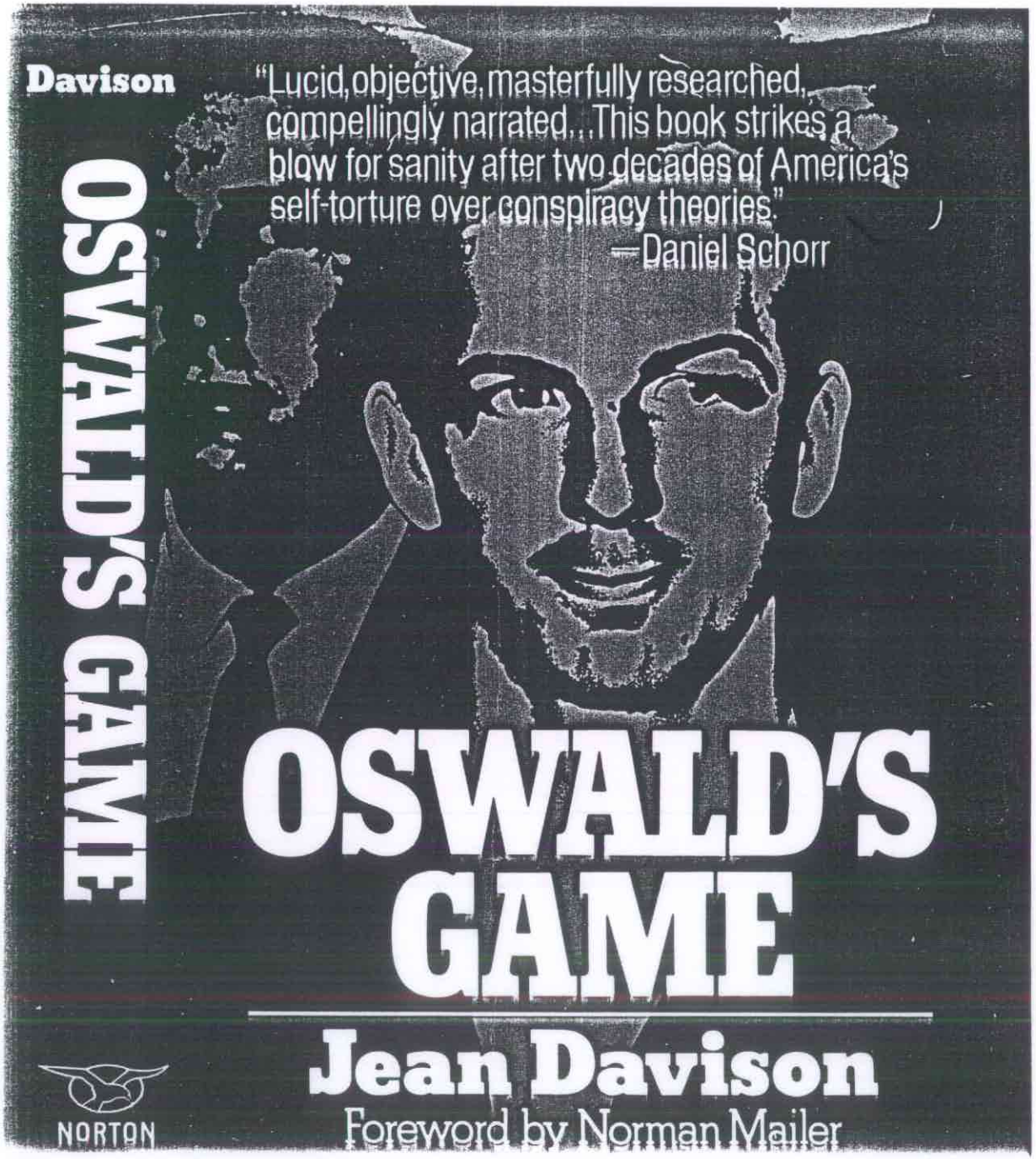

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Oswald's Game

Jean Davison

Foreword by Norman Mailer

Twenty years have passed since President John F. Kennedy was shot in Dallas, and although both the Warren Commission and the House Assassinations Committee concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald was his assassin, neither investigation could explain *why* he did it. By presenting a careful, thoroughly researched examination of Oswald's life, character, and ambition, this is the first book to challenge conspiracy theories and reveal how Oswald was politically motivated to assassinate the President.

As an adolescent, Oswald was diagnosed as emotionally disturbed but sane and intelligent. He became a Marxist when he was sixteen and once threatened to kill President Eisenhower for exploiting the working class. In 1959, he defected to the Soviet Union and, three years later, returned to the United States, where he attempted to assassinate a right-wing leader. By September 1963, Oswald was a pro-Castro activist trying to infiltrate anti-Castro organizations as an *agent provocateur* and suggesting that Kennedy be killed.

No previous explanation has encompassed all this material. Written over a span of thirteen years, this book is provocative and controversial, a groundbreaking investigation of the most vital yet neglected factor in the mystery of Kennedy's assassination—the assassin himself.

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Credit: John A. Davison

JEAN DAVISON is a free-lance writer living in Vermont.

Printed in the United States of America

"I have never found persuasive any of the 'conspiracy theories' about President Kennedy's murder, and despite the deficiencies of the Warren Report, I have always believed Lee Oswald was the lone assassin. *Oswald's Game* comes as near proving it and providing the long-sought motive as perhaps any investigation ever will."

—Tom Wicker

"For twenty years we have been subjected to a variety of wooly-headed conspiracy theories about President Kennedy's assassination. Jean Davison has stripped away the emotionalism and inaccuracies to present us with very persuasive evidence that Oswald was the lone assassin, on his own but influenced by his admiration for Fidel Castro. She carefully traces Oswald's character and the circumstances surrounding JFK's death. This is a fascinating and important book."

—Marianne Means, columnist, King Features syndicate and Hearst newspapers

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Davison

OSWALD'S GAME

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Jean Davison

FOREWORD BY NORMAN MAILER

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Illustrations appear between oo and oo.

Foreword

In field artillery, forward observers are told to bracket a target. If, in their estimation, the first shot falls three hundred yards short, they call for the next to be six hundred yards farther. They want to be certain to land on the far side; that way, by comparing the near and the long, they can approach a direct hit. The target is not found as well creeping toward it. One wants to make certain that errors fall to opposite sides of the mark.

Oswald's Game by Jean Davison fulfills such a purpose. Considering the difficulties surrounding one lonely researcher, she does it well, and here I may as well confess that the author came to my attention when she wrote me a letter full of gentle but determined criticisms to *Conspiracy* by Anthony Summers (McGraw-Hill 1980). I suggested then that she write her own book. Indeed, she has, and I think it may enter the small canon of acceptable words about Lee Harvey Oswald and the Kennedy assassinations, and say this although I am still not sympathetic to her point of view which would argue that Oswald was not an agent for the KGB, CIA, or FBI, nor any part of an anti-Castro Cuban conspiracy with the Mafia to kill Jack Kennedy (which possibilities are carefully investigated in Anthony Summers's book) but to the contrary, Davison here makes the case that Oswald was what he purported to be, an isolated Marxist, half-crazed, who killed for his ideas—in other words, we are given the Warren Commission revisited. While their august labor now resides in our minds as a congeries of evasions, replete with bad conscience (for the Warren Commission cut off more interesting possibilities than it opened) Jean Davison has gone through the forest and settled on a string of trees

that offer a path. Her product, as a result, has lucidity and Oswald emerges as the protagonist of a novel, rather than as a set of forced conclusions by committee. Her work, in short, has conviction, and offers us a recognizable Oswald, a desperately fouled-up young psychopath, full of brilliance, arrogance, cruelty, and bad spelling all in one. So *Oswald's Game* presents a thesis that is unpleasant but not to be ignored, for it is possible. The merit is that Ms. Davison lands on the other side of the target.

When we treat such enigmas as assassination and the possible implication of secret police, we never know whether to give such agents credit for too much intelligence or too little—the crucial question is always: are they as stupid as they seem? Or do they pretend to such incompetence in order to conceal exceptional plans and works? Of course, both may be true. Some of the brightest and some of the most stupid (let us say blindly stubborn) men among us go into secret police work. Short of a solution to the Kennedy assassination, we do have to live, therefore, with two notions of Oswald—that he was the focus, the pawn, and the plaything of more than one intelligence organization, most specifically the CIA and the KGB (and on this is much intriguing evidence that Summers presents, and Davison all but ignores) or, to the contrary, these services were surprisingly benign in their treatment of Oswald—which is not inconceivable given the peculiar reflexes of bureaucracy—but is certainly suggestive of intense incompetence. It is not easy to believe that the KGB would accept an American defector without scrupulously analyzing the possibility that he was a young CIA plant, or without trying to turn him into an agent for themselves. At the least, to make him a double agent would be a game of much interest to them. In turn, on Oswald's voyage back to America, we are also asked, via Davison, to believe that the CIA never debriefed Oswald, or made any attempt to use him as a counter in a game with the KGB. It is hard to believe all those intelligent, game-hardened Ivy League classmates of mine were not seizing the rare opportunity that Oswald presented. Still, Davison takes the benign view. Somehow or other, Oswald slipped through. They did not bother with him. They were out to lunch when he came along. It is conceivable, but it is a point of view that must ignore much, particularly that the genial and urbane George de Mohrenschildt featured in her pages was not conceivably debriefing Oswald for the CIA.

If we are willing to accept Jean Davison's portrait of Oswald as a psychopath, and to a great degree I am, it becomes difficult to see him pursuing one course to the exclusion of all others. Psychopaths have a prodigious sense of their own talents, of their speed of mind and essential importance—so they see opportunities everywhere. Given their enormous sense of the present, their lack of loyalty to the past, and their taste for action, it is natural for psychopaths to attach themselves to every opportunity even when their aims are contradictory. The clue to much of Oswald's behavior, and Davison leads us to it even at damage to her thesis, is his psychopathy. He would not have been out of his element leading eight lives at once. To assume, however, that none of these eight lives was dictated by the KGB, CIA, FBI, Mafia may be to insist on a valley in this fog where others sense a mountain range. Davison does not even seem aware that Marina Oswald's uncle, Ilya Prusakov, was a lieutenant colonel in the MVD and a leading light of Minsk. He gave approval to her marriage to Oswald. The Marina Oswald that Jean Davison offers us does not present such fine connections.

No matter. I return to the first dilemma. The net of conspiracy is always *more* or *less* finely woven than what we do perceive of it. Coincidence often creates the facsimile of evidence for many a conspiracy. To give my own example, I remember that I worked through most of the Fifties in a small studio building on Fulton Street in Brooklyn, and on the floor below worked Colonel Abel, undercover head of a vast net of Soviet espionage in America. For years Abel and I must have gone up and down in the elevator together many times. Then, too, in the late Forties, I subscribed for a little while to the *Daily Worker,* and since I was staying with my parents at the time, my father was brought up before a Loyalty Board and almost lost his governmental job. Finally I wrote a novel called *An American Dream* and in the first paragraph Jack Kennedy is mentioned not ten lines

away from the name of the villain whom I chose to call Barney *Oswald* Kelly. I wrote that paragraph in September, 1963, two months before the assassination.

Conceive of those items as they must look on a computer readout in some Intelligence shop. Then add to them that in 1965 I exhorted Berkeley youth to hang posters of LBJ upside down as a protest against the war in Vietnam, and in truth was so demagogical that a standing ovation rewarded me. I am struck how full of profile many a dossier can seem if we are not alert to these unfathomable powers of coincidence. So I can read *Oswald's Game* as a most legitimate attempt to perceive the terrain on that other side of the moon where people's lives are always less interesting than they ought to be, and less sinister, less manipulated. Though I belong to the Summers's school of conspiracy, I still think Jean Davison has delivered an invaluable tool, a corrective, a clear measure of the other possibility to be kept in mind by all us other amateur and professional investigators of the great American mystery. From my side of the debate, I choose then to greet her work.

Norman Mailer

Vladimir Ilyich and I recalled a simile L. Trotsky used somewhere. Once when walking, he spotted in the distance the figure of a man squatting on his haunches and moving his hands about in an absurd way. *A madman!* he thought. But on drawing nearer, he saw that it was a man sharpening his knife on the paving-stone.

—Lenin's wife, quoted in Bertram D. Wolfe's
Three Who Made a Revolution

Introduction

Practically everybody who can remember November 22, 1963, remembers the exact moment when he or she heard that President John F. Kennedy had been shot while riding in a motorcade in Dallas. I was sitting in a staff office at the University of Georgia, getting ready to teach a class of freshmen, when I saw a knot of students in the hall huddled around a transistor radio. One glanced up at me with the fiercely introspective look survivors of a natural disaster often have and said, "Somebody shot President Kennedy."

I didn't believe it. An hour or so later, after news came that he had died, I walked outside the building and noticed the intense green of the lawn and trees and the sudden weight of the air. Down the hill, a long line of cars was backed up leaving the campus—all classes had been canceled. The cars moved foot by foot, but very quietly and patiently, like a funeral procession.

People too young to remember may find it hard to credit the degree of shock and disbelief that was the almost universal reaction. No American leader had been assassinated since McKinley in 1901, and Kennedy was no ordinary leader, as even his adversaries agreed. More than a popular president, he was fortune's child, having wit, elegance, wealth, and a style that made his admirers talk, even while he lived, of the Kennedy myth and the legend of Camelot. He had been destroyed in an instant by a bullet to the brain, and for no apparent reason.

At first, because Dallas was a notorious center of right-wing extremism, many people assumed Kennedy had been attacked by a right-wing fanatic—someone who opposed his civil rights program or his efforts to relax tensions with the Soviet Union. The news that the

suspect who had been arrested—a 24-year-old named Lee Harvey Oswald—was a Marxist and a former defector to the Soviet Union struck many as a grotesque twist of fate. When Robert Kennedy told his brother's widow, Jacqueline, that Oswald was a Communist, her reaction was, "Oh my God, but that's absurd. . . . It even robs his death of any meaning." A Marxist killing a liberal president made no sense.

Under arrest, Oswald maintained he hadn't shot anybody. Two days later, when the police attempted to transfer him from one jail to another, he was gunned down by Jack Ruby, a Dallas nightclub owner, before a national television audience.

Over the next few weeks the public's impression of Oswald solidified around the bits of information that came out through the news media. Oswald never held a steady job and he had marital problems. He seemed erratic and aimless. Having defected to Russia, he returned to the United States and later tried to go to Cuba. In April of 1963 he had reportedly taken a shot at retired General Edwin A. Walker, a prominent right-winger—Walker was one of Kennedy's bitterest political enemies. Many editorials blamed the vicious anti-Kennedy atmosphere in Dallas for inciting a confused misfit to violence.

In 1964 the Warren Commission published the results of the official investigation—a summary that came to be known as the Warren Report, followed by twenty-six volumes of testimony and exhibits that sold mainly to libraries. The report presented strong circumstantial evidence that Oswald had fired three shots at the motorcade from the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository, striking Kennedy twice and Governor John Connally once, and that during his attempt to escape he had shot and killed Patrolman J.D. Tippit. Among other things, the rifle found in the School Depository had been mailed to Oswald's post office box, and the order blank and money order bore his handwriting. When he was arrested at a movie theater, he held in his hand a pistol that matched the bullet casings found near Patrolman Tippit's body—and Oswald reportedly exclaimed, "It's all over now." But perhaps the most telling was a small symbolic gesture. Before Oswald went to work at the Depository on the morning of the assassination, he took off his wedding ring and left it on his wife's dresser, something he had never done before.

And yet, although the Warren Commission concluded that Oswald shot Kennedy, it was unable to say why:

> Many factors were undoubtedly involved in Oswald's motivation for the assassination, and the Commission does not believe that it can ascribe to him any one motive or group of motives.

The Warren Report spoke of his troubled personal life, his hostility to American society, his interest in Marxism, and his alleged propensity for violence. None of this seemed adequate to explain what had been called the crime of the century. It seemed to many Americans that the reason Kennedy was murdered would never be known.

Some felt, in fact, that there *was* no reason. If Oswald was a lone gunman with no motive, then the assassination was an event without meaning. It was as though Kennedy had been struck by a bolt of lightning, or by a brick that happened to fall from a construction site as the motorcade passed by. In their view, it amounted to the same thing: the course of history had been changed by a freak accident.

Others suspected a conspiracy from the very beginning. They pointed out that the murder of any head of state is a political crime. If the assassin wasn't a raving lunatic—and Oswald certainly wasn't that—then there must have been a political motive. The Warren Commission's critics began asking the old legal question, *Cui bono?* Who stood to gain by Kennedy's death? If Oswald had no obvious motive, there were others who did—CIA operatives and Cuban exiles who felt Kennedy had double-crossed them at the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, and Mafia dons who were feeling heat from Kennedy's Justice Department, to name a few. As many of the critics saw it, one had only to discover the links between these groups and their patsy, Lee Harvey Oswald, to determine a motive. The result would be a multitude of assassination books attacking the Warren Report and offering new theories about how and who and why. The prospect of a widespread, high-level conspiracy entered America's consciousness, as did a new suspicion about the way our world worked. In these books, Oswald is merely a pawn, and the real assassins are the unidentified men who successfully plotted to control and change American history.

It has been said that there are only two theories of history: blunder and conspiracy. Broadly speaking, these were the only theories about Dallas, as well. It was an act of random violence or a plot. Choose the first, and run head on into the conclusion that history—life itself—is chaotic and meaningless. Choose the second, and history is a racket run by unseen, all-powerful conspirators.

In the mid-1960s I didn't take an interest in this controversy. Like a lot of people I had formed an immediate impression of the alleged assassin: he was "some kind of nut" who probably didn't know himself why he did what he did. As far as I was concerned, the case was closed. In 1965 I left my teaching job and got married, moved north, and began working as a free-lance writer.

Then in 1968 I happened to read an article about Oswald in *The Westwood Village Square,* a conservative, youth-oriented magazine that has since folded. The article was written by an anti-Communist propagandist named Ed Butler, who said he had faced Oswald in a New Orleans radio debate on Cuba in August 1963. That surprised me, since I found it hard to imagine Oswald, who apparently couldn't even hold a menial job, holding his own in a public debate. But according to Butler, he was a well-informed and articulate debater who was dedicated to the cause of Castro's Cuba. Butler produced testimony and documents from the Warren Commission records to bolster his belief that Oswald had been "conditioned to kill" by the Communist propaganda he'd been reading since he was a teenager. That didn't seem likely, to put it mildly, but even taking Butler's political bias into account, I couldn't reconcile this picture of Oswald as a skilled public debater with the one I had previously been given of him as a hapless drifter. Although I didn't realize it, I was getting bitten by one of the central mysteries of the Kennedy assassination—the question of who Oswald really was.

On a later trip to the library I checked out Mark Lane's *Rush to Judgment,* one of the first attacks on the Warren Report. Lane had been retained by Oswald's mother to represent her son's interests before the Commission. His argument was that Oswald had been framed. Almost nothing was said about Oswald's personal background, his political commitment or lack of one. Like the defense attorney he was, Lane tore into virtually every piece of evidence in the case against his client—the shell casings found near Patrolman Tippit's body, the famous snapshots showing Oswald holding the rifle found in the Depository, and much more. Lane portrayed the Warren Report as a farce, a calculated attempt to conceal a conspiracy. By the time I had finished this angry book, I wondered if Oswald was involved in the assassination at all.

I now had *three* pictures of Oswald to choose from: those of the Warren Commission, Butler, and Lane. All had relied on evidence contained in the Commission's twenty-six volumes. Everybody had read the same material and arrived at wildly different conclusions.

How was that possible? More to the point, who was telling the truth? At the time, it seemed simple enough to find out. I would read the twenty-six volumes myself.

I found the blue-bound *Hearings* in a local university library. Volumes I–XV contained the testimony of witnesses who appeared at the Commission's hearings or gave depositions before a Commission lawyer. The question-and-answer format made the transcripts read like the text of a play. The remaining volumes contained exhibits entered as evidence—FBI reports, photographs, and similar documents. The first thing that struck me was how disorganized this material was. An FBI report on ballistics might be followed by a psychiatric report on Jack Ruby's mother or a description of the preparations for the motorcade. And there was no index. I began taking notes, wondering if I could ever find an underlying order in this jumble of information.

