

# The Soviet Sojourn of Citizen Oswald

What does an American diplomat do about a 20-year-old boy who wants to defect? After all the conspiracy theories and speculations, our man in Moscow in 1959 now tells his side.

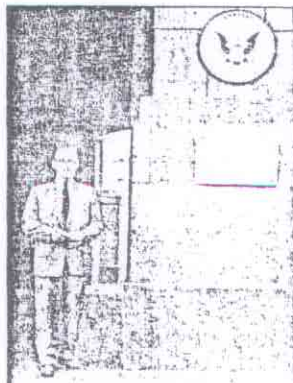
BY RICHARD E. SNYDER

Oswald appeared at the office of Richard E. Snyder, the senior consular official . . . well and favorably known to me . . . "I had a traitor on my hands!" said Snyder, "and his arrogance was unbelievable."

—Henry J. Taylor, syndicated columnist

Richard E. Snyder, who had joined CIA in June 1949 as an intelligence operative, then had served in Tokyo under State Department cover and was now acting as senior consular official in Moscow, recalled that Oswald banged his passport down Snyder's desk.

—Edward J. Epstein, *Time*



Richard E. Snyder when he was senior U.S. consul in Moscow.

Courtesy of Richard E. Snyder

**T**he House Select Committee on Assassinations has released its findings on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Will we be the better off for it, the report destined to be new grist for the mills of conspiracy industry? The above quotations from the recent literature illustrate why I pose the question: in we are given not the author's own opinion, to which he is entitled but the author's own facts, to which he is not entitled.

In fact, columnist Taylor's conversation is fanciful; I never met him or communicated with him. In fact, though I did meet Epstein, he did not ask me about his "facts," most of which are untrue.

Facts alone, for that matter, will not resolve all the questions about the Kennedy assassination; for some questions there simply are not enough facts to go around. But where we have them, they can be useful. My purpose in this article is to help the reader rescue facts from fiction in an important corner of the Oswald mystery—his sojourn

*Richard E. Snyder, retired from the U.S. foreign service, is a free-lance writer.*

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a defector in the Soviet Union.  
As the senior American consul in Moscow during much of the 32 months Lee Harvey Oswald was in the Soviet Union, I dealt with him, made the official decisions concerning him, and wrote most of the record in his case.

Snyder was the embassy officer with whom Oswald conferred . . . following his decision to "renounce" his American citizenship. . . . Informed sources report that Snyder definitely did serve in an

"intelligence capacity" at the embassy. . . .

—Bernard Fensterwald, *Coincidence or Conspiracy*

Lee Harvey Oswald on the forenoon of Saturday, Oct. 31, 1959. Oswald's own later written account of his arrival appears to me credible enough.

**T**he American Embassy in Moscow is a graceless converted apartment building facing a broad, treeless boulevard, Ulitsa Chai-kovskovo, on the fringes of downtown. My assignment there as a second secretary in charge of the consular operation began in July 1959. It was there, in my ground-floor office with its high ceiling and large, frosted storefront windows that I first encountered

12:30 arrive in "Bolga" type taxi, two Russian policemen stand at the embassy, one salutes as I approach the entrance of the embassy and says "passport." I smile and show my passport. He motions me to pass inside as I wish. There can be little doubt I'm sure in his mind that I'm an American. . . . Entering, I find the office of "consular" sign. Opening the door I go in. A secretary busy typing looks up. "Yes?" she says. "I'd like to see the consular," I say . . . laying my passport on her desk . . . I'm here to dissolve my American citizenship. She rises and taking my passport goes into the open inner office, where she lays the passport



**Proclaiming himself a "Marxist," ex-Marine Lee Harvey Oswald sought to renounce his U.S. citizenship in Moscow in 1959. Delayed in his quest by Richard E. Snyder, author of this article, Oswald settled in Minsk, married Marina Prusakova, fathered a child—and then decided that the United States, not the Soviet Union, was where he wished to live.**

on a man's desk, saying, "there is a Mr. Oswald outside, who says he's here to dissolve his U.S. citizenship . . . "thanks," he says . . . without looking up from his typing. She . . . invites me into the inner office to sit down. I do so, selecting an armchair to the front left side of Snyder's desk.

