The Secret Life of Lee Harvey Oswald

This month, it will have been 30 years, and myriad conspiracy theories, since President Kennedy's death in Dallas – and still no one knows for sure whether Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone assassin. But now Anthony Summers, author of The Kennedy Conspiracy, has unearthed startling new information. He has traced Oswald's KGB files and the women who knew him in Russia. And he has a major revelation about the role of the CIA in the murder mystery of the century

BAR IN AN OXFORD ALLEYWAY, November 22, 1963. Early evening Muzak, first orders lined up on the counter for familiar first-comers. I was an oddjobbing student, trying meanwhile to break into television. The break came at seven o'clock, when the telephone rang behind the bar. The editor of World in Action, a new programme then, was talking fast, on two lines at once, rustling up reporters and researchers for a flight to Dallas, Texas. He asked me to leave for Heathrow by taxi, in half an hour. It seemed a stupendous journalistic chance – until they rang back to say they had found someone with more experience. As the world's journalists raced to Texas, I went on pulling pints.

I remembered this in Moscow, early this year, as I trudged through dirty snow to the door of a former KGB colonel. I talked, then raced to another KGB man, hoping to get to him before the first could phone. Later, in Mexico, colleagues and I played the same game with a string of former CIA operatives. Not for the first time, I was back on the story that had eluded me in 1963.

Dallas evokes a numbing historical snapshot, a young President dying of gunshot wounds in his speeding limousine, an alleged assassin murdered in turn before he had been charged. November 22 marks the thirtieth anniversary of President Kennedy's murder. Thirty years is the dictionary definition of a generation's span, but the shots fired in Dallas reverberate for those born before and after 1963.

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The word "Dallas" has become the coda for the end of political promise, for Vietnam, more assassinations, racial stalemate, Watergate, and a string of shabby presidencies that leave the youth of America - and most of the world - without ideals or leadership.

Suitably enough, the event that triggered the convulsion remains an international byword for confusion and lack of trust in officialdom. The commission of enquiry, presided over by Chief Justice Earl Warren, told us that Kennedy, riding in his motorcade through Dallas, had been shot by Lee Harvey Oswald, a 24-year-old labourer, firing from a sixth-floor window of the Texas School Book Depository. Oswald, a left-wing crank, had supposedly acted entirely alone.

A growing number of doubters, some responsible scholars, some charlatans, soon threw doubt on the official conclusion. New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison, since regrettably lionized in Oliver Stone's JFK, was one of the charlatans. His failed 1967 prosecution of Clay Shaw, a local businessman and homosexual with alleged CIA connections, stalled serious investigation for a decade.

In 1978, however, a new official enquiry by a congressional committee working with a \$6 million budget, dismissed one conspiracy

theory: that the assassination had been masterminded by the KGB or Fidel Castro's intelligence service. It concluded, however, that there had "probably" been a plot involving Oswald and another, unidentified gunman. A conspiracy by whom? "We believed," former committee chairman Louis Stokes recalled this month, "that there was a role played by members of the Mafia and anti-Castro Cubans."

Congress passed on its conclusions, including some information never made public, to the Justice Department for further action. Ten

years later, Justice announced – to no one's surprise – that it saw no grounds for further investigation. The case remains a festering wound, constantly irritated by a succession of books and films, through which the features of the alleged killer have become not clearer but more obscure. Oswald has become strangely one-dimensional. Bringing him back into focus in the context of new information gathered this year offers fresh clues as to what really happened in Dallas that day.

LEE OSWALD WAS THE lonely product of a troubled childhood. His father, an insurance collector, died two months before he was born, in October 1939, in New Orleans. His mother Marguerite, whose relatives and friends included people on the fringes of the criminal underworld, had two elder sons to support.

When Lee was three, his mother sent him to a home for a year, so that she could go out to work. It was, reportedly, a traumatic experience. According to a fellow inmate, the

SHOOTING TO FAME Oswald's police mug shot, left; right, aged eight with cap gun, at school where he suffered from dyslexia; and Oswald in the Marines



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infant Lee more than once witnessed sex between one of the childminders and teenage girls. Returning home, Lee was subjected to years of inept parenting.

