

Vol III

INVESTIGATION OF THE ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 1978

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SELECT COMMITTEE ON ASSASSINATIONS,
Washington, D.C.

The select committee met, pursuant to adjournment, at 9:15 a.m., in room 345, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. Louis Stokes (chairman of the select committee), presiding.

Present: Representatives Stokes, Devine, Preyer, Fauntroy, Thone, Sawyer, Dodd, Ford, Fithian, and Edgar.
Staff present: G. Robert Blakey, chief counsel and staff director; Gary Cornwell, deputy chief counsel; Michael Goldsmith, senior staff counsel; and Elizabeth L. Berning, chief clerk.
Chairman Stokes. A quorum being present, the committee will come to order.
The Chair recognizes Professor Blakey.

NARRATION BY G. ROBERT BLAKEY, CHIEF COUNSEL

Mr. Blakey. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
Cuba was an important concern of John F. Kennedy during his brief administration. It prompted the occasion of his "darkest hour"—the aborted Bay of Pigs invasion. In the missile crisis, it also brought the United States—and the world—to the brink of a nuclear holocaust. Understandably, therefore, among the many efforts to understand the assassination, those that include a Cuban element have been very prominent. Indeed, no less a figure than President Lyndon B. Johnson expressed his private view that John F. Kennedy might well have been the victim of the Cuban plot.
The Warren Commission explored the Cuban element in the assassination of the President from two perspectives.
First, it considered the extent to which Oswald "might have been motivated in the assassination by a desire to aid the Castro regime, which President Kennedy so outspokenly criticized."

In the months preceding the assassination, left-wing literature to which Oswald subscribed—chiefly "The Militant" and "The Worker"—reflected an extremely critical attitude toward the Kennedy administration's policy toward Cuba. Indeed, much of what appeared in these papers seemingly called for violent solutions to Cuban problems with the United States.

The possibility that Oswald may have been influenced by this literature seems real. Apparently in all seriousness, he told Michael Paine, the individual in whose home Marina was then living, that "You could tell what they wanted you to do * * * by reading

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between the lines." Ultimately, however, the Warren Commission decided that it could not ascribe to Oswald any one motive or a group of motives.

Second, the Commission considered the extent to which Oswald's trip to Mexico in late September and early October 1963—a trip during which Oswald visited the Soviet Embassy and the Cuban consulate in Mexico City—may somehow have been related to the assassination. Based largely on the testimony of Sylvia Thirado de Duran, a Mexican national employed at the Cuban consulate, the Commission concluded the following about the visit.

Oswald first visited the Cuban consulate on September 27, 1963. He requested an in-transit visa to permit him to visit Cuba en route to the Soviet Union.

He was informed he could not obtain a visa to Cuba unless he first got one to enter the Soviet Union, and he was told at the Soviet Embassy he should not expect an answer to his visa application for about 4 months.

He carried with him newspaper clippings and other documents, some authentic and some forged, in an attempt to demonstrate he was a "friend of Cuba."

He used these documents, his previous residence in the Soviet Union, and his marriage to a Soviet national to curry favor at the Cuban consulate.

He persisted in his demand for a Cuban visa, resulting in a bitter argument between him and the Cuban Consul, Eusebio Azcue Lopez. Eventually, his request was denied, and he left, apparently in anger.

Ultimately, the Warren Commission expressed its satisfaction with the Duran account, noting that it had—

Reliable evidence from a confidential source that Senora Duran, as well as other personnel at the Cuban Embassy, were genuinely upset upon receiving the news of President Kennedy's death.

It also indicated that—

... confidential sources of extremely high reliability ... establishes that her testimony was truthful and accurate in all material respects.

The Commission also checked out a number of specific conspiracy allegations stemming from Oswald's trip to Mexico City, most of which alleged that he had been enlisted by Cuban agents in a plot to carry out the assassination. Nevertheless, the Commission concluded:

Without exception, the rumors and allegations of a conspiratorial contact were shown to be without any factual basis.

