moscow. Two years later, when he was trying to return to the United States, he told the American Embassy officials in Moscow that the interview had occurred. Oswald said that the reporter represented himself as seeking statements from American tourists on their impressions of Moscow and that he had therefore made a few routine comments of a visiting-tourist nature, the whole interview lasting no more than two or three minutes and of no political significance. The information which the Commission has on the ordinary procedures of the KGB, the Soviet Agency charged with the responsibility for espionage and counter-espionage activities, would indicate that the so-called "reporter" was in reality a KGB agent sent to assess Oswald's desirability as a defector from the point of view of that agency. The contents of that interview was therefore probably not as innocent as Oswald later described them. (Just as in number 1 above, I believe that we can obtain a letter from the CIA confirming the truth of this as a matter of general operating procedure for the KGB.)

4. Some insight on what was going on behind the scenes, unknown to Oswald, has been sized by the Central Intelligence Agency. The Agency's information on normal KGB handling of American defectors would indicate that virtually everyone who had contact with Oswald at this time, which would include Riza Shirokova and the Radio Moscow reporter, among others, was a KGB informant. Their job was to assess Oswald from every possible point of view, for example, his sincerity, i.e., whether his stated reasons for wanting to defect were the real ones or whether he was perhaps an agent of American intelligence and planted for the purpose, his psychological stability, and his intelligence. According to a Soviet Union source the reliability of which has not been ascertained, the KGB decided to reject Oswald's application for permanent residence in the Soviet Union on the grounds that he was "not regarded . . . as being completely normal mentally nor was he considered to be very intelligent." If this account is correct, it must have been this decision, communicated to Oswald on the evening of October 21, that precipitated his suicide attempt. According to the same source, the attempted suicide only confirmed the correctness of the KGB's initial adverse judgment.

5. The same Soviet Union source previously mentioned has stated that the KGB decision not to accept Oswald was never reversed. Presumably, therefore, his continued presence in the Soviet Union was a result of an intervention by some other agency of the Soviet government. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs would seem a logical guess, because it would have been interested in Oswald for his propaganda value as a defector, rather than for the use he might have been as some sort of agent or as a source of intelligence information about the United States.

6. The account of this interview in the Historic Diary also states that the officials to whom he spoke on October 28th asked him about the other official who had spoken to him earlier, before he was hospitalized, and then proceeded to ask some of the same questions he had already answered for the other official. Oswald comments on this that there must have been a lack of communication between the men who were now interviewing him and the man who had interviewed him previously. This tends to confirm the Commission's information that the KGB, a representative of which was presumably the first official who spoke to Oswald, had washed its hands of Oswald and that the group which picked him up after his hospital stay was from some other branch of the Soviet state.

7. A Soviet Union source, the reliability of which has not been ascertained, says that after the decision was made to send Oswald to Minsk his department was asked to bring Oswald's file up-to-date and transfer it to the KGB office in that city. This was done. Accompanying the file to Minsk was a cover letter instructing the

local office to take no action concerning Oswald except "passively" to observe his activities to make sure he was not an American intelligence agent temporarily dormant. (In the vocabulary of international intelligence, a "dormant agent" is one who has been ordered not to carry on any intelligence activities whatever until he is contacted by his superiors or until some other condition has been fulfilled. It is not uncommon for agents to be left dormant for many years, in the hope that any suspicions originally aroused by their survival will have dissipated and they will have succeeded in being accepted as a loyal citizen within their area of contemplated operations.) The same source goes on to say that in view of the instructions from the Moscow office, the Minsk office would do nothing in regard to Oswald except to alert its informants to keep an eye on him and make occasional reports on what he was doing, how he liked Russia, etc. These reports would be drawn up on the basis of periodic checks at his place of employment, inquiries of neighbors, friends and fellow workers, and by secretly reading his mail. After he returned to the United States, Oswald told a friend that on several occasions it had been brought to his attention in Minsk that the MVD (the predecessor of the KGB for this purpose) had inquired of his neighbors and fellow workers about his activities. The Soviet Union source goes on to say that the Moscow office had no further concern or even knowledge of Oswald until after the assassination of President Kennedy, when the KGB was immediately alerted to find out as much as it could about him. The Minsk office's file on Oswald was immediately ordered to be brought to Moscow. The Moscow office examined it as soon as it arrived and was satisfied that nothing that was not authorized had been done relative to Oswald while he was in Minsk, that is, the Minsk office had done nothing during the entire period of his residence in Minsk but "passively" observe him.

W. David Slawson

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