The young Oswald suffered from dyslexia and had trouble with spelling, which would stay with him into adulthood. In other respects, he was bright. At thirteen, he achieved an IQ of 118 on the Wechsler Intelligence Scale. Later, in the military, his was to prove one of the sharpest minds in his unit. Later still, just months before Dallas, one observer thought him "impressive, almost like a young lawyer".

In 1953, however, when he was in junior high school, Oswald ran into trouble. He was deemed to be out of control and spent several weeks in a juvenile detention centre. A social worker at the centre, Evelyn Strickman, noted that he "acknowledged fantasies about being powerful and sometimes hurting or killing people " He once allegedly threatened a relative with a pocketknife. And in 1955, when he was sixteen, he startled a friend by outlining a plan to steal a pistol from a New Orleans gun store. He produced a glass-cutting tool to make a hole in the plate-glass window - and a toy gun to wave at anyone who might catch them in the act. The madcap scheme never materialized.

In 1955, Oswald became a cadet in a New Orleans unit of the Civil Air Patrol. It was at CAP meetings, according to several fellow cadets, that he met a man whose name would one day loom large in assassination conspiracy theories - a flier called David Ferrie.

Ferrie, then a 37-year-old pilot for Eastern Airlines, was a brilliant but bizarre character. He boasted degrees, one bogus, in philosophy and psychology, and styled himself "Dr" in the telephone book. Ferrie was also a promiscuous homosexual, with a predilection for teenage boys.

The CAP was a happy hunting-ground for such a man. He took his young charges on out-of-hours flights in his personal plane, and there were reports of drunken orgies, of boys scampering around in the nude. He got away with such conduct until the early Sixties, when complaints from parents led to his arrest for a "crime against nature" with a fifteen-year-old and indecent behaviour with three others. 'Oswald certainly knew Ferrie in the CAP," former cadet Jerry Paradis told me. "But I know nothing about sexual contact between them."

This autumn, however, I discovered a startling dispatch among the hundreds of thousands of newly released CIA and FBI documents. "Headquarters asked the Mexico City Station to bear in mind," the dispatch reads, "that Lee Harvey Oswald was a homosexual." This bald, matter-of-fact statement sits alone and unexplained.

Ferrie habitually encouraged CAP cadets to join the armed forces. The record shows, too, that Ferrie had a penchant for forging identification documents. The under-age Oswald used a phony birth certificate when he tried to join up. One of Ferrie's associates, Jack Martin, would years later remember him having talked about a young friend who had been present while Ferrie had homosexual sex, and who later joined the Marine Corps.

In 1956, when Oswald finally succeeded in joining the Marines, he seemed to one fellow recruit to be "a naive and innocent boy ... a virgin"., Two fellow marines, Daniel Powers and David Christie, suspected he was homosexual. On a trip to Tijuana, on the Mexican border, he took his friends to a gay bar and appeared to have been there before. In Japan, he patronized a hang-out for transvestites. Soon, though, Oswald was having heterosexual sex. His friends cheered him on as he went with his first woman, a Japanese bar girl. He would later recall encounters with eight different women in Japan.

As a radar operator on a secret spy plane base - Oswald's main job in the Marines - he did well enough. However, he was court-martialled twice, once after injuring himself with an unauthorized pistol, and again after a punch-up with a sergeant in a bar. He also began enthusing about Marxism - and in late 1959 he left the Marines, boarded a freighter for Europe, and defected to the Soviet Union.

Oswald was to live in Russia for nearly three years, until the year before the assassination. It is a period of his life that, until the collapse of the Communist regime, remained something of a black hole in the assassination story. This year, however, I was able to conduct the first-

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ever interviews with Russians who met Oswald during his stay. For the first time, we now have details from Soviet sources of an apparent suicide attempt Oswald made just days after reaching Moscow. They confirm that, despairing over the government's initial refusal to let him stay in the country, he slashed his wrists in the bathroom of his hotel room. The doctors who patched him up later decided his action was a crafty, if risky, ploy. So did the KGB.