History has not permitted so simple a resolution of the complex questions surrounding the assassination, Cuba, and Oswald's trip to Mexico City. Ironically, too, it was the Premier of Cuba, not the President of the United States, who was revealed and documented in Senate Intelligence Committee hearings in 1976 as the target of deadly serious assassination schemes.

Between 1960 and early 1963, the committee concluded, the CIA conspired with known underworld figures to assassinate Premier Castro. Following the missile crisis in October 1962, the CIA-Mafia plots were brought to an end, or so we are told. But other assassination plots continued. Indeed, on November 22, 1963, a CIA case

officer was planning the killing of Castro with an official of the Cuban Government.

The revelation in 1976 that the Premier of Cuba was the target of an unsuccessful assassination planned by the United States served to fuel the fires of speculation that Cuba had been the perpetrator of the successful effort against the President of the United States in 1963. It was recalled that Premier Castro himself, in an interview with Associated Press reporter Daniel Harter on September 7, 1963, seemed to be warning that U.S. leaders who approved terrorist attacks on Cuban leaders could themselves be vulnerable.

The AP story was carried in the New Orleans Times Picayune on September 9. Consequently, it could have been read by Lee Harvey Oswald himself. But the evidence of Cuban intentions may be interpreted in various ways. The Cuban delegate to the United Nations was in contact on September 5, 1963 with William Atwood, a U.S. delegate, to begin talks with the view toward starting the process of normalizing relations. And Jean Daniel, a French journalist, was with Premier Castro on November 22. He described Castro's reaction to the news of the Kennedy assassination as one of genuine surprise and deep regret.

The critics of the Warren Commission, too, have persisted in their questioning of its conclusions, offering the theory that Oswald met with Cuban agents and various additional allegations.

The most serious is the charge that it was, in fact, not Oswald who visited the Cuban consulate, but an imposter. Critics cite as evidence a photograph published by the Commission and thought by the critics to have been taken by a surveillance camera outside the Cuban consulate. It shows a burly man who bears no resemblance to Oswald, but who was identified as the individual who visited the consulate at the time Oswald was supposed to have done so.

Mark Lane, in his "Rush to Judgment," raised the issue of the mysterious photograph and asked, "Was someone posing as Oswald?"

Another widely circulated story after the Warren report was published is that Oswald, in a burst of anger on learning at the Cuban consulate that he could not secure a visa to visit Cuba, expressed an intention to assassinate President Kennedy.

The select committee has sought to explore a number of questions in connection with Oswald's trip to Mexico City. Committee members and staff made two separate trips to both Cuba and Mexico. The cooperation of the Governments of Cuba and Mexico was sought and secured. The committee and the staff expresses its thanks to each government and those officials and citizens of each country that helped the committee in its investigation.

Comment, however, must be made on the lack of cooperation by the Soviet Government. The select committee, both informally and through personal contacts and formally through the State Department, sought the cooperation of the Soviet Government, not only on Oswald's alleged trip to Mexico City where he is supposed to have visited the Soviet Embassy, but also in the period of time Oswald lived in the Soviet Union. Various documents and files not made available to the Warren Commission but which the commit-

tee had a reasonable basis to believe existed were requested. The most important were the KGB surveillance files on Oswald. It was hoped that these files particularly might have been assistance to the committee in the crucial area of trying to ascertain Oswald's motive in the assassination. Ironically the KGB may well have the most complete file in the world on this crucial aspect of Oswald's personality.

In addition, a request was made to interview officials and Soviet citizens who had contact with Oswald. The Soviet Government denied any relationship with Oswald or complicity in President Kennedy's death but declined to be of assistance, saying that it would be inappropriate for a great power to put itself in the position of having to defend itself against possible suspicion of complicity in the death of the leader of another country.

The committee posed to itself in its investigation in this area, that is, Oswald's trip to Mexico, as the following:
Was the man who visited the Cuban consulate in fact the man later accused of assassinating President Kennedy?
When did the man alleged to be Oswald visit the Cuban consulate?