Nothing in particular distinguished the young man before me from any proper American tourist, unless it was perhaps a certain determined pursing of his lips. I recall him as of medium height and slender build. A clean-shaven face was set off by neatly groomed dark-brown hair. By his own account he wore a light coat against the late October chill. A button-down collar shirt and a pair of gloves which he carried reinforced an image of prim conventionality.

He had come, he said in an assertive tone, to give up his American citizenship. So saying, he thrust at me a note written in a scrawling hand on a sheet of stationery of Moscow's aging Metropole Hotel.

I Lee Oswald do hereby request that my present citizenship in the United States of America be revoked.

I have entered the Soviet Union for the express purpose of applying [sic] for citizenship in the Soviet Union, through the means of naturalization.

My request for citizenship is now pending before the Suprem [sic]

Soviet of the USSR.

I take these steps for political reasons. My request for the revoking of my American citizenship is made only after the longest and most serious considerations.

I affirm that my allegiance is to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Taking up his passport from where it lay on the edge of my desk, I read: Lee Harvey Oswald, shipping export agent, born New Orleans, October 18, 1939. I noted that he had just turned 20.

The young man's demeanor was an invitation to confrontation. He let me know in a determined manner that he did not need or want advice, but desired only to renounce his citizenship and leave. When I offered to explain to him the provisions of law on the subject, Oswald declined, saying that he knew all about that and needed no lecture on the seriousness of the step. But the speaker's high-pitched, reedy voice poised on coils of tension undercut the cocksureness that his words asserted.

Oswald was insistent at first that he would not answer questions about his personal affairs. But I would need, I said, at least his home address in order to prepare the document for his renunciation. His home address, he reluctantly conceded, was Fort Worth, Texas. Did he have a wife

there? No, he was not married; that was his mother's address.

Gradually the defenses slipped. Oswald revealed that he had gotten out of the Marine Corps on early discharge in September on the grounds that his mother needed his support. But he had barely stopped by to see her before taking ship at New Orleans for Europe and the defection he told me he had planned for two years. If the deceit bothered him he gave no sign of it.

What were his reasons for wanting to live in the Soviet Union? "I am a Marxist," he said stiffly. He also referred to himself several times as a "worker," but admitted that he had never held a civilian job. But he had "seen American militaristic imperialism in action in Okinawa" while in the Marine Corps. His eyes had been opened; he had read books, had learned about "socialism."

Toward the end, probing for a new lead, I stumbled onto a revealing sensitivity on Oswald's part. I asked what grade he had held in the Marine Corps. He was a corporal, he said. (In fact, Oswald had only made private first class during his three years of service, and had been demoted once from that.) Did he feel that he should have had a higher grade? His reply took me by surprise.

Oswald said that he had been a radar operator in the Marines. Then, almost casually, he added that he had told Soviet officials that as a Soviet citizen he would make known to them whatever he knew about the Marine Corps and his specialty in radar. He intimated that he might know something of special interest.

What caused Oswald to flaunt disloyalty in so gratuitous a manner can only be guessed at. My consular colleague John McVickar, a witness from his desk across the room, thought Oswald was trying to goad me. Or was he "getting even" with the Marine Corps for the corporal he never became? He might also, as it turned out later, have thought he was establishing credibility with Russian ears-in-the-wall, his offer to be made good "when I become a Soviet citizen."

Was Oswald, in fact, alluding to the then-secret U-2 op-

see Harvey Oswald on the afternoon of Saturday, Oct. 31, 1959. Oswald's own later written account of his arrival appears to me credible enough.