"We didn't think the American really wanted to kill himself," former KGB chairman Vladimir Semichastny recalled in an interview at his apartment on Moscow's Moloya Bronaya Street. "He was resorting to blackmail to force us to let him stay. He did get his political asyhum But we desided to see this

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hum. But we decided to send him far away from Moscow, where he was less of a potential embarrassment."

The KGB packed Oswald off to Minsk, to work in a radio factory, and put him under long-term surveillance. Vacheslav Nikonov, a Russian official who recently

reviewed the KGB files, says the surveillance produced no evidence against Oswald. The Russians were puzzled, however, to learn that their "Marxist" visitor showed no interest in socialist activities.

Oswald kept a journal, and it shows his political disillusion. "I don't like," he wrote in his dyslexic scrawl, "picture of Lenin which watchs frome its place of honour and phy. training at 11-11.10 each morning (compulsery) for all. (shades of HG Wells)". What Oswald did like was female company, and he scribbled a record of his conquests in the journal. There was an Enna, a Nell, an Eleanora, an Anita and a Galina. And an Ella, Ella German, a "silky, black-haired Jewish beauty" whom, as both admitted, he failed to get into bed.

Interviewed this year, German remembered Oswald as "relaxed and full of fun. We talked a lot. He often took me to the theatre and concerts. That was very nice, and I think it shows that he wasn't a very coarse person." Oswald started talking of marriage. The girl he did marry, however, he met at a trade union dance in Minsk.

This was Marina Prusakova, a nineteen-year-old pharmacist, who accepted his proposal just a month after meeting him, and married him two weeks after that. They were in one sense made for one another. Like Oswald, Marina had had a miserable childhood. Like him, she never knew her father, and she, too, had had an unhappy relationship with her mother. No sooner had her mother died, when Marina was fifteen, than her stepfather tried to have sex with her. Her friend Ellie Soboleva remembers her as "sensitive to any show of tenderness, and probably in consequence taken advantage of by men".

Marina quickly became pregnant, and in due course gave birth to the couple's first child, a daughter named June. Afterwards, however, she was repelled by her husband's lovemaking. She teased him about his shoulders, which she considered "weak" and "womanly". According to

Marina's biographer, Oswald came to fear he was "less than he should be as a man".

During a visit to Minsk from Moscow, the woman who had been Oswald's official guide when he arrived in Russia saw at once that the marriage was unhappy. "I quickly saw that he had changed and not for the better," says Rimma Shirokova. "He seemed disappointed, disillusioned."

According to Nikonov, hidden microphones in the Oswalds' apartment picked up the sounds of bitter quarrelling, even physical fights. The last sounds the mikes recorded, as the couple departed for the United States in 1962, was Marina badmouthing Oswald for being "not even capable of holding the baby".

At the Oswalds' new home, near Dallas, the relationship continued to deteriorate. Both husband and wife gave each other cause to be

jealous, Marina in a way some see as highly relevant to the assassination. In January 1963, having written to an old flame in Russia, she failed to put enough stamps on the envelope. The letter was returned and Oswald opened it. "Anatoly, dear," his wife had written, "my husband does not love me ... I fear I shall never be happy with him. How I wish you and I could be together again ... I kiss you as we kissed before ... I remember the snow, the frost, the opera building - and your kisses. Isn't it funny how we never even felt the cold?"

Anatoly Shpanko was a medical student with whom she had once been "deliriously" in love. Now, in the United States, she saw a resemblance between him and President Kennedy. Marina even bought a photograph of Kennedy and was forever asking her husband for information about him. Oswald obliged and - Marina said in an interview this year - always spoke of the President in glowing terms. According to her, Oswald never knew that Kennedy reminded her of a former boyfriend.

In March, 1963, Oswald purchased a handgun and a rifle. One April night in Dallas, someone with a rifle fired through the window of General Edwin Walker, a prominent racist and extreme right-winger. The shot missed and the incident remained a mystery until after President Kennedy's assassination several months later. Then, strong evidence would emerge - backed by the testimony of Marina - that Oswald had taken part in the shooting. The Warren Commission saw the episode as an indication that Oswald was a potential killer. It ignored, however, testimony that two men had fled the scene.

Was Oswald involved with, or manipulated by, someone else in the months before the assassination? A skein of evidence suggests he was, and prompts a hard new look at David Ferrie, the homosexual Oswald had met back in 1955 with the Civil Air Patrol.