During the reading I checked some of Mark Lane's footnotes. The testimony he had cited as evidence that the Warren Report was a cover-up had often been quoted out of context, so that what he quoted changed the meaning of what had actually been said. For example, the way Lane wrote about Jack Ruby's testimony led readers to believe that Ruby was denied the opportunity to reveal the existence of a conspiracy.

After Ruby had been convicted of Oswald's murder and sentenced to death, Warren Commission members Earl Warren and Gerald R. Ford questioned him at the Dallas jail. For many months, there had been rumors that Ruby was a hit man whose job had been to silence Oswald. To hear Lane tell it, Ruby seemed eager to disclose his part in this conspiracy:

> Ruby made it plain that if the Commission took him from the Dallas County Jail and permitted him to testify in Washington, he could tell more there; it was impossible for him to tell the whole truth so long as he was in the jail in Dallas. . . . "I would like to request that I go to Washington and . . . take all the tests that I have to take. It is very important. . . . Gentlemen, unless you get me to Washington, you can't get a fair shake out of me."

After quoting similar statements by Ruby, Lane continued:

Representative Ford asked, not a little redundantly, "Is there anything more you can tell us if you went back to Washington?" Ruby told him that there was, and just before the hearing ended Ruby made one last plea to the Chief Justice of the United States.

RUBY: But you are the only one that can save me. I think you can.

WARREN: Yes?

RUBY: But by delaying minutes, you lose the chance. And all I want to do is tell the truth, and that is all.

But Warren didn't take him to Washington. Reading Lane's account, one is horrified. His implication is clear: Ruby was begging to be allowed to expose the conspiracy, and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court wouldn't listen.

Everything Lane quoted was in the record. What he *didn't* say, however, was that the "tests" Ruby wanted to take were simply a lie detector test—and the reason Ruby wanted to take one was to prove that he was *not* part of a conspiracy.

After his arrest, Ruby had been diagnosed as a "psychotic depressive." His testimony to the Commission indicates that he believed he was the victim of a political conspiracy by right-wing forces in Dallas. He suggested that the John Birch Society was spreading the falsehood that he, a Jew, was implicated in the president's death in order to create anti-Jewish hysteria. "The Jewish people are being exterminated at this moment," Ruby insisted. "Consequently, a whole new form of government is going to take over our country." To foil this supposed plot, Ruby repeatedly asked to be given a lie detector test. At various points in this conversation Ruby told Warren:

No subversive organization gave me any idea. No underworld person made any effort to contact me. It all happened that Sunday morning. . . . If you don't take me back to Washington tonight to give me a chance to prove to the President that I am not guilty, then you will see the most tragic thing that will ever happen. . . . All I want is a lie detector test. . . . All I want to do is tell the truth, and that is all. There was no conspiracy.

The following month Ruby was allowed to take a polygraph test in his jail cell, and he showed no signs of deception when he denied being part of a conspiracy. Because of the doubts about his sanity, however, the test results were considered inconclusive.

The only part of this background that appears in Lane's book is Ruby's statement, "All I want to do is tell the truth, and that is all."

Had he presented the accompanying material, Lane might have argued that Ruby was faking. Instead, Lane cheated. He transformed a man who seemed pathetically anxious to prove his innocence into an honest conspirator desperate to reveal everything he knew. And this was only one of many similar distortions in *Rush to Judgment.*

I remember feeling outraged when I realized what Lane had done. Evidently, the Warren records were like a vast lumberyard. By picking up a few pieces here and there, and doing some cutting and fitting, any theory could be built for which someone had a blueprint.

Meanwhile my impression of Lee Harvey Oswald was changing. I was surprised by the sheer amount of material the Commission had collected on his background. Much of this information was new in the sense that it had never been published anywhere except in the *Hearings.* There was testimony from dozens of witnesses who had known Oswald at each stage of his life from birth to death—they described him and his activities and recounted numerous conversations they had had with him. And there was a good deal more: Oswald's personal papers and letters; detailed evaluations by social workers and a psychiatrist who had interviewed him when he was a junior high school truant; a diary and manuscript he had written that purported to show his experiences in the Soviet Union; his school, Marine, and work records—even lists of the books he checked out of libraries, the magazines and newspapers he subscribed to, and the reading material found among his effects.

A transcript of the radio debate Ed Butler had written about was included, and Oswald did indeed appear to be an able debater. The moderator, a reporter named William Stuckey, testified that he thought Oswald was impressive, almost like a young lawyer. And Stuckey's judgment was not unusual. Virtually everyone who knew Lee Oswald thought he was intelligent, rational, and dedicated to his brand of left-wing politics. The people who knew him best described him as a revolutionary. (This was in 1964, when most Americans thought revolutionaries existed only in banana republics or in Russia before 1917.) On the other hand, people also felt that he was bitter, secretive, and—the most frequent description of all—"arrogant." Testimony about his troubled personal life, beginning when he was a child, was presented in great detail as well.

And yet, if the impression Oswald gave his relatives and acquaintances was clear, some of his political activities were not. He went to the Soviet Union as a 19-year-old defector and lived there for almost

three years. The particulars of his life during that period are, and probably always will be, sketchy. He had given political reasons for his defection, but were they the only reasons? After he returned to the United States, he supported Castro both publicly and privately, but he also made contact with anti-Castro groups. These clouded areas of activity raise questions about which side he was really on. After the assassination, there had been heavy speculation that he may have actually been working for the CIA or the FBI. (Although I didn't like Mark Lane's methods, I could see that he and the other more responsible critics did have a point.)

But no one's explanation encompassed all the available material. The authors of the Warren Report had emphasized Oswald's personal life, while turning aside important questions about his political associations. Ed Butler ignored everything except Oswald's evident obsession with left-wing politics. The shadowy aspects of his record were left to the Commission's critics, who talked about little else.

Not that I was doing any better. Without ever having made a conscious decision to do so, I was becoming an assassination researcher. Reading the testimony, I was learning more about Lee Harvey Oswald than I ever wanted to know, and I couldn't understand his motivations either. I began putting the details of his life into chronological order, hoping to catch the drift of his thinking in the way events unfolded. Leaning first toward one theory, and then another, I soon discovered that it was possible to manipulate the evidence to support any position I took (whether it was, for example, that Oswald worked for the FBI or that he did *not* work for the FBI.) Unfortunately, whichever stand I chose, there was always evidence left over that seemed to contradict it. The simple idea of coming up with a theory and finding evidence to support it was obviously the wrong way to go about finding out the truth.

I gave up the research for a while and turned to other things. When I went back to it I made a deliberate effort to cover as much ground as I could without looking for patterns of evidence to convince me of any particular theory. Eventually the research involved substantially more than the Commission's twenty-six volumes. I read a biography of Oswald written by his brother and many other books and articles on the assassination. I went through contemporary newspapers and magazines, concentrating especially on those Oswald subscribed to and presumably read. I visited the National Archives to examine still other Commission records. Later, I read Senator Frank Church's senate committee reports on the CIA plots to murder Castro, and the

1979 hearings and report of the House Assassinations Committee. In 1978, a new study describing the personality traits of career criminals gave me additional insight into Oswald's character. The project, started on a whim, lasted, off and on, for thirteen years.

During that time, as I acquired more knowledge about Oswald and the times he lived in, explanations for some of his mysterious activities suddenly emerged. Since I had not been pursuing any particular theory by looking for evidence to support what I already believed, I was often surprised by what I found. I don't claim to have solved all the questions surrounding the assassination, but I believe I have found an answer to one of the most elusive: Oswald's motive.

The motive was one suspected by Lyndon Johnson, President Kennedy's successor. Shortly before he died, Johnson told journalist Leo Janos that after he took office he discovered "we were operating a damn 'Murder Inc' in the Caribbean." He said that a year or so before Kennedy's death a CIA-backed assassination team had been picked up in Havana. Although he couldn't prove it, Johnson believed that Dallas had been a retaliation for this thwarted attempt on Castro's life. On another occasion Johnson told columnist Marianne Means that he thought Oswald had acted "either under the influence or the orders" of Cuban Premier Fidel Castro. More recently, several writers—former CBS reporter Daniel Schorr, among others—have echoed LBJ's dreadful suspicion that American plots to kill Castro had somehow backfired in Dallas.

Writing in the *New York Review of Books* in 1977, Schorr pointed out that Oswald could have become aware of these plots, and Castro's reaction to them, from an article that appeared in his local newspaper some ten weeks before the assassination. The article was based on an impromptu interview American reporter Daniel Harker had had with Castro in September 1963, and Castro was quoted as saying, "We are prepared to fight them and answer in kind. United States leaders should think that if they are aiding terrorist plans to eliminate Cuban leaders, they themselves will not be safe." (This newspaper article appears in the Warren Commission's published exhibits. It *wasn't* mentioned in the Warren Report, however.)

Is it possible that Castro's warning to American leaders gave Oswald the idea that Kennedy should be killed? Daniel Schorr thought so. He revealed that just three weeks after the Harker interview was published, Oswald reportedly made threatening statements about Kennedy when he visited the Cuban Embassy in Mexico City to apply for a visa to enter Cuba. Oswald was quoted as telling a consular

official that he wanted to "free Cuba from American imperialism." Then he said, "Someone ought to shoot that President Kennedy. Maybe I'll try to do it." Schorr had uncovered two sources that reported Oswald's threat. One was a top-secret letter FBI director J. Edgar Hoover had sent to the Warren Commission in 1964, the other a tabloid article in 1967 that quoted Fidel Castro.

Considering the timing of Oswald's outburst, Schorr concluded that it was likely Castro had influenced Oswald, as Lyndon Johnson had suspected. Schorr wrote, "The 'influence' may have been as simple as reading Castro's public denunciation of attempts on him and the warning of possible retaliation." Schorr believed that "the possibility Oswald acted on his own, inspired by Castro's statement, cannot today be proved." Even so, he ended by saying, "An arrow launched into the air to kill a foreign leader may well have fallen back to kill our own."

By the time Schorr's article appeared, my research had already led me to a similar conclusion. This book will present evidence that Castro's public warning did, in fact, inspire Oswald to assassinate the president. Furthermore, the full context of Oswald's life directed him toward this reaction. In the final analysis, the assassination was a natural outgrowth of Oswald's character and background—and of the American-backed plots to kill Castro.

The reader will probably be skeptical, for there have already been two official investigations and scores of books, each claiming to have uncovered the truth about Dallas. He or she may well ask: If what you say is true, why hasn't this solution been discovered before now? In large part, American authorities have been understandably reluctant to suggest that Cuba or any other foreign government was involved—however indirectly—in the assassination of the president.

One of the authors of the Warren Report, attorney Wesley J. Liebeler, told writer David S. Lifton in 1965 that he "suspected Cuban involvement." Writing in *Best Evidence,* Lifton said that Liebeler then "dwelt at great length on a speech Castro had made in September 1963 and the possibility that this speech may have influenced Oswald." (This "speech" was the newspaper article quoted above.) Lifton only mentioned this conversation in passing and said nothing further about it. But there was no hint of Liebeler's suspicion in the Warren Report. According to records in the National Archives, Liebeler had argued that Castro's warning should be included in the report, but he was overruled by the chief counsel of the investigation, J. Lee Rankin, who contended that there was no evidence Oswald had seen it. Liebeler

wrote a memo protesting this decision, noting that the same could be said of certain anti-Kennedy propaganda distributed in Dallas, which *was* discussed in the report. Liebeler added, "Our discussion of the possible inclusion of the Castro quote had obvious political overtones."

Hoover's top-secret letter was also withheld from the report. After the assassination a Communist party informant for the FBI had gone to Cuba and met with Fidel Castro. The informant said that Castro had told him about a threat Oswald had made against the president in Mexico City—Castro explained that the Cubans had considered this a provocation and would have nothing to do with him. Hoover passed this information along in his letter to the Commission, but the matter was dropped. Nowhere in the report is there any indication that Oswald might have threatened Kennedy's life in the presence of a Cuban official. On the contrary, the report states that the Commission had found *no evidence* "that Oswald's trip to Mexico was in any way connected with the assassination of President Kennedy." The author of that section of the report, W. David Slawson, apparently never saw Hoover's letter.

Thus, the Warren Report omitted two significant pieces of evidence: (1) Castro's warning that he was ready to "answer in kind" to American-backed assassination plots, which appeared in Oswald's hometown paper on September 9; (2) a report that some three weeks later Oswald told the Cubans he was ready to kill the president. Had the Warren investigation put together these and other clues available to it, Oswald's probable motive might have been explained back in 1964.

However, there was one piece of information the Commission didn't have. It didn't know the CIA had been trying to murder Fidel Castro. If these plots had been common knowledge in November 1963, as they are today, the announcement that the accused assassin was a militant supporter of Castro would have suggested a retaliation from the start. But the Warren Commission investigators didn't know about about our "Murder Incorporated" in the Caribbean—the CIA officials who had that knowledge didn't tell them. With that path kept in the dark, the Commission looked for Oswald's motivation down several better-lighted dead ends.

Having failed to provide a motive, the Warren Report soon fell prey to the proponents of a conspiracy, who dismissed Oswald as a pawn and looked for a motive in the minds of Mafia dons and CIA operatives. It is one purpose of this book to show how some of the most

she is here explicitly - she assumes the correctness of my WC thesis that LHO was the lone assassin and sets out to prove it without any of our criticisms of the lone

widely read conspiracy books have presented what amounts to an imaginary history. The argument that Oswald was the tool of a high-level conspiracy does seem plausible, until one tries to fit it into the context these theorists always leave out—the personality and background of Lee Harvey Oswald, the individual.

Jean Davison

OSWALD'S GAME

1...A Most Unusual Defector

On a crisp, clear day in October, 1959, advisers and allies of the Kennedy family gathered for an important meeting at Robert Kennedy's house on Cape Cod. Seated in front of a fireplace, they listened as Senator John Kennedy talked about his decision to make a run for the 1960 Democratic presidential nomination. This election would mark the end of the Eisenhower era, a period of deceptive tranquillity compared to the raucous decade that lay ahead. The country was at peace, although the Cold War continued, as both sides tested intercontinental ballistic missiles and began putting unmanned satellites into orbit. In Cuba, Fidel Castro's revolution was less than a year old. There was a small group of U.S. military advisers in South Vietnam, but this would not be a campaign issue. Earlier that year the milestone of first American casualties—two GIs killed by a Vietcong bomb—made front-page news. However, the conflict there soon dropped to the back pages. At home, the civil rights movement was quietly gaining momentum. It was the year of "Father Knows Best" and "Leave It to Beaver," the TV quiz show scandals, and the kitchen debate between Premier Nikita Khruschev and Vice-President Nixon.

During the same month the Kennedy forces assembled to map strategy, a young ex-Marine named Lee Harvey Oswald entered the Soviet Union on a six-day visa. Soon after he reached Moscow he informed his female Intourist guide that he wanted to become a Soviet citizen. She helped him draft a letter to the Supreme Soviet and put him in touch with the appropriate officials—who were not encouraging. On October 21 he was informed that since his visa had expired, he would have to leave the country that evening. Oswald went back

to his hotel room and cut his left wrist about an hour before his guide was scheduled to arrive. She found him in time, and he was taken to a hospital where his minor wound was stitched up and he was held for observation. The ploy of a suicide attempt apparently turned the Soviet bureaucracy around. According to Oswald's Russian diary, a new group of officials interviewed him and told him that his request to stay in the country was being reconsidered and that he would hear from them, but "not soon."

After waiting in his hotel room for three days, Oswald decided a "showdown" was needed to give the Russians a sign of his faith in them. On October 31 he took a taxi to the American Embassy, slammed his passport down on Consul Richard Snyder's desk, and announced that he wanted to give up his American citizenship. Oswald gave Snyder a signed, handwritten note:

> I, Lee Harvey 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 for citizenship in the Soviet Union, through the means of naturalization. My request for citizenship is now pending before the Supreme 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 consideration.
>
> I affirm that my allegiance is to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.[1]

The note showed that Oswald understood the legal procedure for renouncing his citizenship. Snyder observed at a glance that Oswald was "wound up like six watch springs." He later said, "You could tell he'd been rehearsing this scene for a long time."

When Oswald demanded that he be allowed to sign the necessary papers then and there, the consul stalled. The month before, another American had formally renounced his citizenship and had been accepted by the Soviets. It turned out that the man had been discharged from the armed forces with a 100% mental disability. When the mental problem became obvious, the Soviets had reacted as though they had purchased damaged goods. They contacted the embassy and ordered the Americans to "get him out of here." With that incident in mind, Snyder, who had once worked for the CIA, tried to get more information from Oswald. He asked his reasons, and Oswald launched into a condemnation of American military imperialism.

When Oswald declared, "I am a Marxist," Snyder joked that he was going to be a very lonesome man in the Soviet Union. Evidently, Oswald didn't get it. He replied that he had been warned the consul would try to talk him out of his decision, and he didn't want any lectures. Snyder quizzed him about his knowledge of Marxist theory. He later remembered asking him "if he could tell me a little bit about the theory of labor value." Oswald didn't have the faintest notion of what he was talking about. When he wrote to Washington about this incident two days later, he said that Oswald had "displayed all the airs of a new sophomore party-liner." The overall impression Snyder got was one of "overbearing arrogance and insufferable adolescence." He thought Oswald was intelligent and mentally competent—but unintellectual, intense, and humorless.

Sometime during their conversation, Oswald dropped another hot potato in his lap. While Oswald was in the Marines he had been a radar operator at a U.S. base in Japan from which America's secret U-2 planes made reconnaissance flights over the Soviet Union. He had tracked the high-altitude U-2s on his radar screen. When Snyder asked him if he was actually prepared to serve the Soviet state, Oswald told him about his duty as a radar operator and that he had informed Soviet officials he was ready to give them any military information he could recall concerning his specialty. He hinted he might know something of special interest.

Richard Snyder's assistant, John McVickar, was in the same room listening to this. The business about giving away secrets "raised hackles," he later testified. He thought Oswald made the threat in order to shock Snyder into taking prompt action on his renunciation of citizenship. The tone of the meeting was so unpleasant that McVickar and two other people who were in and out of the room during part of it—a receptionist and an American exchange student—still remembered it years later.

Finally Snyder told Oswald that the embassy staff would need some time to prepare the necessary papers and that he would have to come back. Oswald stalked out, leaving his passport behind. Snyder immediately drafted a wire to the Department of State reporting Oswald's visit, including his threat to reveal military information. Copies of the telex were sent to the CIA, FBI, and the Office of Naval Intelligence.

Someone at the embassy alerted the press, and the next day the *New York Times* ran a small story at the top of page 3:

EX-MARINE REQUESTS SOVIET CITIZENSHIP

MOSCOW, Oct. 31 (AP)—A former marine from Texas told the United States Embassy today that he had applied for Soviet citizenship.

"I have made up my mind, I'm through," said Lee Harvey Oswald, 20 years old of Fort Worth, slapping his passport on the desk.

The embassy suggested that he withhold signing papers renouncing his citizenship until he was sure the Soviet Union would accept him.

Mr. Oswald is the third American in recent months to apply for Soviet citizenship upon arriving in Moscow. . . .

Mr. Oswald's mother, Mrs. Marguerite Oswald, lives in Fort Worth. His sister-in-law, Mrs. R. L. Oswald of Fort Worth, said he got out of the Marines about a month ago and returned to Fort Worth for a visit.

After the news broke, Oswald was besieged by reporters at his hotel room. He refused all interviews, as well as telephone calls from his mother and brothers back home. His brother Robert found out when a reporter from the Fort Worth *Star-Telegram* confronted him at work with a telex from Moscow. He told the reporter, "Lee is awfully young, looking for excitement. I don't believe he knows what he is doing." As soon as Robert got home he telegraphed his brother: *"Through any possible means contact me. Mistake."*

On November 3 Oswald wrote to the American ambassador, going over Snyder's head as it were, to repeat his request for a revocation of his citizenship and to protest Snyder's refusal to grant his "legal right" to sign the papers. The letter concluded by saying that in the event his application for Soviet citizenship was accepted, "I will request my government to lodge a formal protest regarding this incident."