12:30 arrive in "Bolga" type taxi, two Russian policemen stand at the embassy, one salutes as I approach the entrance of the embassy and says "passport." I smile and show my passport. He motions me to pass aside as I wish. There can be little doubt I'm sure in his mind that I'm an American. . . . Entering, I find the office of "consular" sign. Opening the door I go in. A secretary busy typing looks up. "Yes?" she says. "I'd like to see the consular," I say. . . . Laying my passport on her desk. . . . I'm here to dissolve my American citizenship. She rises and taking my passport goes into the open inner office, where she lays the passport

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eration? In May 1960, Francis Gary Powers was shot down over Sverdlovsk in the Ural Mountains while piloting a U-2 high-altitude aircraft on a spy mission for the CIA. The incident gave Premier Nikita Khrushchev reason to cancel his scheduled summit meeting with President Eisenhower. The following August I attended Powers' show trial in

and intelligent, and appeared to be acting in a deliberate manner, still, he was only 20 and about to make a serious mistake.  
I also had an unsettling sense of déjà-vu. Within a matter of weeks I had already handled two similar cases of American defectors. (The loaded word "defector" has become attached to all such persons; I won't try to fight

it.) One had already returned home; the other would do so about the same time Oswald did. These experiences had prompted me to write some thoughts on the handling of such cases in an informal letter to the officer in charge of Soviet affairs in the State Department. I proposed, in effect, to be guided in my handling of defector cases by a bit of Talleyrand's dictum of "surtout pas de zèle" (above all, no zeal). Among the humanitarian and political considerations in such cases was the naiveté of the principals. A common characteristic of those who chose the Soviet Union as the place to work out their problems was that they knew nothing about it.

The thoughtful reply, which I received several weeks after the Oswald case had opened, had little to add to the subject, but sensibly left it up to me to "consider every case on its merits and follow through in accordance with your own best judgment, keeping, however, the Passport Office thoroughly informed so they can interpose other instructions if they think this is necessary."

One limitation was imposed on me by law: I had no authority to refuse to accept a renunciation. I could, however, delay.

I first suggested to Oswald that he wait until he received Soviet citizenship; he would then automatically lose his American citizenship. By renouncing his citizenship now he would be left stateless. Failing in that approach, I told him I would have the legal form prepared if he came back on a workday when I had clerical help. It was by then afternoon on Saturday. Oswald would have at least a day and a half to think it over.

Oswald left frustrated over my refusal to take legal steps for his renunciation on the spot. I did not know that 10 days earlier Oswald had been admitted to Moscow's Botkin Hospital for attempting suicide by slashing his wrist with a razor. He had done so because the Soviet authorities had denied his request to remain in the Soviet Union. His visit to the embassy was evidently a second desperate bid to get them to change their minds.

I placed Oswald's passport in my file cabinet. Should he change his mind and decide to go home, he could have it back. If not, he would not be in a position to use it or dispose of it.

The youthful defector did not return on Monday. Instead, on Nov. 3 he wrote to Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson again requesting that his citizenship be "revoked," and protesting the earlier refusal to do so. I answered the letter for the ambassador, assuring Oswald of his legal right to renounce his citizenship, and tell-

Moscow as an official embassy observer. Not until later, however, was the question raised of a possible link between Oswald and Powers.

As for Oswald's request, I could not in good conscience make up on the spot the simple legal form by which he with my witness could renounce his American citizenship. Although I judged that Oswald was competent



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Lee and Marina Oswald leaving Russia by train, bound for the United States.

ing him he was free to come to the embassy any time during business hours. Privately I took his letter as a sign of waffling, a resort to rhetoric instead of action.

Finally, on Oct. 16—he had been in Moscow now one month—Oswald received word from the Soviet authorities that he had been granted immigrant status.