Oswald and his wife spent from May until late September 1963 in New Orleans. There, to all outside appearances, he displayed the once led him to defect. Now, at the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis,

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he began acting like a pro-Castro activist. Oswald joined the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, went out in the streets to distribute its propaganda leaflets and - after a confrontation with anti-Castro Cuban exiles - was arrested. A troubling detail, however, has led researchers to wonder whether that episode was staged - part of some obscure political game. For Oswald proudly reported it to the Fair Play for Cuba Committee headquarters a week before it occurred.

There was something else. One of Oswald's pro-Castro pamphlets, seized after his arrest, bore the address "544 Camp Street", a New Orleans location frequented not by Communist sympathizers but by anti-Castro exiles. It was home to a detective agency run by one of the anti-Castros' most active supporters, a former senior FBI agent named Guy Banister. His secretary, Delphine Roberts, has said that - in direct contradiction of his own extreme right-wing views - Banister not only welcomed Oswald to his office. He encouraged him to use a room at Camp Street for his pro-Castro activity.

Why? According to Roberts, Oswald was one of Banister's "agents" - the young men he used in operations designed to penetrate left-wing organizations and sabotage their plans. "I presumed then, and now am certain," she told me, "that the reason for Oswald being there was that he was required to act undercover." If Roberts is right, it is fair to speculate that the supposedly "Marxist" Oswald had by now been coerced into becoming an agent provocateur, with the mission of posing as a leftist to smear and penetrate the genuine pro-Castro movement. American Intelligence was operating such schemes at the time.

One of Banister's closest associates was David Ferrie. He too was a rabid anti-Communist, who thought even Roosevelt and Truman had posed a left-wing threat to the nation. Ferrie had recruited some of his CAP cadets into a group he called the Omnipotents, warriors in training to repel any foreign attack on the United States. In the struggle against Fidel Castro, he found a real-life role as a soldier of the underground. Ferrie reportedly flew to Cuba dozens of times before the Bay of Pigs invasion, sometimes on bombing missions, sometimes to extract anti-Castro resistance fighters. In 1963, he was still running guns and plotting raids with the leading anti-Castro exiles.

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Several sources have placed Ferrie at Camp Street in 1963, and it is there that his path may have crossed with Oswald's again. Guy Banister's secretary says Oswald accompanied Ferrie on at least one visit to an anti-Castro training camp outside New Orleans, "to train with rifles". Credible witnesses, including the registrar of voters and the town marshal, testified to having seen them together in Clinton, a small town 90 miles from New Orleans.

Ferrie, with his dubious degrees and pretensions to medical expertise, dabbled in drugs and hypnosis. According to Congress' Assassinations Committee, he frequently hypnotized young male associates. In 1963 Oswald, too, seems to have taken an interest in drugs. Edward Gillin, then a New Orleans Assistant District Attorney, was visited that summer by a young man who identified himself as Oswald. "He asked," Gillin recalled, "whether or not a particular drug was legal or illegal. He was looking for a drug that would open his vision - you know, mind expansion. Oswald said he was reading a book ... Aldous Huxley's Brave New World." Oswald's library records show that he did indeed check out Brave New World, and another book by Huxley, the literary guru of psychedelia.

Marina Oswald has said that her husband talked and sobbed in his sleep that summer. He had always been obsessive about cleanliness. Now he was dirty and unshaven almost all the time.

> David Ferrie made trips to Central America in 1963, and his telephone records reflected calls to Mexico. Dean Andrews, 2 New Orleans attorney who advised Oswald on his Marines' discharge status, recalled meeting him in the company of one or more "Mexicanos". Two other New Orleans

witnesses said they saw him with a Mexican. And a Dallas witness said Oswald had been accompanied by a Mexican when he visited her that autumn, on his way to Mexico City, a five-day trip that has long puzzled investigators.

THE JOURNEY TO Mexico was, ostensibly, just another phase in the odyssey of Oswald the left-wing loner. A mass of evidence, some from routine CIA surveillance of the Soviet and Cuban diplomatic missions, indicates he was obtaining entry visas for Cuba and the Soviet Union.