Five days later, he wrote Robert:

> Well, what shall we talk about, the weather perhaps? Certainly you do not wish me to speak of my decision to remain in the Soviet Union and apply for citizenship here, since I'm afraid you would not be able to comprehend my reasons. You really don't know anything about me. Do you know for instance that I have waited to do this for well over a year, do you know that I [phrase in Russian] speak a fair amount of Russian which I have been studying for many months.
>
> I have been told that I will not *have* to leave the Soviet Union if I do not care to. This then is my decision. I will not leave this country, the Soviet Union, under any conditions, I will never return to the United States which is a country I hate.

Reading these cold words, one wonders what there was in Oswald's past that led him to reject not only his country but his brother as well. Others—especially people who have followed the controversy about the Kennedy assassination—may suspect that Oswald was insincere and ask: *Who sent him? What was the real purpose behind his coming to the Soviet Union?* Certainly there was more to Oswald's defection than appeared on the surface.

Two weeks after his confrontation with Snyder, Oswald changed his mind about talking to the American press corps. He gave two interviews in which he elaborated on his reasons for defecting. On November 13 he called Aline Mosby, a UPI correspondent, who came to his room on the second floor of the Metropole Hotel. It was a large room overlooking the Bolshoi Theater, with ornate furniture and blue walls and she thought he looked totally out of place there, "like some Okie from the boondocks." Mosby asked questions and took notes in shorthand, and Oswald talked "non-stop" for two hours. He seemed a little stiff at first, but the longer he talked, the more confident, even smug, he became.

Aline Mosby was a veteran reporter, originally from Montana. (It was she who revealed, in 1952, that Marilyn Monroe had once posed for a nude calendar photo.) She had questioned other American defectors during her assignment in Moscow, but as the interview progressed she could see that Oswald was an anomaly. The others as she perceived them, fell into one of two categories—either a "high-level official who had played an important role in his country and decided to transfer his knowledge to the Soviet side" or someone "of the romantic variety who flees behind the Iron Curtain in the hopes of escaping personal problems." Oswald claimed that his reasons were ideological. When Mosby heard him using phrases like "capitalist lackeys," she thought it sounded "as if it were all being given by rote, as if he had memorized *Pravda*." She got very few glimpses of the person behind the political talk.

Mosby asked him how he had become a Marxist, and he told her, "I became interested about the age of 15. From an ideological viewpoint. An old lady handed me a pamphlet about saving the Rosenbergs. . . . I looked at that paper and I still remember it for some reason, I don't know why."[2] He was living with his mother in New York City at the time. The Rosenberg pamphlet introduced him to socialist literature. He began observing the "class struggle" in New York, "the luxury of Park Avenue and the workers' lives on the [Lower] East Side." Nobody had influenced him, he said and insisted

that it was only through his reading and personal observation of American society that he had become a Marxist. "I guess you could say I was influenced by what I read, and by observing that the material was correct in its theses."

Serving in the Marines had strengthened his beliefs, particularly his view of American imperialism: "Like Formosa. The conduct of American technicians there, helping drag up guns for the Chinese. Watching American technicians show the Chinese how to use them—it's one thing to talk about communism and another thing to drag a gun up a mountainside." On guard duty at night, he said, he would dream about getting out of the Marines and going to Russia—it would be, he thought, "like being out of prison."

About his decision to leave America he said, "I would not care to live in the United States where being a worker means you are exploited by the capitalists. If I would remain in the United States, feeling as I do, under the capitalist system, I could never get ahead. . . . I would have a choice of becoming a worker under the system I hate, or becoming unemployed. . . . One way or another I'd lose in the United States. In my own mind, even if I'd be exploiting other workers." Evidently, it was fairly important to him to get ahead and not lose.

He presented himself as a struggling idealist: "I'm sincere in my ideal. This is not something intangible. I'm going through pain and difficulty to do this." But even an idealist can be aggressive, and he seemed to believe he had chosen the winning side. At one point he said, "Communism is an aggressive ideal as well as an economic system. . . . The forces of communism are growing. I believe capitalism will disappear as feudalism disappeared." He also talked about armchair socialists. "You don't just sit around and talk about it," he said. "You go out and do it."

The next day Aline Mosby's UPI story was picked up by a Fort Worth newspaper and run under the headline "Fort Worth Defector Confirms Red Beliefs." After reading her account in another paper available in Moscow, Oswald telephoned Mosby to complain about what he considered to be distortions, saying that his family had not been poverty-stricken, as she had said. True, he told her how he had seen the "impoverishment of the masses" in his own mother, but he felt that Mosby had put her emphasis in the wrong place. He reiterated that his defection wasn't prompted by personal hardship, but was "a matter only of ideology."

On November 16, 1959, Priscilla Johnson stopped by the American Embassy to pick up her mail. She had just returned from the United States, where she was covering the Camp David summit meeting between President Eisenhower and Premier Khruschev. Her first job, oddly enough, had been in Washington as a researcher for the newly elected senator from Massachusetts, John F. Kennedy. In the winter of 1954–1955 she had gotten to know him well. She had left Washington and was working in New York as a Russian-language translator when he was hospitalized there for two operations on his spine. She visited him occasionally during his recovery, posing as one of his sisters. In 1958 she went to Moscow as a correspondent for the North American Newspaper Alliance and *The Progressive* magazine. (In 1977, as Priscilla Johnson McMillan, she would publish a book with Oswald's widow called *Marina and Lee.*)

At the embassy that day she had run into John McVickar, who told her, "Oh, by the way, there's a young American in your hotel trying to defect. He won't talk to any of *us,* but maybe he'll talk to you because you're a woman." When she knocked on the door of Oswald's room later that day, he came out into the hall to speak with her instead of inviting her in, but readily agreed to come up to her room on the floor above for an interview that evening.

Oswald arrived dressed in a dark flannel suit. With his "pale, rather pleasant features," he resembled "any of a dozen college boys I had known back home." They talked for about five hours, from nine until two in the morning. Like Aline Mosby, she had also seen other defectors, and she too found Oswald hard to figure. Oswald had just turned 20, and she had never known anyone "of that age . . . , or that generation, taking an ideological interest to the point where he would defect." He reminded her of the leftists who had emigrated to Russia for political reasons in the 1930s. The reasons Oswald gave—unemployment in the United States, racial inequalities—sounded "nineteen-thirtyish."

He began by complaining about the runaround he had gotten at the embassy, insisting that the American officials were "acting in an illegal way." He told her he had decided to grant the interview because, now that Soviet officials had assured him he would not be forced to return to the United States, he felt "it was safe to tell his side of the story." He wanted to counter the American Embassy's statements about his defection because, he said, "I would like to give people in the United States something to think about."

After that, he seemed mainly interested in discussing economic

theory. Like Richard Snyder, Priscilla Johnson got the impression that Oswald didn't fully understand Marxist economics. When she pointed out that the Soviets made a large profit from their workers in order to accumulate capital for the state, Oswald agreed. What was important, he said, was that the profit was used to benefit *all* the people, emphasizing this concept with a sweep of his arm. Asked about the difference in the living standards of the two countries, he replied, "They don't have as many hot water heaters and meat pies here but they will in 20 years, through an economic system that is leaving the United States far behind." At another point he told her, "I believe sooner or later communism will replace capitalism. Capitalism is a defensive ideology, whereas communism is aggressive." A recent meeting of the Supreme Soviet had taken no action on Oswald's request for citizenship, and Johnson thought he seemed disappointed and worried by that. But he told her he hoped that his experience as a radar operator would make him more desirable to them.

Oswald's account of how he became a Marxist was virtually the same as the one he had given Mosby. He reiterated his belief, from his observations in New York, that the workers were exploited and explained once more how he had discovered socialist literature and saw that the description it gave of capitalist society "was quite correct." He told her, "I had been brought up like any Southern boy to hate Negroes. Socialist literature opened my eyes to the economic reasons for hating Negroes: so the wages could be kept low."

Listening to him, Johnson felt "it was as though Oswald wanted to convince us both that he had never had a childhood, that he had been all his life a machine, calibrating social justice."

He repeatedly said that his decision to defect was "unemotional." But she noticed that his voice seemed to tighten when he talked about his mother, whom he described as a victim of the capitalist system. In contrast, his voice sounded cold and considerably more distant when he answered a question about his father's line of work: "I *believe* he was an insurance salesman." (In fact, his father had died before Oswald was born.) Oswald told her he had joined the Marines "because we were poor and I didn't want to be a burden on my family." By his account, he'd been making plans to defect for two years, finding out how to go about it mostly by reading. "I have had practical experience in the world," he said. "I am not an idealist completely. I have had a chance to watch American imperialism in action."

Shortly after the assassination, Priscilla Johnson would write, "If there was one thing that stood out in all our conversation, it was his

truly compelling need . . . to think of himself as extraordinary." When she asked him if he recommended defection to others, he said he did not. The course *he* had chosen was not for everyone. Defection meant "coming into a new country, always being the outsider, always adjusting, but I know now that I will never *have* to return to the United States. I believe what I am doing is right."

And later, in *Marina and Lee,* she wrote, "Our evening was like a seesaw, with me trying to get Lee to talk about himself and Lee trying to talk about his 'ideology.' I would say that Lee won." Before he left, he told her he had never talked about himself so long to anyone before, and she felt a twinge of pity, "for if this was his idea of openness, then I thought he must never have talked about himself to anyone at all."

Ten days after his interview with Priscilla Johnson, Oswald wrote a second, remarkable letter to Robert, who had responded to his first one by telling Lee he hadn't renounced him. Robert was still puzzled about why his brother wanted to live in the Soviet Union. Oswald's lengthy reply began like a political tract and ended with a threat—the tone was much more hostile than the one he had used with the women reporters.

He began by explaining "Why I and my fellow workers and communists would like to see the capitalist government of the U.S. overthrown." He instructed Robert that the American government "supports an economic system which exploits all the workers, a system based upon credit which gives rise to the never-ending cycle of depression, inflation, unlimited speculation (which is the phase America is in now) and war. . . . Look around you, and look at yourself. See the segregation, see the unemployment and what automation is. Remember how you were laid off at Convair?"

He continued:

> Ask me and I will tell you I fight for *communism.* . . . I will not say your grandchildren will live under communism, look for yourself at history, look at a world map! America is a dying country, I do not wish to be a part of it, nor do I ever again wish to be used as a tool in its military aggressions.
>
> This should answer your question, and also give you a glimpse of my way of thinking.
>
> So you speak of advantages. Do you think that is why I am here? For personal, material advantages? Happiness is not based on oneself, it does not consist of a small home, of taking and getting. Happiness is taking

part in the struggle, where there is no borderline between one's own personal world, and the world in general. . . .

I have been a pro-communist for years and yet I have never met a communist, instead I kept silent and observed, and what I observed plus my Marxist learning brought me here to the Soviet Union.

I want you to understand [that] what I say now, I do not say lightly, or unknowingly. . . . He advised his brother of the following.

1. In the event of war I would kill *any* American who put a uniform on in defense of the American government—any American.
2. That in my own mind I have no attachments of any kind in the U.S.
3. That I want to, and I shall, live a normal happy and peaceful life here in the Soviet Union *for the rest of my life.*
4. That my mother and you are (in spite of what the newspaper said) *not* objects of affection, but only examples of workers in the U.S.

On December 17 Robert received a third letter in which Oswald said he wouldn't write again and didn't want Robert to continue writing to him. The letter concluded: "I am starting a new life and I do not wish to have anything to do with the old life. I hope you and your family will always be in good health." It would be hard to imagine a more extreme rejection of his past.

On January 4, 1960, Oswald was informed that his request for Soviet citizenship had been denied. He was issued an "identity document for stateless persons" and sent to Minsk to start work in a radio factory. If Oswald's statements are to be believed, he never intended to see the United States or his family again.

Although the reasons Oswald gave for his defection were political, his letters to Robert—as well as the undercurrent of his interviews with Aline Mosby and Priscilla Johnson—suggest that there was something highly personal behind his ideology. One of the most curious things about Oswald's sketchy account of his past was his statement concerning the Save the Rosenbergs pamphlet. During the early 1950s American soldiers were fighting a bloody stalemate in Korea and anti-Communists like Senator Joseph McCarthy were riding high. This was the political atmosphere of Oswald's childhood. When the Rosenbergs were executed in 1953, Lee Oswald was *not* about 15 years old, as he had said, but 13. He had been born into an apolitical family in the conservative South. How could a pamphlet about saving

the Rosenbergs have gotten this 13-year-old interested in Marxism "from an ideological viewpoint"?

2...Marguerite's Son

EARLY one hot August morning in 1939, Robert Edward Lee Oswald was mowing his lawn in New Orleans when he felt a sharp pain in one of his arms. His wife Marguerite gave him an aspirin and called a doctor, but he was dead of a heart attack before the doctor could get there. Marguerite arranged to have him buried the same afternoon —she was seven months pregnant and wanted to avoid any undue strain. Some of her in-laws were appalled by her "coldness" and never spoke to her again.

Lee Harvey Oswald was born on October 18, two months later. Marguerite was 32 years old.

Oswald never spoke much about his childhood. What he did say bore more than a trace of resentment and self-pity. In an autobiographical sketch he wrote in 1962 he described himself simply as "the son of an Insurance Salesman whose early death left a fair mean streak of independence brought on by neglect." As in many statements people make about themselves to explain who they are, this one may reflect more than he realized. What Richard Snyder and others saw as his insufferable arrogance, Oswald evidently regarded as a "mean streak of independence," a more admirable quality, a proud deliberate separation from other people. And ultimately he felt he was what he was because his father died. If his mother him, this was secondary: she too was a victim of circumstance. And this was precisely the way Marguerite saw herself.

The most significant and revealing thing about Oswald's childhood is not what happened to him but how much his personality resembled

his mother's. Robert Oswald saw some of Marguerite's worst traits repeated in Lee. Their mother had, as Robert once put it, "an extraordinary idea of her ability and her importance." If she didn't get everything she thought she deserved, it was because circumstances or individuals were against her. Throughout his youth Robert had heard her talk about the hidden motives and malicious actions of other people. She was the type, her older sister Lillian Murret testified, who in any disagreement would always insist she was right. Whenever they quarreled, Lillian wouldn't hear from her again until Marguerite needed "assistance or a place to stay." Lillian explained, "You see, I am forgiving, but she is not." People would say much the same things about Lee Oswald.

Marguerite herself had once observed that Robert was like his easygoing father: "He is not opinionated like I am. My older son and Lee are my disposition." And to writer Jean Stafford she admitted, "I should say I'm very outspoken, I'm aggressive, I'm no dope. Let's face it, if you step on my toes I'm gonna fight back, and I don't apologize for that." This was, she added, the way she wanted her boys to be.

When Lee was born, Marguerite already had two sons—John Pic, from her first marriage, who was 8 and Robert who was 5. Her late husband, a collector of insurance premiums, had left her a $10,000 policy, and she began thinking about how she was going to get by once that was gone. In early 1941 she sold her house and bought a smaller one, where she opened Oswald's Notions Shop in the front room, selling sewing supplies and grocery items. This venture failed, and the following year she placed John and Robert in the Bethlehem Children's Home so that she could find work. Lee was too young to be accepted, so she boarded him with Lillian, who was married and had five kids of her own. Lillian liked her nephew, but he was unusual in one respect. Sometimes he would sneak out of her house at night in his pajamas, to be found later in a neighbor's kitchen. "He could slip out of the house like nobody's business," she said. "You could have everything locked up and he would still get out."

After one of her many quarrels with Lillian, Marguerite took Lee out of the Murret home and found a babysitter for him. She told the Warren Commission at one of its hearings, "War had broken out and the Negroes in New Orleans were going into factories and so on and so forth so there is many a job I had to leave in order to stay home and mind Lee until I could get help. . . . So, then at age 3 Lee was placed in the home. I waited patiently for age 3 because I wanted

naturally for the brothers to be together."

Oswald was at the children's home with his brothers for thirteen months. The Lutheran orphanage had a relaxed atmosphere and its own school, and the two older boys would remember their stay there as a relatively happy time. Robert, who thought of Lee as his "kid brother" and "stayed pretty close to him," said Lee seemed happy there, too. Marguerite visited often and brought them home on weekends. One day she came by to introduce her sons to an older man she had been dating—Edwin A. Ekdahl from Boston, who was working in New Orleans as an electrical engineer. John Pic recalled, "He was described to us as Yankee, of course. Rather tall, I think he was over 6 feet. He had white hair, wore glasses, very nice man."

Not long after this, Marguerite took Lee out of the home and moved to Dallas, where Ekdahl had been transferred, leaving his brothers to finish theschool year. After she and Ekdahl were married in May 1945, he tried to be a father to the boys, and Lee in particular became quite attached to him. That September John and Robert went off for the first of three school years at a military academy in Mississippi. Lee stayed behind, and frequently accompanied Marguerite and Ekdahl on his business trips to places like Boston and Arizona. Ekdahl was making $1000 a month, and they had moved to a comfortable house on a large plot of land in Benbrook, a Fort Worth suburb. But the Ekdahl marriage was shaky from the start. Marguerite complained that her husband was stingy and expected her to account for every penny. There were noisy arguments and several separations. Every time they got back together, Lee seemed elated. Then in the summer of 1947 Marguerite found out that her husband was seeing another woman.

Her reaction was pure Marguerite.

Ekdahl had sent her a telegram saying he'd be late getting back from abusiness trip. Marguerite told the Warren Commission, "So, I called his office, I . . . knew his secretary, and I was going to tell her that Mr. Ekdahl would be delayed 3 or 4 days. But immediately she said, 'Mrs. Ekdahl, Mr. Ekdahl is not in, he has gone out to lunch.' So, I said . . . 'When will he be back' and so on."

Not having let on to the secretary, Marguerite drove her car that evening to the building where her husband worked, watched him come out, and followed him to an apartment building. She went home and told her son John and a friend of his what had happened. Then she called John McClain, an attorney who lived next door, told him what she had seen, and asked his advice. Marguerite reported:

"He said, 'Mrs. Oswald, just ring the phone. Do you know the woman?'

"And I said, 'Yes.'

" 'Just ring the phone and let him know that you know he is there. . . .' "

She thought about it, but decided against it because "he could leave and say he was just there on business and I wanted to catch him. . . ."

"So the kids and I planned that we would say she had a telegram . . . we went up the stairs, I believe it was the second or third floor, and [John's friend] knocked on the door and said, 'Telegram for Mrs. C____. . . .'

"She said, 'Please push it under the door' and I told him no; he said, 'No, you have to sign for it.'

"So with that she opened the door . . . [and] I, my son, and . . . the other young man walked into the room . . . Mrs. C____ had on a negligee, and my husband had his sleeves rolled up and his tie off sitting on a sofa . . . he said, 'Marguerite, Marguerite, you have everything wrong, you have everything wrong.'

"He says, 'Listen to me.'

"I said, 'I don't want to hear one thing. I have seen everything I want to see, this is it."

It might have been a scene from a bedroom farce, but Marguerite's devious and vindictive personality was behind it, manipulating her oldest son and another teenager into taking part in the subterfuge. According to Robert, "Lee's imagination and love of intrigue was a lot like Mother's. She always had a wild imagination and I think it influenced Lee's view of the world."

In 1948 Ekdahl filed suit for divorce and, Marguerite said, "I thought I was sitting pretty. He didn't have anything on me. I had him for adultery with witnesses and everything and I didn't have an idea that he could sue me for a divorce, but [he] did. . . ." John Pic had to testify for Marguerite and, as he remembers it, Lee was called to the stand but excused by the judge as being too young—he was eight—to know "right from wrong and truth from falsehood." In his complaint, Ekdahl charged that his wife argued incessantly about money, flew into "uncontrollable rages," and threw cookie jars, glasses, and bottles at him. The jury found Marguerite guilty of these "outrages" and granted the divorce, awarding her a mere $1500 settlement.