**[Oswald's] apartment . . . was one of the finest in Minsk. . . . He had his own apartment with a separate living room gaily decorated with flowered wallpaper, tiled floors and modern furniture. It also had a magnificent view of the bend of the Svisloch River, and two private balconies from which to observe the ships winding up the river through the city of Minsk.**

Edward Epstein, *Legend*

**T**he Minsk in which Soviet authorities resettled Oswald in 1959 was a drab industrial city of 509,000. The provincial capital of White Russia, Minsk lies in that great expanse of wooded marshland called the Pripet Marshes, on the Napoleonic invasion route between Poland and Russia. Repeatedly devastated by marauding armies, Minsk was again all but obliterated in World War II after heroic resistance. It was in the process of rebuilding in 1959.

The Svisloch River, a distant tributary of the Dnieper,

meanders sluggishly through the city. On the right embankment where the Svisloch passes under Leninsky Prospekt, the main thoroughfare of Minsk, stands one of the miles of prefabricated five-story apartment houses built after the war. Oswald lived for two and a half years on the fourth floor of one of these buildings, No. 4 Kalinin Street (renamed Communist Street).

During five days I spent in Minsk in the spring of 1978, as escort officer for an American orchestra, I was able to walk the streets, shop the markets, chat with local people, and savor the half-peasant ambiance. The apartment house in which Oswald lived belonged to the Minsk Radio and TV Factory where he was assigned to work. The two-story red brick factory building was an eight-minute walk from the apartment, around the corner on Krasnaya Ulitsa. Oswald's apartment was one of those with a balcony. He wrote of how he enjoyed it, legs propped up on the rail, during the city's brief summer. From it he could observe the comings and goings on Leninsky Prospekt (but not the "ships winding up the river," of Epstein's *Legend*—the Svisloch is not navigable at Minsk).

In April 1961, Oswald married Marina Prusakova, a pharmacist who lived with her aunt and uncle just up the street. From Marina in particular we know of the Oswald apartment. Although not in a class with the

privileged three-room quarters which her uncle enjoyed as a comfortable functionary and high-ranking Party member, the simple, functional Oswald apartment was a luxury by Soviet standards for a newly married couple.

It was not long, however, before Oswald found doubt and disillusionment setting in. He wrote in his after-the-fact "diary" of being homesick, of hating the long, cold winters. He chafed at the demands of a collective society and the restrictions of Soviet life. Once the novelty of the new life, the initial attention, the ego-satisfying sense of privilege faded, the expatriate faced the drabness and the monotony of an obscure existence in a land not his own. Familiarity bred discontent. The syndrome is a familiar one in the annals of Moscow consular practice.

On Feb. 5, 1961, after a year and a month in Minsk, Oswald wrote to the embassy asking for his passport back. "I desire to return to the United States," he wrote, "that is if we could come to some agreement concerning the dropping of any legal proceedings against me."

**Decision after decision, the [State] Department removed every obstacle before Oswald . . . self-proclaimed discloser of classified information . . . on his path from Minsk to Dallas . . . [including] grant and renewal of Oswald's passport despite cause for negative action.**

Sylvia Meagher, *Accessories After the Fact*

**Historians may well ask the question of how any one could have made the fatal mistake of readmitting a defector who . . . would murder the president of the United States.**

Gerald Ford, *Portrait of an Assassin*

**R**eading Oswald's letter, I could not help noticing the contrast between its concluding sentence—"I hope that in recalling the responsibility I have to America that you remember yours in doing everything you can to help me since I am an Ameri-

can citizen"—with the closing of his parting letter of Nov. 1959, to Ambassador Thomas:

"My application requesting that I be considered for citizenship in the Soviet Union is now pending before the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. In the event of acceptance, I will request my [the Soviet] government to lodge a formal protest regarding this incident."

Oswald's letter was the first word I had had of him in the 15 months since my last news of him in Moscow. I did not know whether he was still an American citizen. I invited him accordingly to come to the embassy for a personal interview. At the same time, I asked the State Department if Oswald would be subject to prosecution should he enter the jurisdiction of the United States.

I also supplied Oswald with his Minsk address for his mother Marguerite Oswald, who had inquired about the whereabouts of her son in March, 1960, and again at the State Department in January 1961.