What transpired at each visit?
Who were the Cuban officials who dealt with him?
Did he in fact express an intent to assassinate the President?
Did the man alleged to be Oswald have any companions in Mexico City?

The first witness who had been scheduled to be heard on Oswald's alleged trip to Mexico City was Sylvia Tirado Bazan, previously Sylvia Tirado Duran. Ms. Tirado was employed in September 1963 as secretary to the Cuban consul in Mexico City. Ms. Tirado was born November 22, 1937, in Mexico City. She is presently employed by the Mexican Social Security Office. Mr. Chairman, I understand that it has not been possible to secure the appearance of Senora Tirado. I understand, however, with your permission, Mr. Cornwell has a short presentation on her testimony.

Chairman STOKES: The Chair will recognize Counsel Gary Cornwell.

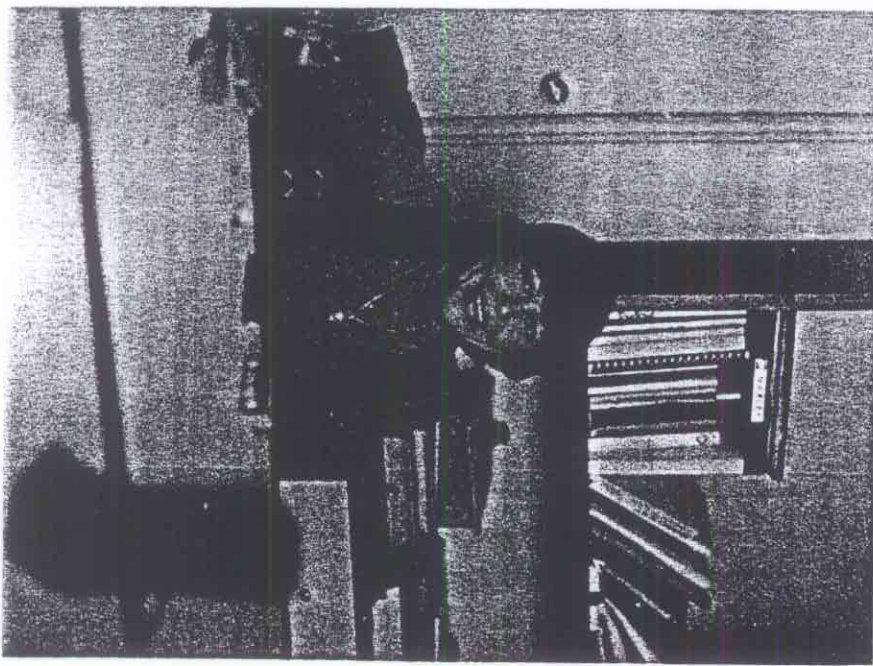
Mr. CORNWELL: I might state, Mr. Chairman, that through the assistance of the Mexican Government, three members of the staff did interview Sylvia Tirado, whose present name is Sylvia Tirado Bazan, on June 6, 1978.

The Mexican Government thereafter agreed that she could come to the United States and testify at these hearings today. Mrs. Tirado Bazan also agreed to come. However, an unexpected business engagement of hers prevented her appearance here today. There is a photo which was made of her at the time of the interview, which is being displayed on the easel and marked JFK exhibit F-433, and we also have a transcript of the interview marked for identification as JFK exhibit F-440A, and a tape recording of excerpted portions of that interview which we have marked for identification as JFK exhibit F-439. Although the tape recording was not made for the purpose of marking it at these hearings—it was simply at the time intended as

a record of her statements—the staff has learned over the course of the investigation that it is often possible to gain a better understanding of a witness' testimony if you can hear or speak to the witness. Thus, with your permission, Mr. Chairman, I would ask that at this time each of those exhibits be admitted into evidence, and that we play for the committee selected portions of her statement.

Chairman STOKES: Without objection, they may be entered into the record at this point, and you may proceed to play the recording.

[The tape recording, mentioned above, JFK exhibit F-439, is being retained in committee files.]
[The information follows:]



JFK Exhibit F-433