Although Marguerite attributed their breakup to disagreements

over money, a friend of hers, Myrtle Evans, thought her attachment to Lee had something to do with it. She thought Marguerite "spoiled him to death." According to Evans, Marguerite wouldn't discipline Lee or let Ekdahl do it, and Lee demanded so much of her attention that she and Ekdahl never had a chance to be alone. But this mother–son relationship was oddly detached. Lee would go his own way, as she did, and she would observe from a distance. After telling Jean Stafford she had taught her sons to fight back, Marguerite said,

> Let me give you one little instance with Lee and the next-door neighbor boy. They were approximately the same age, and if not, they were the same height, and Lee had a dog. He loved his shepherd collie dog. It was named Sunshine. He used to romp in the back yard with his dog and took him every place he went, and this little boy was throwing rocks over the fence at Lee's dog. Well, my kitchen window had a view to the back yard. And I watched my son Lee for approximately three days telling the little boy over the fence he better stop throwing rocks at his dog. Well, I was amused, and I was just waiting to find out what happened. Finally, one day when I came home from work the father called me on the phone. It seemed his son was very badly beaten up—in a child's way. My son Lee had finally taken upon himself, after much patience, I thought, to confront the little boy enough to fight him, and the father didn't approve. I told the father what happened, and since the boys were approximately the same age and height, let them fight their own battles.

While she was at work, Marguerite encouraged Lee to come straight home after school instead of playing with other children. Marguerite insisted he had always been solitary by nature, as she was, and preferred to play alone. "I am not lonely," she said. "But I live to myself." The picture she gives of Oswald at this age—and of her attitude toward him—is vivid and worth closer inspection:

> Lee had a normal life as far as I, his mother, is concerned. He had a bicycle, he had everything that other children had.
>
> Lee had wisdom without education. From a very small child—I have said this before, sir, and I have publicly stated this in 1959 [when she was interviewed after his defection]—Lee seemed to know the answers to things without schooling. That type child, in a way, is bored with schooling, because he is a little advanced.
>
> Lee used to climb on top of the roof with binoculars, looking at the stars. He was reading [astronomy]. Lee knew about any and every animal there was. He studied animals. All of their feeding habits, sleeping habits. . . . And Lee read history books, books too deep for a child his age. At age 9—he was always instructed not to contact me at work unless it was an emergency, because my work came first—he called me at work and said, "Mother, Queen Elizabeth's baby has been born."
>
> He broke the rule to let me know that Queen Elizabeth's baby had been born. Nine years old. That was important to him. He liked things of that sort.
>
> He loved comics, read comic books. He loved television programs. But most of all he loved the news on radio and television. If he was in the midst of a story, a film—he would turn it off for news. That was important. . . . Lee read very, very important things. . . .
>
> Yet he played Monopoly, played baseball.
>
> He belonged to the Y. He used to go swimming. He would come by work with his head wet, and I would say, "Hurry home, honey, you are going to catch cold."
>
> And I considered that, sir, a very normal life.

While the divorce was pending, Marguerite moved to a small house next to the railroad tracks. For John, it meant they "were back down in the lower class again." Soon they relocated, first to a one-bedroom house where John and Robert slept in a screened-in porch while their mother and Lee shared the bedroom, and then to another house in Fort Worth, so that Marguerite could be nearer her job at a department store. Later she began selling insurance.

Marguerite had taken the older boys out of the military academy. They could have stayed on with the aid of scholarships, and wanted to, but their mother reminded them that they were orphans and she could no longer afford it. Robert later wrote, "We learned, very early, that we were a burden. By the time we were teenagers, she felt that we should take over some of her burden." John was 16 when she told him to quit school and get a job. Eventually, she talked him into joining the Marine Corps Reserve to bring in a little more income. He was still under age, but she signed an affidavit giving him an earlier date of birth. As John saw it, "Money was her God," and "Every time she met anyone she would remind them she was a widow with three children. I didn't feel she had it any tougher than a lot of people walking around."

According to Robert, John Pic was "so resentful of Mother that he simply ignored her as much as he could." He went back to high school on his own, signing his report cards himself and working at a shoe store part-time. Three days before he was to graduate in 1950, he enlisted in the Coast Guard. During the following year Marguerite

wrote him several letters containing a repetitive theme: "Try and help as much as possible. After all, my struggle to keep what we have will also help you boys," and "I have four more payments on the car and then that struggle will be over."

With John gone, it was Robert's turn to quit school and go to work. He, too, went back to school and completed his junior year, working after school and Saturdays at the A&P. In July 1952 he joined the Marines. Soon after he left, Lee bought a copy of the Marine Corps handbook and began studying it. He was only 12, but he planned to join the service too, as soon as he was old enough.

The month after Robert left home, Marguerite and Lee Oswald loaded their belongings into her 1948 Dodge and moved to New York City. John was stationed on Ellis Island and was living with his wife, a woman from New York, and their infant son in her mother's apartment on East 92nd Street. Marguerite said she wanted to meet her new daughter-in-law and first grandchild. John recalled that the day they arrived, Lee was waiting for him at the subway exit about ten blocks from the apartment and seemed glad to see him. He took a few days' leave to show him around the city, and during that time he noticed a change in his younger brother: Lee had definitely become "the boss." If he decided to do something, he did it. Pic thought he had no respect for his mother at all.

As time went by, tension developed at the Pics' apartment when Marguerite made no move to help pay the grocery bills or find a place of her own. When Pic's wife was interviewed by the FBI after the assassination, she still remembered how Lee kept damaging their bookcase by putting beverage glasses down on it. She also remembered that one day she asked Lee not to turn on a TV set Marguerite had brought with them and Lee pulled out "a small pocketknife with a blade opened." He moved toward her, she said, and she backed off. When Pic got home that night, she told him about it. Marguerite claimed it wasn't anything serious, simply a misunderstanding. John asked Lee what had happened and immediately "he became real hostile toward me." After that, whenever John tried to talk to him "he ignored me, and I was never able to get to the kid again." Warren Commission lawyer Lee J. Rankin questioned Marguerite about the incident:

"Was there any time that you recall . . . a threat of Lee Oswald against Mrs. Pic with a knife or anything like that? Do you remember that?"

"Yes, I do," she replied. "I am glad you said that. My daughter-in-

law was very upset. The very first time we went there . . . we were not welcome. And immediately it was asked what did we plan to do as soon as we put our foot in the house. . . . I had made it plain to John Edward that I was going to have a place of my own, that we were just coming there to get located.

"My daughter-in-law resented the fact that her mother—this went on before I got there—that her mother had to leave the house and go visit a sister so I could come. . . . I had never met my daughter-in-law. She didn't like me and she didn't like Lee.

"So she—what is the word to say—not picked on the child, but she showed her displeasure. . . .

"So there was, I think now—it was not a kitchen knife—it was a little pocketknife, a child's knife that Lee had. So she hit Lee . . . I remember this distinctly, because I remember how awful I thought Marjory was about this. Lee had the knife in his hand. He was whittling, because John Edward whittled ships and taught Lee to whittle ships. He puts them in the glass, you know. And he was whittling when this incident occurred. And that is what it occurred about, because there was scraps of wood on the floor.

"So when she attacked the child. . . . she made the statement to my son that we had to leave, that Lee tried to use a knife on her.

"Now, I say that is not true, gentlemen. You can be provoked into something. And because of the fact that he was whittling, and had the knife in his hand, they struggled.

"He did not use the knife—he had an opportunity to use the knife.

"But it wasn't a kitchen knife or a big knife. It was a little knife. So I will explain it that way, sir. So immediately then I started to look for a place."

She found a job as assistant manager of a Lerner dress shop and took a basement apartment, one big room, in the Bronx. As soon as she could find a larger place they moved again, to East 179th Street. Originally, Lee Oswald was enrolled in a Lutheran private school and then switched, after several weeks of irregular attendance, to a seventh-grade class in Junior High School No. 117. By the following January he had been absent 47 out of the 64 school days, and he finally stopped going entirely. He later explained that he preferred being by himself and had "many more important things to do."

At first he would get dressed as though he were going to school, but after his mother left for work he would stay home all day reading or watching television. Sometimes he would go to the public library or ride the subways. Once he was picked up by a truant officer at the

Bronx Zoo—he was reportedly surly and called the officer a "damn Yankee." When a teacher came to the Oswald apartment to ask him to return to class, he said he would think about it.

Eventually, truancy charges were brought against him, and in March 1953 he was ordered to appear before a juvenile judge. On the appointed day, Marguerite showed up at court alone and told Judge Delany her son had refused to come with her. As a result, a warrant was issued, and at a hearing in April, at which he did appear, Lee Harvey Oswald was remanded to Youth House, a juvenile detention center, for three weeks of evaluation so the court could determine whether or not he needed psychiatric help.

The old Youth House was on Manhattan's Lower East Side between First and Second avenues on Twelfth Street, among tenement buildings. Oswald was examined by a physician and then a psychologist. The latter, Irving Sokolow, reported:

> He achieved an I.Q. of 118 on the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (abb.) indicating present intellectual functioning in the upper range of bright normal intelligence. All his scores were above the average for his age group, appreciably so in the verbalization of abstract concepts and in the assembly of commonly recognizable objects. His method of approach was generally an easy, facile and highly perceptive one. Although presumably disinterested in school subjects he operates on a much higher than average level. . . .
>
> The Human Figure Drawings are empty, poor characterizations of [a] person approximately the same age as the subject. They reflect a considerable amount of impoverishment in the social and emotional areas. . . . He exhibits some difficulty in relationship to the maternal figure suggesting more anxiety in this area than in any other.
>
> Under conditions of emotional stress and strain he appears increasingly defensive . . . and in general incapable of constructing an effective ego-defense.

Afterward, a social worker named Evelyn Strickman talked to him at length and wrote an insightful report in which we are able to see Oswald's own assessment of his situation, and hers. She began by describing him as "a seriously detached, withdrawn youngster of thirteen" who answered questions, "but volunteered almost nothing about himself spontaneously."

> By persistent questioning, the information received from Lee was as follows: his father died before he was born and he doesn't know a thing about him. He has no curiosity about his father, says he never missed having one, and never thought to ask about him. His mother was left with three children. . . . Lee said his mother supported them by working as an insurance broker and she was on the go all day long. He doesn't remember anyone else taking care of him and he thinks she either left him in the care of his older brothers or . . . that he shifted for himself. She would leave early in the morning and come home around seven or eight at night after a hard day's work. Occasionally she took Lee with her on these trips, but he wrinkled his nose and said it was very boring because she was always making stops, going into houses and trying to sell people things, while he waited for her in the car.

He told her that after his brothers went into the service, his mother decided to move to New York "to be near John." His story of their stay with the Pics was similar to his mother's, but he didn't tell her why they left.

> Questioning revealed that while Lee felt John was glad to see them, his sister-in-law . . . was unhappy about their sharing the apartment until they could find a place of their own and she made them feel unwelcome. Lee had to sleep in the living room during this period although there were five rooms in the apartment and he admitted that this made him feel as he always did feel with grownups—that there was no room for him.

After they relocated, the report continued, "He withdrew into a completely solitary and detached existence where he did as he wanted and he didn't have to live by any rules or come into contact with people."

> When questioned about his mother's reaction to this he said she told him to go to school, "but she never did anything about it." When he was asked if he wished that she would do something he nodded and finally emerged with the fact that he . . . felt his mother "never gave a damn" for him. . . . When Lee and his mother are home together, he is not uncomfortable with her, but they never have anything to say to each other. She never punishes him because she is the kind of person who just lets things ride. It was hard for him to say whether she acted the same way towards his brothers, because he never noticed. Although his brothers were not as detached as his mother was, he experienced rejection from them, too, and they always pushed him away when he tried to

accompany them. They never met any of his needs. He said he had to be "my own father" because there was never any one there for him.

When Miss Stickman expressed her understanding of his lonely situation, he denied he really felt lonely, and she noted, "Questioning elicited the information that he feels almost as if there is a veil between him and other people through which they cannot reach him, but he prefers this veil to remain intact." When this revelation prompted her to inquire about his fantasy life, he responded by pointing out "this is my own business."

He agreed to answer questions if he wanted to, rejecting those which upset him and acknowledged fantasies about being powerful, and sometimes hurting or killing people, but refused to elaborate on this. None of these fantasies involved his mother, incidentally. He also acknowledged dreaming but refused to talk about the dreams other than to admit that they sometimes contained violence, but he insisted that they were pleasant.

Asked about his future, he told her he wanted to return home, and assured her that he would run away if he were placed in a boarding school as an alternative. He admitted that home "offered him very little," but he said that's how he wanted it. Being away from home meant "a loss of his freedom and privacy." Miss Strickman wrote, "If he could have his own way, he would like to be on his own and join the Service. While he feels that living that close to other people and following a routine would be distasteful he would 'steel' himself to do it."

Miss Strickman also interviewed Marguerite—she described her as a "smartly dressed, gray-haired woman, very self-possessed and alert and superficially affable," but essentially a "defensive, rigid, self-involved person" who had almost no understanding of Lee's behavior and of the "protective shell" he had drawn around himself. She wrote, "I honestly don't think that she sees him as a person at all but simply as an extension of herself." When she remarked to Marguerite "that it must have been difficult for her to be both parents as well as the breadwinner, proudly she said she had never found it so. She felt she was a very independent, self-reliant person, who never needed help from anyone, and who pulled herself up by her own bootstraps. Her mother died when she was only two, and her father raised six children with the help of housekeepers in a very poor section of New Orleans

of mixed racial groups. She always had 'high-falutin' ideas and managed to make something of herself."

Marguerite made it clear she believed her son Lee had been treated unjustly:

Mrs. O. railed and railed against NYC laws which she felt in a large measure were responsible for the way Lee acted. She said that when he first began to truant, the truant officer picked him up in a police car and took him back to school and she thought that was just atrocious. . . . She said she felt Lee could be stubborn and defiant . . . as she would be if someone kept stressing with him the way the truant officer had with Lee that he had to go to school because the NYC law said so.

When it came time to write her recommendation, Evelyn Strickman faced a dilemma. She felt that if he returned home and got counseling, his mother's "attitude about social workers, probation, etc., would inevitably communicate itself to the boy" and that if he started showing improvement in therapy she was "one of these mothers who would have to break it up." On the other hand, Lee was so strongly against placement she doubted much could be accomplished by sending him away, either. She noticed that he had become totally withdrawn at Youth House: "I have spent some time watching him with other boys and he doesn't participate or mingle in any way but keeps himself completely aloof."

The following day Oswald was seen by the chief psychiatrist, Renatus Hartogs, who had gathered the reports on his desk and whose task it was to put a label on Oswald's behavior and decide what to do with him. Hartogs found him to be a tense and evasive boy who disliked talking about himself and his feelings. Lee repeated to Hartogs his belief that his mother and brothers showed little interest in him, and he remarked, "I dislike everybody." In Hartogs' view, Lee Oswald was quite disturbed emotionally—but definitely not psychotic: "He was in full contact with reality," and there was "no indication of psychotic mental changes." Lee's problem, he believed, came from the impact of his "emotional isolation and deprivation." The psychiatrist's diagnosis was "a personality pattern disturbance with schizoid features and passive–aggressive tendencies." As he later explained,

The "schizoid features" were apparent in his extreme withdrawal and the depth to which he seemed to live in fantasy. "Passive–aggressive tendencies" is a term used to describe an apparently compliant manner

which hides, however, deep anger.

Hartogs recommended that Oswald be allowed to go home on the condition that both he and his mother seek help from a child guidance clinic. If that didn't work out, placement in a juvenile home for further treatment could come later.

Released from Youth House on May 7, 1953, Oswald appeared in court again and was put on parole with the understanding that he return to school and attend regularly. Mrs. Oswald was told that the case had been referred to a family agency for counseling, and Lee's probation officer recorded, "Both mother and boy promised to cooperate."

The Save the Rosenbergs pamphlet probably fell into Oswald's hands three days later—ironically, on Mother's Day.

Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were on death row in upstate New York. Their execution was set for June 19. During May and June, supporters of *The Worker,* the Communist party daily, were canvassing neighborhoods all over the city in a subscription drive. They gave away copies in a housing project in the Bronx and simultaneously tried to enlist help in the Rosenberg campaign. On Mother's Day, May 10, women who had been recruited through an ad in *The Worker* passed out leaflets for the New York Committee for Clemency for the Rosenbergs on city street corners. (This was the only instance I could find, in back copies of the *New York Times* and *The Worker,* of city-wide distribution of leaflets on the streets—there may have been others. But the fact that women volunteers were specifically recruited for this one suggests, at least, that this may have been the day the "old lady" handed him a pamphlet. Possibly Oswald was on his way to the Bronx Zoo or the library or the subway station that Sunday—the entrance to any of those places would probably have been a good spot for a demonstration.)

It isn't known exactly what was in the pamphlet, but the campaign for clemency had only two themes. The first was that the Rosenbergs were innocent victims of an unjust court. In *The Worker* they were described as martyrs who were being lynched by a hanging judge and by President Eisenhower, who refused to commute their sentences. The other theme was implicit in the choice of women for a Mother's Day demonstration—implicit, too, whenever the names of the Rosenbergs' sons Michael and Robert were mentioned. Michael was 10; Robert was four years younger. Their parents were going to be executed, leaving them orphans. It's unlikely that a campaign could have been designed any better to strike Oswald's nature and circumstances. "I looked at that paper," he told Aline Mosby six years later, "and I still remember it for some reason, I don't know why."

It wasn't that he had compassion for the Rosenbergs. Oswald never had a talent for empathy. An acquaintance of his in Dallas, an intelligent and sensitive man, believed that Oswald saw people as cardboard figures, with the single exception of his daughter June. There is evidence for this in the Youth House records. He had no curiosity about his dead father. He didn't know how his mother treated his brothers because he never noticed. If Robert and John, five and eight years older, respectively, didn't always want a kid brother tagging along, they were rejecting him. They "never met any of his needs." Whether through force of example or inherited disposition, Lee Oswald had acquired an egocentricity resembling his mother's. What made the Rosenberg pamphlet memorable to him, surely, was that he saw *himself* in it—the "innocent victim" of a New York court. He held in his hand a message that said to him: Here are allies you can identify with. Here are people who feel as you do about the legal system.

The more one takes this period of his life into account, the more plausible the story he told in Moscow becomes. The pamphlet got him started reading socialist literature, he said, and he saw that the description it gave of capitalist society matched his own observations. When he talked about "watching the treatment of workers in New York and observing the fact that they are exploited," we may assume he was speaking primarily about Marguerite. During the year and a half they lived there, she resigned or was fired from at least three different jobs. When Evelyn Strickman saw him at Youth House, his resentment was aimed at his mother. She was always busy selling insurance and when she came home she didn't even make him a decent supper. She never gave a damn for him. In his interview with Priscilla Johnson he explained why he became a Marxist—by characterizing his mother's situation: "At 15 I was looking for something that would give me the key to my environment. My mother has been a worker all her life. All her life she had to produce profit for the capitalists. She is a good example of what happens to workers in the United States." It was as though new battle lines had been drawn. The uncaring mother had become a "good example" of what capitalism does to people. It followed that if he could see her as the victim of a political system, he now had a more secure emotional footing—and a way to fight back. Thus, Oswald's anger and resentment were easily

subsumed by a radical political outlook.

Oswald would always be reluctant to talk about himself and his feelings, but he would become articulate and combative about politics. In his second letter to Robert from Moscow, he rejected not only capitalism but his family as well, vowing to kill any American who fought against Russia. The glaring ideology of that letter initially hides the person who wrote it, but using his past as a filter, we see the detached 13-year-old who resented his mother's incessant taking and getting, who felt without reason that his brothers had neglected him, who admitted having fantasies about being powerful and sometimes hurting and killing people. He would insist the Rosenberg pamphlet got him interested in Marxism from "an ideological viewpoint." He would protest that his decision to defect was unemotional, that it was motivated by ideology alone, not by personal hardship. This was a sore point with him. But if this reconstruction is correct, his turn toward politics could hardly have been more firmly entangled in his emotional life.

