

"They've Killed the President."

and leaked their existence by talking about them over a telephone they believed tapped. Hawkins's latest explanation did not account for the newspaper story he had written in the *Houston Post* ten years before, reporting the numbers, or his interview with the Secret Service. In any case Hawkins told the *Inquirer*: "Oswald was either a stoolie for the FBI or CIA and turned out to be the greatest double agent of all time."

The Commission Report, relying on the FBI and CIA, stated definitively that he was not. In an appendix entitled "Speculations and Rumors," the Report discussed statements by Margaret Oswald that her son was an agent as baseless speculations or simply malicious falsehood. "Investigation by the Commission," the Report concluded, "has revealed no evidence that Oswald was ever employed by the FBI or CIA in any capacity." All that remains to corroborate that statement is a collection of the most incredible coincidences.

They begin in the Marine Corps. Oswald enlisted in the Marine Corps on October 24, 1956, six days after his seventeenth birthday.¹³ His life until then had been a lonely and unhappy one, growing up without a father, pulled from town to town by an indifferent mother, in and out of petty trouble, frequently truant from school, isolated for long periods of time in the hostile, alien world of a youth house or orphanage.¹⁴ In short, a dreary, heart-wrenching, though not broken of hundreds of thousands of children from broken homes. Lee's brother, Robert, had enlisted in the marines some years before and had made a new life. The marines promised the same for Lee.

After basic training at San Diego and Camp Pendleton, California, Oswald reported to the Naval Air Technical Training Center in Jacksonville, Florida, for a six-week course in the basics of radar control.¹⁵ Advanced instruction followed, and Oswald eventually was given an MOS (military occupational specialty) of Aviation Electronics Operator.¹⁶ By mid-September Oswald was in Japan, assigned as a radar operator to the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing based at Atsugi.¹⁷ According to the Report, Oswald's job was "to direct aircraft to their targets by radar, communicating with

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the pilots by radio. The squadron also had the duty of scouting for incoming foreign aircraft, such as stray Russian or Chinese planes, which would be intercepted by American planes."¹⁸

The Report's straightforward prose makes the assignment seem routine. It wasn't. For Atsugi was more than an ordinary air station; it was also one of the largest CIA bases in the world.¹⁹ From its runways U-2 reconnaissance planes of the kind flown by Gary Powers over the Soviet Union were launched on spy missions over mainland China. Atsugi was also a launching pad for Chinese Nationalist agents who parachuted onto the mainland. Deep in the honey-combed caverns that lie beneath the base, intelligence personnel monitored Communist communications traffic.²⁰ Minimum security clearance for the men in Oswald's unit, according to a marine who had served with him in California, was "secret."²¹ Oswald had had trouble being cleared, despite the fact that he had twice been convicted by court-martial.²²

Amid these exotic surroundings Oswald took up a new avocation. The boy with indifferent grades, who always had trouble passing tests, decided to study Russian, a Berlitz book his only reported guide.²³ He seems to have made remarkable progress. By the time he was transferred back to the States to a duty assignment at El Toro Air Station, California,²⁴ Oswald was reading Russian newspapers and impressing a Russian-speaking aunt with his skill.²⁵ Before long his buddies at El Toro kiddingly referred to him as "Oswaldskovich."²⁶ Oswald in turn sometimes addressed them as "comrade."²⁷

Oswald was also knowledgeable about world affairs. The Report comments that "the appears, whose lack better informed than some of the officers, whose lack of knowledge amused and sometimes irritated him."²⁸ The Report quotes Lieutenant John F. Donovan, Oswald's commander and a graduate of the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service, as saying that Oswald was "truly interested in international affairs and "very well versed, at least on the superficial facts of a given foreign situation."²⁹ Private Kerry Thom-

Not an
military
unit but
the only
graduated
5 school
Lt. Donovan
The official records would
show that he was cleared
to work at Atsugi &
was not a security clearance
The records show
clearance to work

Robert Lee Lincoln

IA
IB

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ley, one of Oswald's fellow enlisted men, told the Commission that Oswald believed that "Marxist morality was the most rational morality in the world."²⁸ To munism was "the best system in the world."²⁸ Thorntonley, Oswald merely seemed to be toying with these ideas rather than holding any conviction. Thorntonley was so struck by the unusual young marine that he eventually wrote a novel based on Oswald's life.²⁹

There is no record of the Marine Corps ever showing concern that one of its young radar operators, with access to secret information and stationed at one of its most sensitive bases, was talking of the joys of Marxism and the superiority of the Communist system to his fellows. In any case Oswald's active relationship with the marines came to an end on September 11, 1959, three months ahead of his scheduled discharge.³⁰ Oswald had applied for and received a "dependency discharge"³¹ on the grounds that his mother had injured herself at work and could no longer support herself. All of which was a lie. True enough, Marguerite had been injured on the job when a jar fell on her head and struck her toe;³² the accident had occurred nearly a year before,³³ however, and it had kept Marguerite from work less than a week. Coincidentally, Lee had been on leave in Fort Worth at the time of the accident, and had returned to duty without mentioning the incident.³⁴ All the same, Oswald's discharge was granted in less than a week, a speed which astounded his Marine Corps buddies.³⁵ Even the Commission was suspicious. An unpublished top secret Commission memo stated flatly, "He undoubtedly obtained the discharge fraudulently."³⁶

There was also some funny business with Oswald's Marine Corps records. The Report, relying on a Defense Department chronology of Oswald's service, as well as his Marine service records, stated that Oswald spent a brief time on Taiwan beginning September 30, 1958, and then, with the rest of his unit, was transferred back to Atsugi.³⁷ Between October 6 and November 2, the records go on, Oswald was shuttled to another section of his unit on Japan, while awaiting shipment back to the United States.³⁸

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All this seemed routine until Oswald's pay records arrived at the Commission, slightly more than a week before submission of the final Report. They told an entirely different story. According to the pay records Oswald had been transferred out of his regular unit on August 29, 1958, and placed in a different unit with a new pay status between September 8 and October 17, 1958.³⁹ What this status was could not be determined. That part of the pay records was censored.⁴⁰ The pay records contained one other bit of interesting news. Oswald was not in Japan at all when the Report said he was but, along with his new unit, was on Taiwan.⁴¹

The questions are obvious: What was Oswald doing on Taiwan? What new job did he have? And why did the Defense Department and the marines go to such pains to conceal Oswald's status and exact whereabouts? One explanation for the determined obscurantism is that Oswald had been recruited for a covert assignment by the Office of Naval Intelligence. The Commission would never know. While it asked the CIA and FBI whether Oswald had been one of their agents, the Commission made no attempt to ask the same questions of the Department of Defense, the most logical organization to have recruited him.⁴²

The odd happenings were beginning to stack up. They were nothing, though, in comparison with what occurred next. Three days after returning home to Fort Worth Oswald left for New Orleans, and immediately booked passage on a freighter bound for Le Havre,⁴³ on the first leg of a trip to the Soviet Union. From France he sailed to England, arriving in Southampton on October 9.⁴⁴ He informed British customs officials that he planned to stay in the country a week before proceeding on to Switzerland.⁴⁵ Instead he flew the next day to Helsinki, Finland.⁴⁶ On Monday, October 12, Oswald went to the Soviet consulate and applied for a visa.⁴⁷ It was granted two days later.⁴⁸ The next day he left Helsinki by train, crossing the Soviet frontier at Vainikkala.⁴⁹ By October 16 he was in Moscow.⁵⁰

That, at least, is how the Report laid out Oswald's