Oswald's next letter must have been written immediately on receipt of my reply. It was postmarked Minsk, March 1961, though I didn't get it until almost two weeks later.

In it he said he could not come to Moscow for an interview because he was not allowed to leave Minsk without permission, and he suggested I put preliminary questions to him by mail:

"I understand that personal interviews undoubtedly make the work of the Embassy staff lighter than written correspondence, however in some cases other means must be employed," he commented rather tartly.

Reading between the lines I surmised he might already have been rebuffed by the Minsk police in an effort to secure travel permission.

My correspondence with Oswald, and I presumed his wife's, was written with one eye to the Soviet authorities: all mail and telephone communications with foreign embassies in Moscow were monitored by Soviet intelligence. The next time I wrote him I quoted a most exactly from official Soviet Foreign Ministry lan-

gauge that "it is the position of the Soviet Government that they interpose no objection or obstacle to visits to the embassy by American citizens in the Soviet Union." I suggested to Oswald that if necessary he show the letter to the proper authorities in Minsk in connection with his request for travel permission. But I insisted he come to the embassy so that I could take his statements under oath.

Two months later, on May 24, a third Oswald letter arrived. Again he appeared to be bargaining with me:

In regard to your letter of March 24, I understand the reasons for the necessity of a personal interview at the embassy, however, I wish to make it clear that I am asking not only for the right to return to the United States, but also for full guarantees that I shall not, under any circumstances, be persecuted [sic] for any act pertaining to this case. . . .

As for coming to Moscow, this would have to be on my own initiative and I do not care to take the risk of getting into an awkward situation unless I think it worthwhile. Also since my last letter I have gotten married.

Overblown language, it had appeared to me, was a mask with which Oswald concealed his anxiety. I surmised that the "awkward situation" he feared was burning his bridges to the front and to the rear. By his correspondence with the embassy he had jeopardized his future in Minsk. Suppose in the end he should be unable to go back to the United States?

I delayed replying to Oswald to give Washington a chance to respond with any thoughts or instructions they might have. Oswald did not wait; taking his two-week vacation from the factory, he flew to Moscow.

Saturday afternoon, July 8, 1961: In three days I and my family—wife Ann and younger daughter Gail, 14—would leave Moscow for home leave and transfer to Tokyo. In the immediate offing was a five-day sail from Leningrad to London aboard the Soviet ship Baltika and a reunion in London with our other daughter, Dianne, 18, who was in school in Switzerland.

Two years as consul in Moscow had taught me that

the telephone in our apartment just above my office was rarely a bearer of glad tidings. This time it was Lee Harvey Oswald calling from the house phone in the embassy vestibule below. I headed for the door leaving my wife Ann with the packing; experience had taught her that she ended up with it anyway.

Oswald was waiting as I came out of the elevator into the gloomy, high-ceilinged box-like space that served as reception room both for the consular offices and for the chancery upstairs. Once again Oswald had chosen to arrive unannounced on a Saturday afternoon. The meeting was brief and matter-of-fact. There was little I could accomplish on the spot, and I wanted to refresh myself on the details of his case before getting down to matters of substance. He accepted amicably my invitation that he return during office hours.

Once Oswald had not come back on Monday and thereby had preserved his American citizenship. This Monday 20 months later he did come back to claim the fruit of his original omission. Awaiting him in the foyer was another person who stood to benefit from that omission, his wife Marina. Reassured by his reception on Saturday, he had called her to join him. Marina was two months pregnant with their first child, June Lee Oswald, who would be born an American citizen thanks again to her father's omission. But I never saw Marina; Oswald did not tell me she was there.

Apart from looking a little older, Oswald appeared not to have changed greatly. He sat in the same chair he had occupied on his first visit. My room, however, was smaller and more private as the result of a partition that now separated my office from the rest of the large room. The visitor's boyish face was clean-shaven as before, the short dark hair neatly groomed but showing signs of thinning where part and forehead met on the left.