That is not to say that he was insincere when he said he defected for political reasons, or that he wasn't actually committed to Marxism, as he understood it. On the contrary, one of his Marine Corps buddies, Kerry Thornley, said he thought Oswald had an "irrevocable conviction" when it came to his political beliefs:

> I think you could sit down and argue with him for a number of years . . . and I don't think you could have changed his mind . . . unless you knew why he believed it in the first place. I certainly don't. I don't think with any kind of formal argument you could have shaken that conviction. And that is why I say [it was] irrevocable.

Oswald's chance encounter with the Rosenberg pamphlet just after he got out of juvenile court is the sort of coincidence any decent novelist would scorn as being too melodramatic, too pat. Evidently, history doesn't make that type of editorial judgment. When I was doing some background reading on the Rosenberg case, I ran across another coincidence, another one of history's whims—Julius Rosenberg's account of his own introduction to politics, at age 15 in New York:

> I stopped to listen to a speaker at a street corner meeting. . . . His topic was to win freedom for Tom Mooney, [a] labor leader who was imprisoned on a frame-up.

> That night I was reading a pamphlet I bought from the speaker giving the facts of this case and the next day I went and contributed 50 cents. Then I began to distribute the pamphlets and collect signatures on a Mooney petition from school friends and neighbors.

In *The Implosion Conspiracy,* Louis Nizer quoted the passage above and remarked, "It is curious how a purely accidental incident can change the course of a person's life. If Julius Rosenberg had not stopped to listen to the Mooney orator, he may not have been seated in a defendant's chair in the courtroom eighteen years later."

We return now to the summer of 1953, to pick up Oswald's trail. In July Robert Oswald came to New York City on a ten-day furlough to visit his family, and Lee showed him around. After taking him by subway from the Bronx to Times Square, Lee guided him to the top of the Empire State Building and mapped a tour for him from Wall Street to the Museum of Natural History. Typically, Lee didn't open up to him about his recent troubles. Nobody else in the family mentioned Lee's confinement or his clash with Mrs. Pic to Robert, either. (As far as one can tell from the Warren records, Oswald never talked about his court appearances and his stay at Youth House with anyone, ever. As he wrote Robert from Moscow, "You really don't know anything about me.") Robert noticed some tension between John and their mother, but that was nothing unusual, no different from their past relationship.

Earlier that year, Marguerite had told John that the school authorities suggested Oswald be seen by a psychiatrist but that she couldn't get him to go. She said he refused to see a "nut doctor head shrinker." John advised her to just *take* him, but he never heard any more about it.

In September 1953 Lee Oswald entered the eighth grade in the Bronx. The following month one of his teachers reported:

> During the past 2 weeks practically every subject teacher has complained to me about the boy's behavior. He had consistently refused to salute the flag during early morning exercises. . . . He spends most of his time sailing paper planes around the room. When we spoke to him about his behavior, his attitude was belligerent. [When] I offered to help him, he brushed out with, "I don't need anybody's help!"

Another court hearing was scheduled on October 29, but Marguerite telephoned the probation officer to say she couldn't make it. (The hearing had already been postponed once for the same reason, and the Warren Report notes that she was apparently afraid that Lee might be "retained in some sort of custody" if he showed up.) Justice Sicher continued his parole and suggested a referral to the Berkshire Industrial Farm or Children's Village. At about the same time, Marguerite went to talk to school authorities about Lee, and subsequently his classroom behavior improved.

On January 4, 1954, a representative of the Big Brothers organization came to the Oswald apartment to offer its help. He reported that Mrs. Oswald was cordial but informed him that Lee was doing fine, going to the Y every Saturday, and needed no further counseling. She told him she was considering returning South, and he reminded her she would have to get the court's consent before leaving its jurisdiction. Several days later, Marguerite packed and left with her son for New Orleans.

3 . . . Dropping Out, Joining Up

On arriving in New Orleans that January, Marguerite and 14-year-old Lee moved in with her sister, Lillian, until they found another place to live—an apartment managed by Marguerite's old friend Myrtle Evans. To Marguerite's way of thinking, bringing Lee back to the South had averted a tragedy. The anger he had revealed in New York receded from view. To his relatives and Evans, Oswald seemed quiet and studious, often going off into his bedroom to read or listen to the radio. His cousin Marilyn Murret, who was 25, recalled seeing him read encyclopedias "like somebody else would read a novel." He returned to school, and the disciplinary problems didn't reappear.

But Lillian noticed a strange aloofness. The Murrets were Catholic, and on Fridays he came over to have seafood, which he liked. Then on Saturdays he came back, and Mrs. Murret would give him money to rent a bike even though he could have borrowed one from her children. "My children had a bike, but it seemed like he wanted to go up in the park rather than ride their bicycles, and sometimes I would have to . . . give him more money so that he could keep his bike another hour." She bought him some school clothes "so he would look presentable to go to school, you know, whatever a boy needs, and when we gave them to him, he said, 'Well, why are you all doing this for me?' And we said, 'Well, Lee, for one thing, we love you, and another thing we want you to look nice when you go to school, like the other children.' " But he offered no thanks, and later on he told her, "I don't need anything from anybody." Another time he told her he didn't want to go to school anymore because he already knew everything they had to teach him. Like his mother, Lillian thought

—Marguerite "didn't think she needed anybody either."

Sometime after returning to New Orleans Oswald was beaten up by a gang of white boys for sitting in the black section of a city bus. Marguerite and Lillian assumed he must have forgotten the buses were segregated while he was in New York, and the Warren Report says he probably acted "out of ignorance." But Marilyn Murret thought it was possible he had acted "defiantly."

After a falling-out with Myrtle Evans in the spring of 1955, Marguerite moved to an apartment in the French Quarter. There Oswald spent time playing pool and darts with a junior high classmate named Edward Voebel, but made no other friends. In Voebel's opinion, "people just didn't interest him generally" because he was "living in his own world."

One day Oswald shocked Voebel by showing him a plastic gun and glass cutter and outlining a plan to steal a pistol from a store on Rampart Street. When Oswald went to reconnoiter the store, Voebel tagged along and pointed out a burglar alarm wire running through the shop's plate glass window. Afterward Oswald said no more about his idea. Since there had recently been several jewel robberies on Canal Street in which store windows were cut, it occurred to Voebel that Lee wanted to "look big among the guys" by doing something similar.

Had he gone ahead with this scheme, it would have been what policemen call a copycat crime. Voebel's testimony thus provides a revealing glimpse of young Oswald's thinking. At age 15 one of his fantasies was to imitate a daring crime described in the local press.

In June Oswald filled out a personal history form at school, listing his plans after high school as "military service" and "undecided." That summer he joined the Civil Air Patrol and attended several meetings at which one of the leaders was an eccentric pilot named David Ferrie. Ferrie would become a central figure in many conspiracy theories.

It was during this period, when Oswald was evidently looking for excitement, that he began to think of himself as a Marxist. In Moscow he would tell Aline Mosby:

> Then we moved to New Orleans and I discovered one book in the library, "Das Kapital." It was what I'd been looking for.
>
> It was like a very religious man opening the Bible for the first time.
>
> I read the "Manifesto." It got me interested. I found some dusty back shelves in the New Orleans library, you know, I had to remove some

> front books to get at the books.
>
> I started to study Marxist economic theories. I could see the impoverishment of the masses before my own eyes in my own mother, and I could see the capitalists. I thought the worker's life could be better.
>
> I continued to indoctrinate myself for five years. My mother knew I was reading books but she didn't know what they were about.

(In fact, Marguerite did know, but said nothing to him about it.) At this point Oswald's only work experience consisted of about ten Saturdays as a stock boy in a shoe store where his mother worked.

In the fall of 1955 Lee entered 10th grade at Warren Easton High School, but dropped out after his birthday a month later. He wrote a letter to school authorities to which he signed his mother's name:

> To whom it may concern,
>
> Because we are moving to San Diego in the middle of this month Lee must quit school now. Also, please send by him any papers such as his birth certificate that you may have. Thank you.
>
> Sincerely,
> Mrs. M. Oswald

As he often did, Oswald had woven a part of the truth into a deception. He was planning to join the Marines and go to their training center in San Diego. Since he was just 16, Marguerite signed a false affidavit saying he was a year older. But the recruiting officer must have seen through the ruse, for Oswald had to wait another year to get out on his own.

Early in 1956 Oswald went to work for the Pfisterer Dental Laboratory making deliveries around town with an 18-year-old named Palmer McBride. The two young men shared an interest in classical music and astronomy and would visit one another after work. McBride soon learned that Lee Oswald "was very serious about the virtues of Communism, and discussed these virtues at every opportunity." Oswald's "central theme seemed to be that the workers in the world would one day rise up and throw off their chains." Oswald showed McBride the library copies of *Das Kapital* and the *Communist Manifesto* he kept in his room, and McBride thought he "seemed quite proud to have them." On another occasion, after they began discussing President Eisenhower, McBride recalled, "He then made a statement to the effect that he would like to kill President Eisenhower because he was exploiting the working class." McBride added,

"This statement was not made in jest."

In April 1956 Senator James Eastland of Mississippi held lengthy subcommittee hearings in New Orleans to investigate alleged Communist activity in the area. The hearings were covered by the local press, especially after a defense attorney was ejected from one of the sessions. Eastland told a television interviewer that there were, or had been, Communist cells in Louisiana.

It was apparently about this time that McBride and Oswald got to know William Wulf, a history major and president of an astronomy club they were interested in joining. During a visit to Wulf's home Oswald, who had been looking at some of the books in Wulf's library, started talking about communism. McBride recalled that Oswald began telling Wulf "about the glories of the Worker's State and saying that the United States Government was not telling the truth about Soviet Russia." As Wulf remembered it, Oswald

> started expounding the Communist doctrine and saying that he was highly interested in communism, that communism was the only way of life for the worker, et cetera, and then came out with a statement that he was looking for a Communist cell in town to join but he couldn't find any. He was a little dismayed at this, and said that he couldn't find [one] that would show any interest in him as a Communist.

According to Wulf, Oswald "was actually militant on the idea, and I can repeat that he expressed his belief that he could be a good Communist, he could help the Communist Party out, if he could find the . . . Party [and] join it." At this point,

> we were kind of arguing back and forth about the situation, and my father came in the room, heard what we were arguing on communism, [saw] that this boy was loudmouthed, boisterous, and asked him to leave . . . and that is the last I have seen or spoken with Oswald.

Wulf concluded that Oswald was "looking for something to belong to."

On another occasion Oswald had tried to talk McBride into joining the Communist party with him.[1] At a time when most adolescent males were thinking about cars and girls, Oswald's fantasy life involved a pistol and an unrequited romance with the Communist party. As a child, one of his favorite TV shows had been "I Led Three Lives," an anti-Communist program that stressed the supposedly

clandestine and subversive nature of Party work. This kind of life—being an outsider and secretly fighting the authorities—would likely have appealed to him.

The patterns laid down during adolescence shaped Oswald's later behavior. Evidently, he had already begun to identify more closely with the political world than with his immediate environment. One might wonder why this should be so. Psychiatrist and author Edwin Weinstein believes that many potential assassins take up a political cause to give themselves a sense of identity. Several other American assassins have identified strongly with a political group—John Wilkes Booth with the Confederacy, Sirhan Sirhan with the Palestinians, and so on. This identification may take the place of close relationships with relatives and friends—in effect, the cause becomes the assassin's family or "pseudo-community." More important, however, the typical assassin often has a grandiose self-image that allows him to see himself as a player on the world political stage. For most people, President Eisenhower was a remote figure somewhere above them; Oswald projected himself onto Eisenhower's level, as someone who wanted to punish what he saw as an abuse of power.

And yet, classifying Oswald as a typical assassin doesn't go very far toward explaining him. There is another model that may throw more light on his character, or at least one side of it. The episode Voebel recounted about the pistol foreshadowed the fact that Oswald ended his life as someone accused of committing two murders with firearms. In 1978 there was a brief stir in the press about a three-volume work entitled *The Criminal Personality* by psychiatrist Samuel Yochelson and his associate, psychologist Stanton Samenow. The work was the result of a study Yochelson had instituted at St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, D.C., a federal psychiatric hospital where felons judged to be criminally insane are treated. (John Hinckley, Reagan's attacker, is now confined there.) Yochelson and Samenow examined 250 young men who were habitual felons, having them record their thoughts daily on tape and interviewing both the inmates and their relatives. *The Criminal Personality* presents their provocative conclusions, which I'll attempt to summarize.

Yochelson and Samenow contend that all habitual criminals, of whatever category, share many specific character traits from early childhood. In their view, the typical felon is unusually self-centered and secretive. At an early age the criminal-to-be "wraps himself in a mantle of secrecy," as Samenow puts it, and "sees himself as unique." He conceals his ideas and activities from his family because he doesn't

want to be interfered with. He is chronically restless, dissatisfied, and angry. He often gets into trouble for school truancy. Violation becomes a means of getting excitement; normal life seems boring. Listening to the tapes, the authors discovered that their subjects spent a good deal of time fantasizing about potential crimes they would never commit—merely thinking about a crime was itself exciting.

Whatever crimes they did commit, Yochelson and Samenow's subjects saw themselves as good, decent people. An inmate would usually justify his behavior by describing himself as a victim of his environment. He sees himself as superior to others, capable of great things. He wants to be Number One, to come out on top, but he expects instant success and considers schoolwork and most jobs beneath him. If he joins a sports team, he wants to be the captain and run the show. (The authors describe a prison football team as consisting of eleven quarterbacks.)

Highly manipulative, the criminal described here sees other people as pawns. Even as a child, he rejects close personal relationships. He is basically a loner, because his view of reality is totally egocentric. He feels he owns the world. The world must conform to his demands, not the other way around. Lying comes as naturally as breathing. "If he goes to a grocery store," says Samenow, "he will say it's the Safeway even if he intends to go to Grand Union." He feels he is right, and others must see things on his terms. As one inmate wryly put it, paraphrasing Descartes, "I think; therefore, it is."

When held accountable, "the criminal believes he has been wronged, that he has been obstructed in the exercise of his rights and privileges."

> Although he has broken the law, the law now must be inviolate when invoked in his behalf. The breaker of laws becomes a constitutionalist. There is *no inconsistency* in this, from the criminal's viewpoint. In breaking the law, he exercised the freedom to do as he wanted. He will now use the law to achieve the same freedom, which is being denied him [emphasis in the original].

Assuming that this unflattering portrait is accurate, how did the St. Elizabeths inmates get this way? Yochelson and Samenow could find no cause. Although they had expected to find the root cause in family or social influences, they discovered that their subjects came from all kinds of backgrounds and, in many cases, had siblings who were "straight." These authors concluded that the criminal freely chooses

his way of life in his unending quest for power, control, and excitement. They noted that some people with this type of personality were attracted to radical political movements of the left or the right—in their view, for the same reasons they were drawn to crime. "Although he may forcefully present himself as a spokesman for the oppressed, he is using his cause as a vehicle for self-aggrandizement. . . . For those who take direct action, the excitement of the event outweighs the merit of the cause."

The St. Elizabeths study is highly controversial and its findings have been rejected by many criminologists. One suspects there is something more than "free choice" involved in the criminal lifestyle. But the personality profile outlined above appears to describe Lee Oswald remarkably well. For one thing, this model at least provides a framework for looking again at Oswald's breathtaking arrogance—for instance, the manner in which he threatened to give away military secrets at the U.S. Embassy and then loudly complained that the embassy had acted illegally in refusing to let him sign away his citizenship. Oswald expected his adversaries to abide by the letter of the law, whereas he did as he pleased.

However, despite the foregoing analysis, it ought to be remembered that Oswald was an individual, not a type. Throughout his life, none of his acquaintances saw him as dangerous or as a criminal. For the most part, his teenage years were mundane—he often rode a bike in the park or went to museums. Even McBride remained friendly, despite Lee's hangup on Marxism. The cumulative details of his life reveal more about him than any category we might use to explain him.

In July 1956 Marguerite took Lee to live in Fort Worth with Robert, who had just gotten out of the Marines. That fall he entered the 10th grade for the second time, and a classmate recalled that Oswald tried to get him interested in Marxism, too. Oswald went out for the B football team, but was kicked off the squad for refusing to run laps with the other players. (Robert later commented, "He usually wanted to be 'the boss' or not play at all. He was like Mother in this respect.") Soon he dropped out of school again.

On October 3, 1956, young Oswald wrote the Socialist Party of America:

> Dear Sirs;
> I am sixteen years of age and would like more information about your youth League, I would like to know if there is a branch in my area, how

to join, etc. I am a Marxist, and have been studying socialist principles for well over fifteen months. I am very interested in your Y.P.S.L.[1]

Later that month, after his seventeenth birthday, he enlisted in the Marines.

4... The Marxist Marine

SOME critics of the Warren Report have found it strange indeed that an avowed Marxist should want to join the U.S. Marine Corps. Robert thought his brother saw "an escape from the drabness of school, a chance to lead his own life, and an opportunity to impress the world. . . . To him, military service meant freedom." John Pic was blunter. He thought his half-brother joined up largely to get out from under "the yoke of oppression from my mother." Oswald himself once said that he enlisted not because he was a patriot but because he wanted "to get away from the drudgery" and see the world.

Whatever his reasons for enlisting, Oswald's career in the Marines would show a development of the same pattern of behavior we've already seen—problems with authority, a good deal of secretive scheming, and dramatic incidents in which he tried to manipulate or outwit the system.

On aptitude tests during basic training Oswald scored significantly above the Corps average in reading and vocabulary, and significantly below in arithmetic and pattern analysis. In a six-week course on aviation fundamentals, he finished forty-sixth in a class of fifty-four. As usual, he kept to himself, doing a lot of serious reading. During combat training in early 1957 Oswald shared a tent with Allen R. Felde, who recalled that Oswald constantly talked about politics. He said that Oswald espoused "the cause of the working-man" and believed the American intervention in Korea had resulted in one million needless deaths for which he held Presidents Truman and Eisenhower responsible.

After being trained as a radar controller, Oswald was shipped

overseas to Japan in September. At the Atsugi base twenty miles west of Tokyo he began work in the radar room, where he often plotted the course of America's U-2 planes. The U-2 was an extremely light jet that could achieve altitudes close to 100,000 feet. U-2s were then operating at American bases in Europe and the Far East, ostensibly to collect weather information. Their principal purpose, however, was to gather military intelligence. Lone U-2s began "straying" over Communist territory in 1956—at the touch of a button seven cameras, mounted under the plane, took continuous, high-resolution pictures of the ground below. They were doing the work eventually taken over by spy satellites. Several of Oswald's co-workers later remembered seeing these strange-looking glider-like planes take off and land. In their briefings, Oswald and the other men were told that the U-2 was a top-secret reconnaissance project which they were not to discuss with anyone outside their unit.

Oswald seemed to take pride in his work and would bristle whenever a young officer tried to second-guess or correct him. Being resentful of authority was almost second nature among the enlisted men, but Daniel Patrick Powers, who had been with Oswald since their technical training, thought Oswald wasn't resentful of authority *per se:* "he was resentful of the position of authority that he could not command."

Oswald began gathering with his fellow Marines in some of the cheap bars near the base and apparently had his first sexual experience with a Japanese bar girl. Then he started dating a beautiful young Japanese woman who was a hostess at a Tokyo bar. When the time approached for his unit to be shipped out to the Philippines in November 1957, Oswald grazed his left arm with a .22 caliber bullet from a derringer he had kept in his locker. A barracks-mate, George Wilkens, heard the shot and rushed in to find Oswald sitting quietly on a bunk holding the gun. Wilkens had seen the gun a few weeks before when Oswald showed it to him and said he had bought it from a mail-order company in the United States. Others rushed in, and Wilkens left.