For many years, however, independent researchers have been troubled by clues suggesting that something about the Mexico visit has been covered up. Now, with the release this August of a "Top Secret" congressional report, those suspicions have proven correct. It reveals that the CIA, on whom the Warren Commission relied for most of its Mexico information, suppressed a key passage in the statement of the clerk who handled Oswald at the Cuban consulate. She described her visitor as having been "blond" and "short", a description that does not fit Oswald. Another witness, interviewed by me, says much the same.

The report quotes several former CIA officers - including the 1963 Station Chief, Winston Scott - as saying that the Agency's hidden cameras did take photographs of Oswald on his way in or out of the Communist consulates. Why, then, has the CIA never produced any photographs, not even for the Warren Commission? And why have its spokesmen claimed that the tapes of Oswald's conversations with Communist officials - the harvest of wiretaps and hidden microphones - were routinely destroyed before the assassination? In direct contradiction of the CIA claim, former Warren > PASE 188

Marina teased her husband about his 'weak' and 'womanly' body. Oswald feared same leftist sympathies that had he was 'less than a man'

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Commission counsel William Coleman and David Slawson told me that they heard the tapes – courtesy of the Agency – many months after the President's murder. If so, where are the tapes now?

Would access to the surveillance material show that, at some stage at least, someone was impersonating Oswald? Or could it be that Oswald was not alone when he visited the consulates, that the surveillance pictures cannot be released without showing another man in the frame? Until the CIA comes clean, the questions are not going to go away.

What is not in doubt is that, in the final weeks before the assassination, Oswald returned to Texas. He lived alone in a cheap rented room, working by day order-filling at the Texas School Book Depository. At weekends, he visited his wife, living now with a woman friend while awaiting the birth of her second child. He was delighted when the new baby arrived, and seemed to be trying to repair the marriage.

On the eve of the assassination, November 21, 1963, Oswald asked Marina to come and live with him again. "I'm going to find an apartment," he said, "tomorrow..." Three times he asked and three times Marina refused. Early the next morning, he got up and went out – to his work at the Depository, to arrest that afternoon, to his own death at the hands of Jack Ruby, and to historical ignominy as the man suspected of having murdered the President.

Behind him, in a cup on the bureau, the alleged assassin left his wedding ring. It is a sequence of events that leads some to believe it was despair over his ruined love life that drove Oswald off the rails, and led him to go out and shoot the President. Some think it was jealousy over Anatoly, his wife's former suitor, that put him over the edge. Perhaps, after all, Oswald realized that Marina saw a physical resemblance between her former suitor and JFK, that – like millions of other women, apparently – she indulged a fantasy of having the President as her lover. Did the leader of the western world die because a lovelorn husband went berserk?

I do not think so. After years of study, I still force myself to keep an open mind. The physical evidence of Oswald's guilt has never been strong. Certainly, his gun was found at the Texas School Book Depository, but the only print on it identifiable as Oswald's, the only readable print at all, was a palm-print on an internal part of the gun – accessible only when the weapon was dismantled.

I am impressed, too, by testimony showing Oswald may have been on the lower floor of the Book Depository when the President went by, not upstairs in the infamous sixth-floor window at all. It is an axiom of criminology that every crime not committed by a lunatic – and no one has claimed seriously that Oswald was insane – can be linked to a motive. Yet, according to a string of witnesses, Oswald admired the President. His widow was insistent about that when I interviewed her this year. And, far from seeking fame as a presidential assassin, Oswald repeatedly denied he had done the deed. Indeed, in a shouted comment picked up by a television camera in the throng at the police station, he insisted he was "just a patyy", a fall guy.

Perhaps he was. Just hours before Oswald himself was murdered, the authorities in New Orleans received a tip-off that he had links to David Ferrie, his former CAP instructor. Ferrie denied it. We now know, though, that Ferrie had rushed to Oswald's former lodgings in New Orleans within hours of the assassination to ask about a library card. According to one report, Oswald had been "carrying a library card with Ferrie's name on it" when arrested in Dallas.

Later, Ferrie scurried off to see at least one of his former CAP cadets, to ask whether Oswald's face appeared in old photographs of Ferrie's CAP unit. If the report linking Oswald to Ferrie was unfounded, how come Ferrie's apparent panic?