The most noticeable difference was the absence of the tension he had displayed at our first meeting. After 20 months of life in Russia he had, he said, "learned a hard lesson the hard way." Speaking guardedly without letting

his stiff pride down, Oswald admitted to being relieved of his illusions about the Soviet Union. He had, he said, acquired a new understanding and appreciation of the United States and the meaning of freedom. Oswald spoke without prompt or lead from me.

I felt that these statements had the ring of sincerity. It took no act of faith to accept the objective reality behind Oswald's words. Furthermore, they were uttered without particular emotion and with no evident effort to impress me.

It was quickly evident that he was most worried about what might happen to him if he went home; would he face possible "lengthy imprisonment"? I presumed that what was on his mind was his statement to me about passing information to the Soviet authorities. As I noted earlier, I had queried Washington on the subject. Drawing on the reply I had received, I now told Oswald that I could give him no official assurance as to whether he might face criminal charges. However, I said informally that I did not see on what grounds he might be open to the sort of severe penalty he seemed to have in mind.

Neither leaving one's country nor condemning it is an offense against law in the American democracy. As for Oswald's statement of intent to pass on information, he did not dispute it when I reminded him of it. He denied, however, that he had passed on any information. As a matter of fact, he said, he had never been questioned by the Soviets about his life before coming to the Soviet Union.

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1950 provides that an American citizen may lose his nationality by committing certain acts. Those acts likely to apply in Oswald's circumstances were (1) renouncing, (2) acquiring Soviet citizenship and (3) indicating formal allegiance to the Soviet state by such acts as voting, registering as a citizen, accepting employment in the government, and the like.

It was in the researching of this article that I first encountered conspiracy buffs' fascination with Oswald's recovery of his

passport. Suspicions of dark doings abound.

Some writers like Epstein hint at CIA interest under cover of consul Snyder. (To digress for the record, I was employed by the CIA from October 1949 to September 1950 while awaiting appointment to the foreign service. The job was secured through the Department of State, which had arranged interim employment with other agencies for candidates facing the financial stringencies of a protracted wait for appointment. I ended all connection with the CIA when I became a foreign service officer in September 1950. I had no intelligence function in the foreign service.) Sylvia Meagher wrote darkly of benefits accorded the "undeserving Oswald." Gerald Ford saw it in prodigal son terms: "So Oswald had learned his lesson? . . . Well, technically it might be said that he had not renounced his citizenship. They would return his passport."

The facts are more prosaic. I had to determine from the facts available whether Oswald had done anything which could lead to loss of his American citizenship under the law. In such matters the consul's writ does not run to the dispensing of rewards and punishments; the consul is to serve, not to judge.

As a first step in determining citizenship status I had Oswald fill out a sworn questionnaire covering each of the expatriating acts specified in the law. (Oswald admitted to none of them.) I then questioned him in greater detail.

I knew that Oswald had not lost his citizenship by renunciation. This could only be done under law by formal declaration "before a diplomatic or consular officer . . . in such form as may be prescribed by the Secretary of State." It was that form which I had refused to make up for him on his first visit.

I was also satisfied that Oswald had not acquired Soviet citizenship. The fact that his Soviet identity document was of a type issued to foreigners was prima facie evidence that the Soviet government did not regard Oswald as a Soviet citizen. He had applied (and been turned down, it was later learned), but only accepting

is an expatriating act.

Finally, my questioning of Oswald produced no evidence that he had done anything that might constitute a formal declaration of allegiance to the Soviet Union. Although he had written in the first note he left with me, "I affirm that my allegiance is to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics," this, like his "renunciation," had no legal meaning.

Oswald was, I was sure, acutely aware of what was at stake in his replies to my questions. I had no reason to suppose that he would be unflinchingly candid in his statements. I was bound to question him as thoroughly as I could, and to take official notice of anything he might tell me; beyond that I could not go.