At the hospital Oswald claimed his minor wound had been caused accidentally when he dropped his government-issue .45. But the .22 bullet was found, and the incident was reported as a breach of regulations concerning private firearms. The scuttlebutt afterward was that Oswald had deliberately shot himself to avoid leaving Japan to go on maneuvers. If that was his plan, it failed—he was shipped out to the Philippines five days after he was released from the hospital.

After his unit returned in the spring of 1958, Oswald was court-martialed for possessing an unauthorized weapon. He was fined $50 and sentenced to twenty days at hard labor, but the confinement was suspended for six months. Two months later, however, he was court-martialed again. This time he was charged with attempting to provoke a fight with Sergeant Miguel Rodriguez at the Bluebird Cafe in Yamato, and for assaulting Rodriguez by pouring a drink on him. (Oswald evidently bore a grudge because the sergeant had kept him on mess duty.) After electing to serve as his own defense counsel, Oswald cross-examined Rodriguez and persuaded the court he was drunk that night and had spilled the drink by accident. (Years later, Rodriguez would still insist Oswald had been sober and knew exactly what he was doing.) But despite this minor victory, Oswald was found guilty of using "provoking words" and sentenced to the brig. He served eighteen days in a tough military prison.

His fellow Marines noticed a change in Oswald when he got out. He seemed bitter and more withdrawn than he had been before. One man remembered Oswald telling him, "I've seen enough of a democratic society here. . . . When I get out I'm going to try something else." Oswald would later claim that he met a few Communists in Japan who got him interested in going to the Soviet Union to see what a socialist country was like. There may be some truth in this—it would have been in character for him to try to make contact with a Communist group, as he had in New Orleans. The court-martial may have helped make up his mind. In any case, it was during this period that Oswald began studying the Russian language.

In September 1958, a month later, the Chinese began shelling the offshore islands of Quemoy and Matsu, which were controlled by the Nationalist government on Formosa (now Taiwan), and Oswald's unit was sent to Formosa to set up a radar base. Shortly after they arrived, Oswald was on guard duty one night when the officer in charge heard four or five shots at Oswald's position. Running over, he found Oswald "shaking and crying." Oswald told him he was seeing things and that he couldn't stand being on guard duty. After Rhodes reported what had happened, Oswald was sent back to Japan on a military plane. Rhodes believed Oswald was faking. He told Edward Jay Epstein, "Oswald liked Japan and wanted to stay. . . . I know he didn't want to go to Formosa, and I think he fired off his gun to get out of there. . . . There was nothing dumb about Oswald."

At the end of his overseas duty in November 1958 Oswald was

transferred to the El Toro base in Santa Ana, California. He became part of a radar crew with about seven other enlisted men and three officers. One of the officers, Lieutenant John E. Donovan, was a recent graduate of the Foreign Service School. He found Oswald to be "very competent," "brighter than most people," and surprisingly well-informed about foreign affairs. He recalled that Oswald

> would take great pride in his ability to mention not only the leader of a country, but five or six subordinates. . . . He took great pride in talking to a passing officer coming in or out of the radar center, and in a most interested manner, ask him what he thought of a given situation, listen to that officer's explanation, and say, "Thank you very much." As soon as we were alone again, he would say, "Do you agree with that?" In many cases it was obvious that the officer had no more idea about [what he was saying] than he did about the polo . . . matches in Australia. And Oswald would then say, "Now, if men like that are leading us, there is something wrong—when I obviously have more intelligence and more knowledge than that man."

If the officers weren't too high in rank, Oswald would point out their mistakes. One of the enlisted men, Nelson Delgado, enjoyed the way Oswald baited them: "Oswald had them stumped . . . four out of five times. They just ran out of words. . . . And every time this happened, it made him feel twice as good. . . . He used to cut up anybody that was high ranking . . . and make himself come out top dog."

Donovan also recalled that Oswald thought the poverty he saw in Asia was unjust and that he took a special interest in Latin America. At a Warren Commission hearing, Donovan was asked, "Did he ever have any specific suggestions as to what should be done about problems in Asia or Latin America?" Donovan answered, "No. His only solution that I could see was that authority, particularly the Marine Corps, ought to be able to recognize talent such as his own, without a given magic college degree, and put them in positions of prominence." As Donovan recalled, this attitude carried over to the squadron football team, on which Lee played end:

> [H]e often tried to make calls in the huddle—for better or worse . . . a quarterback is in charge of the team and should make the calls. . . . And I don't know if he quit or I kicked him off. . . . at any rate, he stopped playing.

He felt that Oswald's only common bond with the other enlisted men was a desire to get out, but that the others respected his intelligence and admired his ability to "pursue Russian on his own and learn it."

At the El Toro base Oswald flaunted his admiration for all things Russian, playing Russian music in the barracks and putting his name in Russian on one of his jackets. He subscribed to a Russian-language newspaper and to the *Daily Worker.* Some of his barracks-mates kidded him, calling him "comrade," or accused him jokingly of being a Russian spy. Oswald seemed to enjoy these comments immensely.

Some critics of the Warren Report have argued that Oswald couldn't have gotten away with this ostentatious pro-Russian behavior without official sanction. They contend that Oswald was merely pretending to be pro-Russian, while he was, in fact, working for American intelligence. As it often happens, a more reasonable explanation is less exciting, but more suited to his character. Oswald was apparently not as open about his political beliefs with the officers as he was with the enlisted men. Lieutenant Donovan, for instance, never heard Oswald "in any way, shape or form confess that he was a Communist, or that he ever thought about being a Communist." He thought Oswald subscribed to the Russian newspaper to learn the language and to get another view of international affairs. Oswald's behavior evidently attracted official interest just once, when a mail-room clerk reported that he had been receiving leftist literature. When Captain Robert E. Block questioned Oswald about this literature, Oswald replied, in a typically disingenuous fashion, that he was indoctrinating himself in Russian theory in conformance with the Marine Corps policy (of getting to know the enemy). Although Block wasn't satisfied with that explanation, he let the matter drop. According to Thornley, Oswald believed he was being watched because of his politics and felt "unjustly put upon."

In December 1958, when Fidel Castro was on the verge of defeating Batista in Cuba, Oswald began spending more time with Nelson Delgado, a Puerto Rican who agreed with him in supporting Castro. While Delgado was on leave in January Castro took power, and when he returned Oswald joked that he must have been down in Cuba helping Castro win. The Cuban revolution fired Oswald's imagination, especially when it appeared that other Latin American countries might follow suit. In June, Dominican exiles based in Cuba launched an invasion of the Dominican Republic in an unsuccessful attempt to overthrow Trujillo. Later that summer there were similar exile raids against Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Haiti. Oswald's hero during this

time was William Morgan, a former sergeant in the U.S. Army who had become a major in Castro's army. That August Morgan received considerable press coverage when he lured some anti-Castro rebels into a trap by pretending to be a counter-revolutionary.

Delgado recalled that Oswald wanted to emulate Morgan. They began talking about going to Cuba to join the revolutionary forces as officers and "lead an expedition to some of these other islands and free them too." They talked about how they would "do away with Trujillo." With Delgado's help, Oswald learned some elementary Spanish.

After the Cuban government started sending hundreds of Batista supporters before the firing squad, Delgado lost his enthusiasm for Castro, but Oswald defended him. He argued that in all new governments some errors were bound to occur, but he was certain that these people had been investigated prior to their executions and that the American press wasn't publicizing those investigations. For Delgado, leaving for Cuba had been barracks talk, mostly, but Oswald still wanted to go. He asked Delgado for ideas about how an Anglo-American like himself could, in Delgado's phrasing, "get with a Cuban, you know, people, be part of that revolutionary movement," and Delgado suggested he get in touch with a Cuban embassy. He believed that Oswald later made contact with the Cuban consulate in Los Angeles and received mail—perhaps pro-Cuban literature—from there. But for some reason Oswald abandoned the idea of going to Cuba, at least for the moment.

Delgado also remembered that Oswald had no use for religion—"He used to laugh at Sunday school . . . mimic the guys that fell out to go to church. . . . Oswald told him that "God was a myth or a legend, that basically our whole life is built around this one falsehood." The Bible was simply "a novel." Oswald preferred *Das Kapital* and other political books like George Orwell's *Animal Farm.* Through Delgado, we are able to see that Oswald had little sense of irony. As he described *Animal Farm* to Delgado, the farmer represented the imperialistic world, and the animals were the workers or socialist people, and "eventually it will come about that the socialists will have the imperialists working for them." When he was asked if Oswald had explained that after the pigs took over the farm they became like the farmers, Delgado replied, "No; just that the pigs and animals had revolted and made the farmer work for them." Oswald had read the book literally and obviously missed Orwell's point.

Nelson Delgado's name appears in many conspiracy books, but

mainly because he testified that Oswald was a poor rifle shot when he was in the Marines:

> Q. Did you fire with Oswald?
> A. Right; I was in the same line. . . . It was a pretty big joke, because he got a lot of "Maggie's drawers" [a red flag indicating the shot had missed the target], you know, a lot of misses, but he didn't give a darn.
> Q. Missed the target completely?
> A. He just qualified, that's it. He wasn't as enthusiastic as the rest of us. We all loved—liked, you know, going to the range.

The key element in this account is that Oswald wasn't enthusiastic—he didn't give a darn. He scored just one point above the score necessary to qualify. As a raw recruit he had done better. And according to a report in *Time,* his Marine rifle-score book showed him "making 48 and 49 points out of a possible 50 in rapid fire at 200 yards from a sitting position, without a scope."

In the spring of 1959 Oswald struck up an acquaintance with Kerry Thornley, another young radar operator, who would be so impressed by Oswald that he would write a novel about him after his defection. As in the case of Delgado, Oswald became interested in Thornley after Thornley seemed to agree with some of his ideas—beginning with an admiration for the new Cuban leader. They met at a bull session during which Oswald learned that Thornley, too, was an atheist. "What do you think of communism?" Oswald asked him. When Thornley replied he didn't think much of it, Oswald told him, "Well, I think the best religion is communism." At first Thornley felt that Oswald was merely playing to the crowd, but he later decided that Oswald sincerely believed "communism was the best system in the world." Although he noticed some gaps in Lee's knowledge, Thornley considered him to be "extremely intelligent," and was surprised on learning after the assassination that Oswald had never finished high school. He thought the news media underestimated Oswald's understanding of Marxism:

> I certainly think he understood much more than many people in the press have seemed to feel. I don't think he was a man who was grasping onto his particular beliefs . . . trying to know something over his head, by any means.

He also thought Oswald "could analyze what he read very well, but it was a very subjective impression."

Thornley said, "I think in his mind it was almost a certainty that the world would end up under a totalitarian government or under totalitarian governments." With that future in mind, Oswald seemed to be "concerned with his image in history":

> He looked upon history as God. He looked upon the eyes of future people as a kind of tribunal, and he wanted to be on the winning side so that 10,000 years from now people would look in the history books and say, "Well, this man was ahead of his time. . . ." He wanted to be looked back upon with honor by future generations. It was, I think, a substitute in his case for traditional religion.
>
> The eyes of the future became what to another man would be the eyes of God, or perhaps to yet another man the eyes of his own conscience.
>
> . . .
>
> I don't think he expected things to develop within his lifetime. I am sure that he didn't. He just wanted to be on the winning side for all eternity.

Oswald's view of history wasn't as unusual as it might appear. In a book on the ideological battles of the McCarthy period, Victor S. Navasky wrote, "Ernest Becker has argued that what man really fears is not so much extinction but extinction with insignificance. Man wants to know that his life has somehow counted, if not for himself then at least in a larger scheme of things, that it has left a trace, a trace that has meaning." In wanting his name to live on, young Oswald was not very different from a philanthropist who endows a library in his name or a politician who hopes to be remembered. But Oswald was staking his hopes in what has been called "revolutionary immortality." And in that particular system of belief, there is a catch. In order to be remembered, his side has to win. If the revolution he supported prevailed, he would live on. If it didn't, he would end up in the dustbin of history. Fighting for the revolution thus meant fighting for his own immortality.

For someone who defines himself and his hope of immortality through his politics, as Oswald did (thus making politics his religion), ideological disputes are quite literally a matter of life and death. As Navasky wrote, "No wonder men go into a rage over fine points of belief: if your adversary wins the argument about truth, *you die.* Your immortality system has been shown to be fallible, your life becomes fallible."

all of this based on Thornley about who she says nothing. She neither disputes him or enables her reader to do so. If she left, she would not have dared use him as a source.

One day Oswald was complaining to his buddy Thornley about the stupidity of a ceremonial parade they were preparing for, and Thornley happened to joke, "Well, come the revolution you will change all that," at which point Oswald looked at him "like a betrayed Caesar," in Thornley's words, "and screamed . . . 'Not you too, Thornley'. . . ." They never spoke to each other again.

5... The Defection

EVEN before he met Kerry Thornley, and while he was daydreaming with Delgado about Cuba, Oswald was making concrete plans for his defection. He had been thinking about it long enough to anticipate a problem he would have to face. After his discharge he was required to serve three more years in the inactive Marine Reserves. How was a member of the Reserves going to explain applying for a passport for a trip to Europe and the Soviet Union, without arousing suspicion?

To get around this difficulty, Oswald worked out an elaborate cover story. He was due to be discharged from active duty in December 1959. In March he passed a high school equivalency exam and applied for admission to the Albert Schweitzer College in Switzerland for the spring 1960 semester. On his application he indicated that he planned to attend a summer course at the University of Turku, Finland, before returning to America to pursue his "chosen vocation." Turku is 100 miles west of Helsinki, the city through which he would enter the Soviet Union. After his application to Schweitzer College was accepted, he had an alibi. If anyone questioned him before he entered the Soviet Union, he could say that he was traveling to Finland to enroll at Turku and would be visiting Russia as a sidetrip. (Soon after the defection, Robert Oswald realized this was his cover story and mentioned it to a reporter.)

Oswald must have spent a good deal of time working out this scheme. The trips that Delgado noticed he took alone into Los Angeles may have involved visits to libraries or consulates there to find out about European colleges and routes to the Soviet Union. The plan suggests that he feared someone in authority might spot him as a

potential defector and pick him up. He talked with Delgado about extradition treaties and the countries that were "extradition-free," like Cuba, Russia, and Argentina. Oswald told him about a route to get to the Soviet Union, in Delgado's words, "bypassing all U.S. censorship. . . . And he definitely said Mexico to Cuba to Russia. . . . I remember him at the time mentioning two men that had defected, and we were wondering how they got there." Later on, Delgado asked Oswald if he still intended to go to Cuba. Oswald grimaced and acted as if he didn't know what he was talking about. "When I get out," he said, "I'm going to school in Switzerland."

In June 1959 he wrote Robert, "Pretty soon I'll be getting out of the Corps and I know what I want to be and how I'm going to be it, which I guess is the most important thing in life."

Later that summer—five months before he was due to be discharged—he saw an opportunity to expedite his departure. In December 1958 Marguerite had been hit on the nose by a jar that fell off a shelf at the store where she worked. She went from doctor to doctor trying to obtain evidence with which to sue her employer and wrote Oswald about her troubles. On August 17 he wrote back saying that he had applied for a hardship discharge

> *in order to help you.* Such a discharge is only rarely given, but if they know you are unable to support yourself then they will release me from the U.S.M.C. *and I will be able to come home and help you* [his emphases].

He cautioned her to make the "right" impression when the Red Cross representative arrived to ask questions about her capacity to support herself. Marguerite came through. She somehow got letters from an attorney, a doctor, and two friends—plus one from herself—all saying she had been injured at work and was unable to support herself. Because of this documentation, Oswald's petition for discharge was approved fairly quickly.

Oswald's letter to Marguerite says quite a bit about his nature, for he never intended to live in Fort Worth and help support his mother. Immediately after his discharge was approved he applied for a passport, indicating he planned to sail from New Orleans within three weeks to attend the colleges in Europe. Under countries to be visited he listed Cuba, the Dominican Republic, England, France, Switzerland, Germany, Finland, and Russia. Before being discharged he signed the customary statement promising not to divulge any secret

or confidential information he may have gained during his military service.

The day after he arrived at his mother's one-room apartment in Fort Worth, he informed her that he was going to "board a ship and work in the export–import business." When she tried to talk him out of it, he told her his mind was made up and, "If I stay here, I will get a job for about $35 a week, and we will both be in the position that you are in." He visited Robert and his family at their home—where he altered his explanation somewhat by saying he had plans to go to New Orleans and "work for an export firm." He said nothing about boarding a ship. After two days at home he left for New Orleans, where he booked passage on the freighter *Marion Lykes* bound for France. On the steamship company's application form he described himself as a "shipping export agent." From New Orleans he wrote Marguerite:

> I have booked passage on a ship to Europe. I would have had to, sooner or later, and I think it's best I go now. Just remember above all else that my values are different from Robert's or yours. It is difficult to tell you how I feel. Just remember this is what I must do. I did not tell you about my plans because you could hardly be expected to understand.

During the first days at sea Oswald spent most of his time pacing back and forth on deck. There were only three other passengers aboard: a retired army colonel and his wife, and a 17-year-old student, Billy Joe Lord. They found their fellow passenger to be vague about his travel itinerary and bitter about life in the United States. He complained about his mother's circumstances, the fact that she had to work in a drugstore to get by. When he saw that Billy Joe, his roommate, had brought a Bible, he said he couldn't see how anyone could believe in God in light of the findings of modern science, since "anyone with intelligence would recognize there was only matter."

From Le Harve, France, Oswald sailed to Southampton, England, where he told customs officials he planned to stay in Britain for one week before proceeding to school in Switzerland. On the same day he flew to Helsinki. Oswald arrived in Moscow around the time of his twentieth birthday, in October 1959. Shortly thereafter, he told his Intourist interpreter, Rimma Shirokova, that he wanted to become a Soviet citizen. She helped him write a letter to the Supreme Soviet requesting citizenship. But at that point the Soviet bureaucracy took control. When his six-day visa expired, Oswald was informed he would have to leave the country immediately. And since the Russians were not interested, he would have to return to the United States. Oswald went back to his hotel room, considered the situation for a few hours, and cut himself above his left wrist.

Although the Warren Report cautiously called it "an apparent suicide attempt," there is reason to believe that this incident was another one of Oswald's dramatic manipulations. He knew that Rimma was scheduled to arrive at his hotel room within the hour and would find him. The hospital records, provided by the Soviets after the assassination, state that his injury was "light" and that Oswald told his doctor he had cut his wrist to "postpone his departure" from the Soviet Union. In fact, this "apparent suicide attempt" was similar to the minor gunshot wound Oswald had inflicted on himself in Japan. Each incident seemed to have had the same purpose—to avoid being sent where he did not want to go. The emotion expressed was probably not suicidal despair but an extraordinary willfulness—a determination to act decisively and even violently to manipulate events.

The strategem worked, at least for a while. After being released from the hospital, Oswald was transferred to another hotel, although his tourist visa had expired. His diary claims he was interviewed by a new set of Soviet officials the same afternoon. They asked him to describe the other officials he had seen, and took notes. But these bureaucrats also put him off. Several factors must have entered into their decision—among them, Oswald's evident unpredictability and the overall political situation. While Oswald was sailing to Europe, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev had been touring the United States after meeting with President Eisenhower at Camp David. The world press was heralding a potential thaw in the Cold War.

Priscilla Johnson thought the Soviets were suspicious of all foreigners, including those whose ideological credentials were unquestionable—as, of course, Oswald's were not. Having never joined the Communist party, he had no ideological record. One of the questions the second group of officials asked him was, "What documents do you have to show who and what you are?" The only thing Oswald could produce was his Marine Corps honorable discharge.

After waiting for three days without getting an answer, Oswald decided to take action again. He went to the American Embassy and attempted to sign away his citizenship. As a non-American he couldn't have been forced to return to the United States—it would

have made it impossible for Soviet officials to tell him, as one already had, "Go home." Although he didn't get to sign the papers that day, he eventually got what he wanted. When he spoke to Priscilla Johnson two weeks later, he said the Russians had assured him he would be allowed to stay.