Ferrie was to be found dead in 1967, in circumstances some regard as suspicious, during the botched assassination enquiry led by Jim Garrison. The night he died, one of Ferrie's close associates in the anti-Castro underground, the prominent Cuban exile – and bisexual – Eladio del Valle, was hacked to death and shot in the heart for good measure. Ferrie's former roommate, a homosexual activist called Raymond Broshears, claimed that Ferrie told him some "very personal things" about Oswald. He said Ferrie "certainly knew Oswald when he was chicken [homosexual jargon for a teenage boy]. And knew him later." In a 1968 interview with official investigators, he said Oswald had been "a bisexual who had had relations with Ferrie."

"David told me," said Broshears, "that Lee Harvey Oswald did not kill the President. He was very adamant about it, and I believed him." According to Broshears, Ferrie said there had been a conspiracy, that the hit team in Dallas had included two Cuban exiles, and that money for the operation had been provided by Carlos Marcello, the New Orleans Mafia boss. Ferrie's role, he claimed, had been as a stand-by getaway pilot – never used. Broshears was a controversial witness who, like Ferrie, espoused bizarre religious beliefs, and himself once allegedly threatened the life of President Johnson. He proved untraceable this year, and there is probably no way now to check his story.

It is a fact that David Ferrie loathed President Kennedy. Like so many in the anti-Castro movement, Ferrie felt Kennedy had betrayed the exile cause. He had been heard to say: "The President ought to be shot," and some believe he meant it. Another anti-Castro activist, Gerry Hemming, claimed this autumn that Ferrie's associate Guy Banister "took us aside and suggested that a considerable sum of money could be had if we did a direct hit on both Castro and JFK."

The most troubling fact of all about Ferrie is that, with Banister, he was working in 1963 as an "investigator" for Carlos Marcello, one of 'b' the most powerful Mafia bosses in the United States. Marcello, who supported the Cuban exiles and was furious about the Kennedy crackdown on organized crime, was regarded by Congress' Assassinations Committee as a key suspect. A year before Dallas, raging about the Kennedys behind closed doors, Marcello had spoken of murdering the President, and of taking out "insurance" to cover his tracks.

Was Oswald Carlos Marcello's chosen nut, manipulated into his role as fall-guy by David Ferrie? If so, where does that leave the CIA, which during the Kennedy administration used both the Cuban exiles and the Mafia in the secret war to topple Fidel Castro?

Only paranoids believe the CIA, as an agency, had anything to do with murdering the President. Yet, when Ferrie came under renewed suspicion before his death, CIA Director Richard Helms is said to have become seriously alarmed by the possible implications. It is likely, I have concluded, that US intelligence feared some of its undercover schemes had gone horrendously awry, that some of its protégés mây have plotted the death of the President. Seeing that massive potential embarrassment, senior officials ran for cover – and prayed that the dead Oswald would become history's lone assassin.

Of course, if you prefer the easy option, you can stay with the theory that Oswald killed President Kennedy because he was unhappy with his wife. Me, I'm stuck with the unresolved evidence that refuses to go away. I'm stuck with a remark by a man who should have been better briefed than anyone, Kennedy's successor President Johnson. He told his aide Marvin Watson, years after the assassination, that he felt "the CIA had something to do with this plot".

Nor can I forget something said by the Chief Justice of the United States after heading the official enquiry. Asked whether everything the enquiry learned would be made public, he replied: "Yes, there will come a time. But it might not be in your lifetime... there may be some things that would involve security. This would be preserved but not made public."

Thirty years on, with the Cold War over, we're still being treated like kids. The best estimate is that US Government agencies are still withholding between one and two million documents related to the assassination. That makes me angry. It should make you angry, too, even if you were not born when President Kennedy was killed.

Anthony Summers is author of The Kennedy Conspiracy (Warner) and of Official and Confidential, this year's best-selling biography of J Edgar Hoover. He has reported from Russia and Mexico for the TimeWatch programme on Lee Harvey Oswald, BBC2, November 21. Programme researcher Robbyn Swan Summers also contributed to this article.