Lee Harvey Oswald was, I concluded, still an American citizen. As my last official act as consul in Moscow I returned his passport to him. I did not, however, renew it (its current validity expired in 60 days). This would give my successor a freer hand in taking over the case, and give the department a chance to go over any questions with me when I returned to Washington.

In returning the passport to Oswald I had acted contrary to an instruction from the Passport Office in Washington that he be given his passport only after he was ready to depart for the United States. I noted in my report to the department that I had done so because I knew that Oswald would have to display a passport in order to get an exit visa from the Soviet authorities.

At one minute to midnight the following day, July 11, 1961, one consul with his wife, daughter and baggage departed from Moscow's Leningrad Station aboard a "soft" sleeper of the Red Arrow express for Leningrad, London and home.

Lee Harvey Oswald was relegated to a forgotten corner of my mind until just before dawn of Nov. 23, 1963, when I was summoned urgently by phone from my Tokyo apartment to the embassy. President John F. Kennedy had been shot; suspected assassin Lee Harvey Oswald was in the custody of the Dallas police. I found myself shortly in charge of the embassy arrangements for a memorial ceremony for the Tokyo diplomatic corps.

**Oswald had worked with the Marines at Atsugi air base in Japan, where he had access to information about the altitude of the U-2, and where he was quite probably recruited to defect to the Soviet Union.**

Suzanna Duncan,  
"Oswald the Secret Agent,"  
New York (March 6, 1978)

The burden of evidence in fact leads considerable credence to Marguerite Oswald's constant thesis that her son had gone to the Soviet Union on a clandestine assignment for his own government.

Sylvia Meagber,  
Accessories After the Fact

Is it irrational to suggest that the American and Soviet intelligences cooperated in the American governmental game of killing the president?

Vincent Salandria,  
"The Assassination of  
President John F. Kennedy,"  
Computers and Automation  
(December 1971)

Why, an acquaintance once asked me, did we let a guy like Oswald back into the country? The answer is that an American doesn't need permission to return to his own country. Unlike some, the American state has no power to banish those it thinks unworthy.

Continued on page 35

Oswald, from page 33

But more important than the answer is the question itself; it contains within it the germ of suspicion of quite ordinary things, a suspicion which bedevils public understanding of Oswald the defector or as distinct from Oswald the assassin. Some suggest, for example, that much was done to "facilitate" Oswald's return. Nothing was, to my knowledge, beyond what should be expected. True, I delayed acting on his renunciation. But I had done that in similar cases, including one a few weeks before Oswald. Was advancing him funds as was done later to help meet his transportation costs home a special favor? Consuls commonly do that all over the world; "worthiness" is not a consideration.

But isn't it suspicious, some ask, that the Russians let the Oswalds out? Actually, the Soviets had stepped up their granting of exit permits for persons with relatives abroad following Vice President Nixon's visit in July 1959. Based on my experience, I assumed that the couple would sooner or later get permission also.

Was Oswald's defection arranged by the Soviet Union? The only faintly plausible argument I have seen advanced for this thesis is that

Oswald had access to information about the U-2 and was recruited by Soviet intelligence in Japan for that reason. But if so, his value was as a penetration agent in Japan.

This does not rule out the possibility that at some point some element of Soviet intelligence may have attempted to use Oswald before, during or after his defection. The question is beyond proving or disproving. More probable is that Oswald's defection was an administrative nuisance to the Soviet authorities.

Finally, was Oswald working for the CIA as a "defector" in the Soviet Union? The implausibilities here are mountainous, but the question is at least susceptible to rational inquiry. I know of nothing, however, supportive of the thesis that Oswald's travel to or return from the Soviet Union had some official sanction.

Healthy skepticism is one thing; national paranoia is another. One powers a drive to know, the other feeds on artful invention. It may turn out, as has been said, that the American people are the only jury that Lee Harvey Oswald will ever have. If so, the verdict may depend ultimately on how many of us insist on our own facts.