Toward the end of November the embassy lost track of him in Moscow. He surfaced in Minsk the following January. Some writers suspect that during the interim Oswald was being questioned by the KGB.

Like his fellow radar operators, Oswald had a low security clearance. In 1964 John Donovan, his former crew chief at El Toro, listed the confidential information Oswald was known to have had access to: the location of every base in the West Coast area, their radio frequencies and call signs, their radar capabilities, and the relative strengths of all squadrons. (The radio frequencies and call signs were changed after Oswald's defection.) He also had some knowledge of the U-2 and of a device called TPX-1, which was used to transfer radio and radar signals several miles away from their source, diverting missiles set to home in on them. And he had received instruction in the then-new MPS 16 height-finding radar equipment, which could locate planes, such as the U-2, at extremely high altitudes. But he would not have had the technical expertise to reveal very much about those devices.

When Oswald hinted to Snyder that he knew something of special interest, he may have been talking about the U-2. But the Russians already knew a good deal about the American "mystery plane." One intelligence observer has said that the Soviets may have first learned about the U-2 from a Ukrainian-born scientist and aerial photography specialist who defected from the United States in 1956. The existence of the plane was no secret. In March 1958 the Japanese magazine *Air Review* published photographs of U-2s taken by a 16-year-old boy standing off-base near a runway of an American installation.

It was apparently standard practice for the Soviet intelligence services to debrief defectors, especially military personnel. As one CIA officer has remarked, if nothing else, "they will talk to a Marine about close order drill." We may assume Oswald was debriefed. The important thing for our purposes, however, is not that he may have given away secrets but that he didn't receive the favorable treatment he had clearly expected as a reward.

According to his wife Marina, he had come to her country hoping to get an education. He applied for admission to the Patrice Lumumba

University of Friendship of Peoples in Moscow, where students from Third World countries learned Marxist ideology. He wanted to study philosophy, economics, and politics. But in May 1961 his application was turned down. Looking back, Kerry Thornley thought Oswald must have assumed that the Russians would accept him in a "much higher capacity" than they did. He thought Oswald expected them, "in his own dreams, to invite him to take a position in their government, possibly as a technician, and I think he then felt he could go out into the world, into the Communist world and distinguish himself and work his way up into the party, perhaps."

This hope was, of course, completely unrealistic. Even the most celebrated defectors were never given significant positions in the Soviet Union. Guy Burgess and Donald MacLean, high-level members of British intelligence who had been KGB agents for many years, defected after learning they were under suspicion by the British. After being feted in Moscow, they were given work at the English Department of a government publishing house. Another defector, Morris Block, was sent to Odessa to work as a shipfitter. Lee Harvey Oswald was sent to Minsk to work in a radio factory. He lived there from January 1960 until May 1962, and for more than half of that time, he was trying to get out.

When Richard Snyder appeared before the Warren Commission someone wanted to know what his reaction was when he heard Oswald had been sent to live in Minsk. Snyder, who had once taken a walk around town while waiting for a train at Minsk, replied, "Serves him right." Minsk was heavily industrialized and unattractive. Its winters were long and severe, quite different from anything Oswald had ever experienced. He was given an expensive apartment and a monthly stipend—he lived well, by Russian standards—but he was assigned manual labor, which he disliked. The records supplied by the Soviet government indicate that he made a familiar impression on his employers: "Citizen Lee Harvey Oswald reacts in an over-sensitive manner to remarks from the foremen, and is careless in his work. Citizen L. H. Oswald takes no part in the social life of the shop and keeps very much to himself."

While Oswald was in Minsk, the American plots to assassinate Fidel Castro began. The idea originated during the planning stages of the Bay of Pigs invasion, while Eisenhower was still in office. Just a few CIA officials were involved. The rationalization then was that Castro's elimination might make the invasion less costly in lives or

possibly unnecessary.

From the moment President John F. Kennedy took office, Cuba was a troublesome burden. In his first State of the Union message he said, "In Latin America, Communist agents seeking to exploit that region's peaceful revolution of hope have established a base on Cuba. . . . Our objection with Cuba is not over the people's drive for a better life. Our objection is to their domination by foreign and domestic tyrannies." He warned that such domination in Latin America "can never be negotiated." The public was alarmed by this new Soviet ally —"only 90 miles from Miami," as the popular expression went. A month after the Bay of Pigs debacle, the House of Representatives passed a resolution declaring that Cuba was "a clear and present danger" to the Western Hemisphere. Editorial writers cited the Monroe Doctrine and demanded that the administration do all it could to get rid of the Castro government. When other methods failed, the assassination idea bobbed to the surface again.

Nobody knows precisely who ordered the assassination attempts. Despite a thorough investigation in 1975, Senator Frank Church's senate committee on intelligence activities couldn't determine whether the CIA acted on its own or on orders from above. During the investigation Church predicted to the Baltimore *Sun*, "The people will recognize that the CIA was behaving during those years like a rogue elephant rampaging out of control," and the phrase "rogue elephant" quickly embedded itself in the public mind. But that was not the conclusion reached by Church's committee in its report four months later:

> The picture that emerges from the evidence is not a clear one. . . . The Committee finds that the system of executive command and control was so ambiguous that it is difficult to be certain at what levels assassination activity was known and authorized. This situation creates the disturbing prospect that Government [i.e., CIA] officials might have undertaken the assassination plots without it having been uncontrovertibly clear that there was explicit authorization from the Presidents. It is also possible that there might have been a successful "plausible denial" in which Presidential authorization was issued but is now obscured.

One committee member has said that pinning down responsibility for these activities was "like nailing Jello to a wall." The committee ended up criticizing CIA officials for failing on several occasions "to disclose their plans and activities to superior authorities, or to do so

One of the unfortunate effects of using disclosed records is the fact that Sheffield Edwards' memo has been disclosed

with sufficient detail and clarity." But it also criticized administration officials "for not ruling out assassination, particularly after certain Administration officials had become aware of prior assassination plans."

That last statement was a reference to former Attorney General Robert Kennedy, who served as a liaison with the CIA on Cuban policy for the White House. On May 7, 1962, Kennedy had been informed by CIA general counsel Lawrence Houston and another CIA officer, Sheffield Edwards, that an intermediary for the CIA had contacted Mafia leader Sam Giancana before the Bay of Pigs with a proposition of paying $150,000 to hire some hit men to go into Cuba and kill Castro. Kennedy was led to believe that this plot had been terminated, but that was untrue. Since Giancana's association with the CIA complicated the attorney general's ongoing attempt to prosecute Giancana, he was furious. Houston recalled Kennedy's response: "If you have seen Mr. Kennedy's eyes get steely and his jaw set . . . his voice get low and precise, you get a definite feeling of unhappiness."

quite understood.

One of the few things made clear by the Church committee report was that, following the Bay of Pigs humiliation, the Kennedy administration put considerable pressure on the CIA to "do something about Castro." Robert Kennedy's notes of a White House meeting on November 4, 1961, indicate that he wanted stronger covert action against Cuba: "My idea is to stir things up on [the] island with espionage, sabotage, general disorder, run and operated by Cubans themselves with every group but Batistaites & Communists. Do not know if we will be successful in overthrowing Castro but we have nothing to lose in my estimate."

On November 16 President Kennedy delivered a speech at the University of Washington in which he said, "We cannot, as a free nation, compete with our adversaries in tactics of terror, assassination, false promises, counterfeit mobs and crises." But at the end of that month, the president authorized a major new covert action program called MONGOOSE, the purpose of which was to "use our available assets . . . to help Cuba overthrow the Communist regime." It was a project designed to use Cuban exiles in intelligence and sabotage activities aimed toward an internal revolt against the Castro government—the same idea Robert Kennedy had outlined earlier.

On January 19, 1962, a meeting of MONGOOSE participants was held in the attorney general's office, and the notes taken by a CIA executive assistant contain the following account of what Robert

With all of this, does she have any rational account of the end or Solution of the 1962 missile crisis?

Kennedy told them:

> Conclusion Overthrow of Castro is Possible
> ". . . a solution to the Cuban problem today carried top priority in U.S. Govt. No time, money, effort—or manpower is to be spared."
> "Yesterday . . . the President had indicated to him that the final chapter had not been written—it's got to be done and will be done."

Former CIA Director Richard Helms told the committee that during the MONGOOSE period "it was made abundantly clear . . . to everybody involved in the operation that the desire was to get rid of the Castro regime and to get rid of Castro . . . the point was that no limitations were put on this injunction." As the pressure increased, he said, "obviously the extent of the means that one thought were available . . . increased too." He added, "In the perceptions of the time and the things we were trying to do this was one human life against many other human lives that were being lost . . . people were losing their lives in raids, a lot of people had lost their life at the Bay of Pigs, agents were being arrested left and right and put before the wall and shot." Helms testified that he received no direct order to assassinate Castro, but he told the committee: "I have testified as best I could about the atmosphere of the time, what I understood was desired, and I don't want to take refuge in saying that I was instructed to specifically murder Castro."

Other administration officials backed up Helms's picture of the crisis. Former Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara testified, "We were hysterical about Castro at the time of the Bay of Pigs and thereafter, and . . . there was pressure from [President Kennedy and the attorney general] to do something about Castro." But he added, "I don't believe we contemplated assassination. We did, however, contemplate overthrow."

Nevertheless, talk of assassination was in the air in 1961. George Smathers, former senator from Florida and an old friend of the president's, told the Church committee that the subject came up during a conversation he had with Kennedy on the White House lawn. He testified that the president asked him "what reaction I thought there would be throughout South America were Fidel Castro to be assassinated." After Smathers told him that it would only result in unfavorable publicity for the United States, Kennedy agreed with him. (It was Kennedy's habit to ask all manner of questions of to obtain information.)

Later on, Kennedy let Smathers know he didn't want to hear any more about Cuba. One evening when Smathers was a dinner guest:

> I just happened to mention . . . something about Cuba, and the President took his fork and cracked the plate . . . and says, for Gods sakes, quit talking about Cuba.

On November 9, 1961, reporter Tad Szulc was asked by Robert Kennedy to meet with the president, off the record, to discuss the situation in Cuba. The president asked Szulc a number of questions about conversations he had had with Castro and what he thought the United States might do about Cuba, either in a hostile way or in establishing some kind of dialogue. Kennedy then asked, "What would you think if I ordered Castro to be assassinated?" Taken aback, Szulc told him he would strongly disapprove of the idea for both ethical and pragmatic reasons. Szulc said that Kennedy replied, "I agree with you completely." The notes Szulc wrote shortly after the meeting continue:

> JFK said he raised question because he was under terrific pressure from advisers (think he said intelligence people, but not positive) to okay a Castro murder, said he was resisting pressure.

Officially, the CIA was against the idea as well. Only the month before, its Board of National Estimates had prepared a paper for the president which concluded that "it is highly improbable that an extensive popular uprising could be fomented" against Castro and that Castro's death "would almost certainly not prove fatal to the regime."

After hearing this sometimes contradictory testimony, some committee members came to feel that a Becket-like situation may have developed in which CIA officials carried out what they believed to be the wishes of their superiors. At one point, Senator Charles Mathias questioned Richard Helms:

> Q. Let me draw an example from history. When Thomas Becket was proving to be an annoyance, [like] Castro, the King said who will rid me of this man. He didn't say to somebody, go out and murder him. He said who will rid me of this man, and let it go at that.
> A. That is a warming reference to the problem.
> Q. You feel that spans the generations and the centuries?
> A. I think it does, sir.
> Q. And that is typical of the kind of thing which might be said, which

might be taken by the Director or by anybody else as Presidential authorization to go forward?

A. That is right. But in answer to that, I realize that one sort of grows up in [the] tradition of the time and I think that any of us would have found it very difficult to discuss assassinations with a President of the United States. I just think we all had the feeling that we're hired . . . to keep those things out of the Oval Office.

Q. Yet at the same time you felt that some spark had been transmitted, that that was within the permissible limits?

A. Yes, and if he had disappeared from the scene they would not have been unhappy.

The first known CIA plot to assassinate Fidel Castro was set into motion in August 1960, when an official in the CIA's Office of Medical Services was given a box of Castro's favorite cigars and asked to treat them with poison. After being doctored, the cigars were handed over to an unidentified conspirator on February 13, 1961.

but to Castro but to unwitting

6 . . . Getting Out

FEBRUARY 13, 1961: At the American Embassy in Moscow, Richard Snyder found on his desk a letter from Lee Harvey Oswald, whom he hadn't seen or heard from in over a year. Oswald had decided to return to the United States, but he was worried about the reception he might get from the American authorities. He wrote, "I desire to return to the United States, that is if we could come to some agreement concerning the dropping of any legal proceedings against me." asked to have his passport returned and concluded, "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 American citizen."

On February 28 Snyder replied. He asked Oswald to come to Moscow for an interview to determine his citizenship status. Unsure about the reference to "legal proceedings," Snyder also sent a dispatch to the State Department about Oswald's letter, asking whether he might face prosecution on his return, and if so, should Snyder tell him that? The State Department responded by saying it had no way of knowing whether Oswald had broken any laws and could offer him no guarantees. It cautioned Snyder not to return his through the Soviet mails under any circumstances.

Oswald didn't want to go to Moscow to be interviewed—he was afraid he might be arrested the minute he set foot on American territory at the embassy. On March 12 he wrote Snyder again saying he found it "inconvenient" to come to Moscow:

> I see no reason for any preliminary inquiries not to be put to me in the form of a questionnaire and sent to me. 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.

Snyder replied on March 24, restating the need for him to come to Moscow. And there the matter rested, for the moment—a standoff.

Meanwhile, something else was going on in Oswald's life. On March 17 he had met Marina Prusakova, an attractive 19-year-old girl, at a dance at the Minsk Palace of Culture. He saw her once more at another dance the following week. Soon after, Oswald went into the hospital for an adenoid operation, and Marina visited him there several times. After just these few meetings—and a stolen kiss on a hospital stairway—Oswald proposed. Marina, an orphan, lived with her Aunt Valya and Uncle Ilya, sleeping in their living room. When Oswald was released from the hospital on April 11, she invited him home for dinner. Oswald told her relatives he had come to Russia to learn the truth about it, not just the "truth" shown to tourists. He told them he was happy there. As he was leaving for work, Ilya put his arm around Oswald's shoulders and told him, "Take care of this girl. She has plenty of breezes in her brain."

Marina had not yet decided to say yes. She would later admit that she had been attracted to Oswald because he was an American, someone out of the ordinary compared to her Russian boyfriends. The fact that he had a private apartment was appealing, as well. But Marina has also said, "I fell in love with the man." In her biography of Marina, Priscilla Johnson McMillan noted that the ideal man of Marina's imagination was Pechorin, the protagonist of Mikhail Lermontov's story "A Hero of Our Time." She wrote, "Vengeful and cold, Pechorin is forever spinning webs of intrigue that destroy all those whose lives touch his own." McMillan pointed out that Pechorin shunned emotional contact with other people and boasted, "How many times have I played the part of an axe in the hands of fate? Fame is a question of luck. To obtain it, you only have to be nimble."

On April 18 Oswald proposed again and insisted that they be married right away or break up—he couldn't go on seeing her, he said, without having her. They were married as soon as it could be arranged, on April 30. They had known each other for six weeks.

Could there have been some reason other than passion for Oswald's sudden decision to marry? He later claimed that he had proposed to

another Russian girl, Ella German, and had been turned down—he married Marina on the rebound, he said, to hurt Ella and didn't fall in love with Marina until after their marriage. That may have been true. But it would have been unusual for Oswald to take a step like marriage without considering how it would affect his plans to leave Russia. Eventually he would have to go to the embassy. Did it occur to him that if the Americans intended to arrest him it might be to his advantage to have a Russian wife? Before his wedding Oswald, having cut himself off from his family, was completely alone. If the Americans had wanted to take him into custody at the embassy and whisk him away to the United States to stand trial, no one but Oswald would have protested. Marrying a Russian citizen gave him some leverage. If he were arrested now, his wife could protest to the Soviet government—thus raising the specter of an "international incident."

Although Marina didn't realize it until after their marriage, Oswald had told her many lies during their courtship. He had said he was 24, increasing his age by three years. He told her his mother was dead. And he maintained that he had renounced his American citizenship and could never go back to the United States. Having grown up in the Soviet Union, Marina could understand someone wanting to keep secrets from potential informers. But as McMillan put it, "Marina soon realized that her husband's secretiveness was of another kind entirely. He told lies without purpose or point, lies that were bound to be found out. He liked having secrets for their own sake. He simply enjoyed concealment."

A few weeks after their wedding they went to see a Polish spy movie. Coming out of the theater Lee remarked, "I'd love a life like that." When Marina expressed surprise, he explained, "I'd love the danger."

During their courtship Marina also began to notice Oswald's interest in Cuba. In mid-April an army of Cuban exiles supported by the United States invaded Cuba at the Bay of Pigs and was quickly defeated. Marina heard Oswald condemn the invasion and American policy toward Cuba and Fidel Castro in general. He took her to see a Soviet film about Castro and afterward spoke of him as "a hero" and "a very smart statesman." Oswald sought out the Cuban students living in Minsk—there were about three hundred of them—to find out more about Castro's revolution. The students he met were disappointed in Russia, as he was. According to Marina, he felt the Cubans would succeed in creating an egalitarian society where the Russians had failed.

On May 16, less than three weeks after his marriage, Oswald wrote the American embassy in a familiar vein:

> 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 prosecuted for any act to this case. . . . Unless you think this condition can be met, I see no reason for a continuance of our correspondence. Instead, I shall endeavour to use my relatives in the United States, to see about getting something down in Washington.

He informed the embassy he had gotten married: "My wife is Russian . . . and is quite willing to leave the Soviet Union with me. . . ." He said he would not leave without her, adding, "So with this extra complication, I suggest you do some checking up before advising me further."

Earlier that month Oswald had written a letter to his brother Robert, his first since 1959, when he told Robert he never wanted to hear from him again. Acting as though nothing had happened, Lee informed Robert of his marriage and invited him to visit him in Russia sometime. Testing the waters, he said nothing about his plans to return. He also wrote to his mother for the first time in a year and a half. After Robert answered in a friendly manner, Oswald wrote a second time on May 31: "I can't say whether I will ever get back to the States or not, if I can get the government to drop charges against me, and get the Russians to let me out with my wife, then maybe I'll be seeing you again. *But* you know it is not simple for either of those two things."

When he had received no response to his most recent letter to Snyder by July, Oswald decided to take his vacation and fly to Moscow. He still suspected he was walking into a trap. He told Marina the embassy was entitled to arrest him because, "I threw my passport on the table and said I didn't want to be a citizen anymore." Always sensitive to his legal rights, Oswald must have known that that action wasn't enough to put him in jail. More likely, he was worried he would be accused of giving the Soviets military information, as he had threatened to do.

Since Oswald hadn't let the embassy know he was coming, Richard Snyder was surprised to see this bad penny turn up. Snyder remembered him as one of the most obnoxious young men he had ever known. Since it was a Saturday, the consular offices were closed, and Snyder suggested he return the following Monday. Oswald telephoned Marina and asked her to join him, assuring her, "It's okay. They didn't arrest me." She flew to Moscow on Sunday and accompanied him to the embassy the next day.

To determine whether Oswald had committed any expatriating acts, the embassy personnel questioned him at length about his activities since he had come to the Soviet Union. Was he a Soviet citizen, they asked? No. Had he applied for citizenship? No. Had he taken an oath of allegiance to the Soviet Union? No. Had he made any statements for the Soviet press or for audiences? No. Had he joined a Soviet trade union? No. When he was asked whether he had given the Russians information he had acquired as a radar operator, he replied

> That he was never in fact subjected to any questioning concerning his life or experiences prior to entering the Soviet Union, and never provided such information to any Soviet organ. . . . that he doubted in fact that he would have given such information if requested despite his statements made at the Embassy.

The Warren Report noted that some of these answers were undoubtedly false. Oswald had almost certainly applied for Soviet citizenship, he had a membership card in a Soviet trade union, and "his assertion to Snyder that he had never been questioned by Soviet authorities concerning his life in the United States is simply unbelievable." But at the time, since Oswald's answers indicated he was still an American citizen and there was no way of proving otherwise, the embassy had little choice but to conclude that he had not expatriated himself. In a dispatch to the State Department, Snyder reported Oswald's many denials and added:

> Oswald indicated some anxiety as to whether, should he return to the United States, he would face possible lengthy imprisonment for his act of remaining in the Soviet Union. Oswald was told informally that the Embassy did not perceive, on the basis of the information in its possession, on what grounds he might be subject to conviction leading to punishment of such severity as he apparently had in mind. It was clearly stated to him, however, that the Embassy could give him no assurance as to whether upon his desired return to the United States he might be liable to prosecution for offenses committed in violation of laws of the United States or of any of its States. Oswald said he understood this. He had simply felt that in his own interest he could not go back to the United States if it meant returning to a number of years in prison, and had delayed approaching Soviet authorities concerning departing from

the Soviet Union until he "had this end of the thing straightened out."

Snyder concluded:

> Twenty months of the realities of life in the Soviet Union have clearly had a maturing effect on Oswald. He stated frankly that he had learned a hard lesson the hard way and that he had been completely relieved of his illusions about the Soviet Union at the same time that he acquired a new understanding and appreciation of the United States and the meaning of freedom. Much of the arrogance and bravado which characterized him on his first visit to the Embassy appears to have left him.

When McMillan read that last passage to Marina Oswald after the assassination, Marina burst out laughing and remarked that "without an ulterior purpose he would never have said any such thing."

It now appeared that he would be allowed to go home. But despite the assurances Snyder had given him, Oswald remained wary. Upon returning to Minsk with his wife, he began preparing a cover story to protect himself, just as he had done when he planned his defection.

After the assassination one of the items found among Oswald's belongings was a twelve-page handwritten account of his life in Russia which he had grandly entitled "Historic Diary." When portions of the diary appeared in the news media, Oswald's melodramatic tone made it appear as if he were a highly emotional young man who had become thoroughly disillusioned with the Soviet Union. What no one realized then was that the "Historic Diary" was not a diary at all—that is, it was not a daily, spontaneous account of his experiences in Russia. It had been written up *after* his July interview at the embassy.[1]

The Warren Commission staff noticed anachronisms in the diary. Entries for particular days sometimes alluded to events that hadn't yet occurred. Because of these discrepancies, the Warren Report noted that Oswald had apparently written many entries at a later date, possibly with "future readers in mind," and that it wasn't an accurate guide to the details of his activities. Despite this skepticism, however, the report relied on the diary to establish Oswald's state of mind when he decided to return to the United States. It quoted an entry dated January 4–31, 1961:

> I am starting to reconsider my desire about staying. The work is drab, the money I get has nowhere to be spent. No night clubs or bowling alleys, no places of recreation except the trade union dances. I have had enough.

The report concluded that "a great change must have occurred in Oswald's thinking to induce him to return to the United States," and suggested that he came back chastened—his return "publicly testified to the utter failure of what had been the most important act of his life." The idea that Oswald had learned his lesson and was humbled was, of course, the same impression he had created with Richard Snyder.

But Oswald's actual purpose in writing the diary is suggested by its contents. Point by point, the diary covered most of the questions he had been asked at the embassy. It begins with his arrival in Moscow full of hope and idealism. It describes his attempt to renounce his citizenship—omitting his threat to give away secrets. A November entry mentions the interview he had with Aline Mosby, which he knew had been published in the United States: "I give my story, allow pictures, later story is distorted, sent without my permission, that is: before I ever saw and O.K.'ed her story." His questioning by Soviet officials is made to appear extremely perfunctory.

The diary claims he was offered Soviet citizenship but turned it down. It says he was asked to address a meeting of workers in Minsk but politely refused. It says nothing of his joining a trade union. After recording his growing disillusionment with the Soviet system, he wrote:

> *Feb. 1st [1961]* Make my first request of American Embassy, Moscow for reconsidering my position. I stated "I would like to go back to U.S."
>
> *Feb. 28th* I receive letter from Embassy. Richard E. Snyder stated "I could come in for an interview anytime I wanted."
>
> *March 1–16* I now live in a state of expectation about going back to the U.S.

Oswald didn't mention his concern about the possibility he would be arrested. The rest of the diary depicted a continuing disillusionment with the Soviet Union and an uncharacteristic silence about politics.

In short, the "Historic Diary" was a self-serving account that could be used as evidence that he had violated no American laws. It may also have served to get his story straight in his own mind, in case he was questioned by the authorities after he arrived in the United States, as indeed he would be.

How about Marina's exit visa?

By January 1962, the only hitch remaining was getting the Americans to agree to let Marina come into the country. The embassy wrote Oswald suggesting that he precede his wife to the United States, but he refused. Sometimes he would tell Marina, "If it hadn't been for you, I could have gone to America long ago." And she would counter his accusation with perhaps more truth than she realized, "The only reason you're waiting for me is—you're afraid they'll arrest you if you're alone."

During January Oswald got troubling news from his mother, who wrote him that the Marines had changed his honorable discharge to a dishonorable (in fact, an "undesirable") discharge. He must have suspected this change was a prelude to criminal charges, for on January 30 he wrote Robert:

> You once said that you asked around about whether or not the U.S. government had any charges against me, you said at that time "no," maybe you should ask around again, it's possible now that the government knows I'm coming they'll have something waiting. . . . If you find out any information about me, please let me know. I'd like to be ready on the draw so to speak.

On the same day he also wrote John Connally, who he believed was still secretary of the navy. (Connally was by that time governor of Texas.) Oswald's letter to him was a shrewd mixture of gall and dissembling:

> I wish to call your attention to a case about which you may have personal knowledge since you are a resident of Ft. Worth as I am. In November 1959 an event was well publicized in the Ft. Worth newspapers concerning a person who had gone to the Soviet Union to reside for a short time (much in the same way E. Hemingway resided in Paris).
>
> This person, in answers to questions put to him by reporters in Moscow criticized certain facets of American life. The story was blown up into another "turncoat" sensation, with the result that the Navy department gave this person a belated dishonourable discharge, although he had received an honourable discharge after three years service on Sept. 11, 1959 at El Toro Marine Corps base in California.
>
> These are the basic facts of *my* case.
>
> I have and always had the full sanction of the U.S. Embassy, Moscow USSR and hence the U.S. government. Inasmuch as I am returning to the U.S.A. in this year with the aid of the U.S. Embassy, bringing with

does — she ignore this and the meaning it can have?

> me my family (since I married in the USSR) I shall employ all means to right this gross mistake or injustice to a boni-fied [sic] U.S. citizen and ex-service man. The U.S. government has no charges or complaints against me. I ask you to look into this case and take the necessary steps to repair the damage done to me and my family. For information I would direct you to consult the American Embassy, Chikovski St. 19/21, Moscow, USSR.

Conally referred his letter to the Department of the Navy, which informed Oswald that it contemplated no change in his undesirable discharge.

On February 15 Oswald wrote Robert once more. After indicating that he and Marina had received their Soviet exit visas, he said:

> The chances of our coming to the States are very good. . . .
>
> How are things at your end? I heard over the voice of America that they released Powers, the U2 spy plane fellow. That's big news where you are I suppose. He seemed to be a nice, bright, American-type fellow, when I saw him in Moscow.
>
> You wouldn't have any clippings from the November 1959 newspapers of Ft. Worth, would you?
>
> I am beginning to get interested in just what they *did* say about me and my trip here.
>
> The information might come in handy when I get back. I would hate to come back completely unprepared.

Oswald may have had a particular reason for mentioning Francis Gary Powers.

The Russians had created an international sensation by shooting down Powers's U-2 plane in May 1960. Powers cooperated with his captors by revealing what he knew, and President Eisenhower was forced to admit that the United States had been conducting reconnaissance flights over Soviet territory. It was one of the Soviets' most impressive propaganda coups ever. That August, Powers went on trial in Moscow. Oswald couldn't have missed hearing about it—excerpts from the trial became daily fare on Soviet television, and a movie of the trial made the rounds at neighborhood theaters. During his trial Powers's defense attorney, Mikhail Griniev, had emphasized that "the divulgence of state secrets in the United States is punishable by ten years' imprisonment, or a fine of ten thousand dollars, or both." Griniev pointed out that Powers had said: "I know that I shall be tried in your court, but if I happen to return home I shall be tried there

as well." In February 1962 Powers was exchanged for an imprisoned Russian spy, Colonel Rudolf Abel.

The ten-year sentence for divulging state secrets may have been the kind of lengthy prison sentence Oswald was worried about. Over and over he had asked Robert to look into certain unspecified charges he might be faced with. Robert apparently didn't know what he was talking about. He may have wanted Robert to send him the newspaper clippings so he could find out whether anything had been said about his threat to expose military secrets. In any case, the Powers case stayed on his mind, for two weeks later he wrote Robert: "In another month or so it'll start to thaw out here although I suppose it's already hot in Texas. I heard a "voice of America" program about the Russians releasing Powers. I hope they aren't going to try him in the U.S. or anything."

By May the paperwork was finally completed and the Oswalds and their infant daughter June left the Soviet Union. It had taken Oswald fifteen months to get out. On board the SS *Maasdam* Oswald found some stationery and spent hours in the ship's library writing about politics. Still worried about his reception, he prepared himself for the hostile questions Ameican reporters might ask a returning defector. He compiled a list of possible questions and *two* sets of answers—one giving sanitized responses reminiscent of his diary and the other giving what was evidently the truth. Here are some of the dual answers he gave.

Why did you go to the Soviet Union? One response was that he went as a tourist "to see the land, the people and how their system works." The other, that he went "as a mark of disgust and protest against American political policies in foreign countries, my personal sign of discontent and horror at the misguided line of reasoning of the U.S. Government."

What are the outstanding differences between the Soviet Union and the United States? Answers: "freedom of speech, travel, outspoken opposition to unpopular policies, freedom to believe in god," and "None, except in the U.S. the living standard is a little higher, freedoms are about the same, medical aid and the education system in the USSR is better than in the USA."

Are you a Communist? "No, of course not. . . ." and "Yes, basically, although I hate the USSR and [the] socialist system I still think Marxism can work under different circumstances."

The defector was coming home, essentially unchanged.

7 . . . Homecoming

On June 8, 1962, a Fort Worth newspaper carried a photograph of Lee Harvey Oswald and an article headlined, "Ex-Marine Reported on Way Back from Russia." Six days later the Oswalds arrived at Love Field, the Dallas airport. Robert and his family met them and brought them home to stay until they could get settled—they would live at Robert's for about a month. Oswald had cautioned his brother to make no statements to the press before he got home—"None at all!"—and now, when reporters called the house Oswald refused to talk with them. A week later a *Fort Worth Press* writer sent him a letter asking for an interview, saying that Oswald's story might be salable to a magazine or book publisher or possibly even to the movies. The writer warned Oswald he might have trouble finding a job in Fort Worth: "You would be surprised how many people still link the name Lee Oswald with 'traitor' and 'turncoat.' " Oswald never answered.

Marina enjoyed her first taste of American life. Robert's wife, Vada, cut her hair and gave her a permanent, and Marina seemed delighted with the way she looked. She bought her first pair of shorts and was overwhelmed by the supermarkets. Before long Oswald would begin speaking disparagingly of his wife as a typical American girl, someone more interested in material things than in important political issues. He would complain that he had thought he married a different sort of girl, "a Russian girl."

On June 19 Oswald called on Peter Gregory, a Siberian-born petroleum engineer who taught Russian at the Fort Worth Public Library. Oswald asked if Gregory would write him a letter of recommendation, certifying his competence in the Russian language, so that he might

try to get a job as a translator. (Oswald was by this time fluent in Russian.) Gregory opened a book at random and had Oswald read for him, then gave him the letter he wanted. Through Gregory, Oswald would meet other members of the Russian-speaking émigré community in the area.

Meanwhile, the Fort Worth FBI had taken note of Oswald's return. Special Agent John Fain saw Oswald's picture in the paper and called Marguerite, and then Robert, to locate Oswald and arrange for an interview. Oswald went down to the FBI office and spoke to Fain and another agent for about two hours. Fain found him to be "insolent and tense." When Fain asked him why he went to Russia, Oswald said "because I wanted to" and "to see the country." The FBI agent wanted to make sure Oswald wasn't going to be recruited by Soviet intelligence, and on this point Oswald "seemed to be just a little bit derisive of our questions, and hesitated to bring out whether or not the Soviet intelligence officials might have been interested in him or might have contacted him. . . . He just didn't think he was that important; in other words, that they would want to contact him." According to Fain's written report, Oswald denied that he had tried to renounce his American citizenship or that he had said he would reveal radar secrets to the Soviets. Fain asked Oswald to take a lie detector test on whether he had dealings with Soviet intelligence and Oswald refused.

In mid-July he got a job as a sheet-metal worker for a manufacturer of louvers and ventilators and moved his family to an apartment on Mercedes Street, in a low-income area of Fort Worth. He spent much of his free time reading books on history and politics he'd checked out of the library. As soon as he had settled, he sent an airmail payment to *The Worker* for renewal of his subscription. On August 12 he sent a letter to the Socialist Workers party asking for information, and the party sent him some literature. He also wrote to the Fair Play for Cuba Committee in New York and received some pamphlets.

Agent Fain hadn't been satisfied with Oswald's responses in their first meeting. He decided to interview Oswald again on August 16, and went to the Mercedes Street address. The interview went over the same ground and yielded similar denials. Marina recalled:

> Lee had just returned from work and we were getting ready to have dinner when a car drove up and [a] man introduced himself and asked Lee to step out and talk to him. There was another man in the car. They talked for about two hours and I was very angry, because everything had gotten cold. . . . I asked who these [men] were, and he was very upset over the fact that the FBI was interested in him. . . . Lee said that the FBI had told him that in the event some Russians might visit him and would try to recruit him to work for them, he should notify the FBI agents. I don't know to what extent this was true. . . . he said that they saw Communists in everybody and they are much afraid . . . inasmuch as I had returned [with him] from Russia.

The FBI's concern was that the Soviets might be able to coerce Oswald into intelligence work because Marina had relatives in Russia. Oswald quickly developed what an acquaintance would call an "extreme allergy to the FBI." Fain had gotten Oswald's new address from Robert, and from that point on, whenever Oswald moved, he rented a post office box and refused to give Robert his home address. After this FBI visit, Marina says he remained nervous and irritable for some time. If the past is any guide, his fear of being arrested must have been renewed.

Oswald didn't know it, but before Fain retired in October, he determined that Oswald wasn't working in a sensitive industry, and decided to close his case, at least temporarily.[1]

Many of the Russian-speaking émigrés in the Dallas–Fort Worth area had heard about Oswald's arrival, and they were eager to find out about current conditions in the Soviet Union. Peter Gregory gave a dinner party to introduce the Oswalds to George Bouhe and Anna Meller. Like most of the émigrés, Bouhe and Meller were strongly anti-Communist. They quickly discovered they had nothing in common with Oswald politically. When Bouhe asked about the living standards of the Russian worker, Oswald told him he had made 90 rubles a month and had a rentfree apartment. Pressed about other costs, Oswald said a pair of boots cost about 19 rubles, cafeteria food about 45. Bouhe said, "90 minus 45, minus 19, what is left?" Oswald didn't respond. Bouhe soon stopped discussing the Soviet system with him.

Bouhe later visited the Oswalds at their apartment, and when he saw what few things they had, he collected clothes for the whole family and bought some groceries and a crib for the baby, who had been sleeping on the floor in a suitcase. Oswald was furious. He picked up a shirt Bouhe had brought him and measured and remeasured it. Finally Bouhe said, "Lee, this is to go to work. Wear them 3 or 4 days, get them dirty, then throw them away." Oswald folded the shirt and

gave it back to him. He said, "I don't need any." The other gifts were tacitly accepted, however. Anna Meller visited, too, and was shocked to see Marxist books in the living room. She thought Oswald was extremely irresponsible in not taking better care of his family and in refusing to let Marina learn English. (Oswald wanted to retain his Russian and wanted June to learn the language.) From his point of view, he was eminently responsible: he was pursuing important political concerns that they were too self-centered and bourgeois to recognize. But the way he criticized both the Soviet Union and the United States made Meller think he was mentally ill. She told the Warren Commission, "He had always something hidden; you [could] feel it."

That summer Gregory's son Paul, a student, paid Marina to tutor him in Russian for a couple of months. Sometimes he would drive the Oswalds to the grocery store, and he was amazed at how little Lee bought. Oswald would get the cheapest possible cut of meat and then haggle to make sure they gave him the best of the lot. Paul remembered that once when they were coming out of the store Marina missed the step down and fell with June in her arms. Oswald rushed over to make sure the child was all right, ignoring his wife, and then gave her a tongue-lashing.

Paul Gregory believed that Oswald considered him a friend, while other people were "beneath him." The two young men discussed politics, and Oswald expressed admiration for Castro and for President Kennedy, whom he called "a good leader." He told Paul the Party leaders in Russia were " 'ruining the principles which the country should be based on.' In other words, they were not true Communists." When Paul mentioned his interest in going to the Soviet Union as an exchange student, Oswald advised, "Just go over there. Don't get on a waiting list. You will never get there. If you want to do something, go ahead and do it. You will get involved in red tape." After recalling this conversation for the Warren Commission, Gregory added, "And I think that was possibly the way he thought about everything." After the assassination, Paul told the FBI that Oswald was "arrogant, stubborn, and would not discuss anything but his particular type of politics, which was definitely radical."

Before long, other members of the Russian-speaking community were offering their help. Meller and Bouhe noticed that Marina's teeth were in very poor condition and sought out the assistance of another émigré, Elena Hall, a dental technician, who directed Marina to a low-cost clinic and began collecting money and clothes for the family. Elena's husband John drove her to the Mercedes Street apartment,

and on the way over she told him how destitute the Oswalds were. When they walked in, John Hall remembered, Oswald had just been to town to buy "this 50-cent magazine on Russia, which of course I thought, to myself, here they are destitute and he is spending 50 cents on a magazine, especially about Russia." Oswald seemed to him "a so-called egghead." At a later meeting Hall, who was a Baptist and owned his own dental lab, tried to convince Oswald that "our system was a tremendous enterprise, was the best." But to Hall's mind, this young man was "completely out in left field in politics" and "you just didn't have any idea at all that you were going to change him." Elena thought the same thing. Her attitude was that after seeing what Russia was like he should have learned his lesson.

Oswald resented the émigrés' help, never thanked anyone, and showed his contempt for these middle-class anti-Communists. Marina told the Commission, "Well, he thought that they were fools for having left Russia, they were all traitors." He said that they only liked money, and that everything is measured by money in this country.

There was only one exception to his general dislike of this group —George de Mohrenschildt, a petroleum engineeer from Dallas. Almost thirty years Oswald's senior, de Mohrenschildt had a flamboyant personality and a colorful past. Born in Russia in 1911, de Mohrenschildt had been an officer in the Polish Army and a roughneck in the Louisiana oilfields. In 1941 he had worked for a French intelligence agent collecting information on people involved in pro-German activity in the United States. Nicknamed "The Mad Russian," de Mohrenschildt was a nonconformist. It was said of him that he might show up at a formal dinner in a bathing suit or come to a church function and announce that he was an atheist. George, who had the reputation of being a "leftwing enthusiast" of some kind, was the one émigré who would listen to Oswald's political ideas and take him seriously. For this reason, Oswald looked up to him, and apparently was more open with him than he was with most people. The older man would be Oswald's confidant until de Mohrenschildt left Dallas in April 1963.

De Mohrenschildt told the Warren Commission, "I could understand his point of view, because that is what happens exactly in the whole world with dissatisfied people. If they are constructive, they study more and try to get good jobs and succeed. The [others] try to form a revolutionary party. And he was one of them." He described Oswald as "an idealistic Marxist" who "had read and created some sort of a theory, a Marxist theory for himself. . . . he was building up a doctrine in his head." He testified that when he asked him why he