

## When They Met, It Was In Tampa

# Lee, Oswald Got Together On Cuba Travel

By TONY DURR  
And SKIP JOHNSON  
Tribune Staff Writers  
(Fourth in a Series)

Vincent T. Lee was the acknowledged master of illegal travel to Cuba in the early 1960s and Lee Harvey Oswald desperately wanted to get there. It was only natural for the two to get together.

When they met, it was in Tampa.

**HOWEVER**, despite information that now shows former Tampa resident Lee had carried on a long series of letters with Oswald, that Oswald was in possession of a Fair Play for Cuba Committee membership card signed by Lee, and that Lee and Oswald had met at least once in Tampa, the FPCC leader adopted the manner of one who had never heard of Oswald after the accused assassin's arrest in Dallas.

Shortly after the authorities nabbed Oswald, news reports linked the accused assassin of President John F. Kennedy with the FPCC and recounted Oswald's arrest earlier that year in New Orleans for a street disturbance involving FPCC demonstrators.

Reporters flocked to the New York office of the FPCC to interview Lee, who said only that Oswald "might have been" a member of the FPCC, but that he could not have been an official in New Orleans because there was no chapter there.

ONLY ONE DAY before, in a

speech in Buffalo, N. Y., Lee had not used the phrase "might have been." He had categorically denied that Oswald had ever been an FPCC member.

He later would have to retreat even further on those statements when investigators uncovered the letters he had written to Oswald and the membership card that Oswald had received from Lee.

The relationship between Lee, national director of the FPCC, and Oswald, later to be named the assassin of Kennedy, apparently began several months before the slaying of the President.

**LEE HAD** already appeared before two congressional committees in 1963 that were investigating his own illegal trips to Cuba and his sponsorship of such trips for other U.S. nationals.

The FPCC leader had been completely uncooperative with those committees, and his denial of even the most basic information had prompted the U.S. Justice Department to initiate plans for his criminal prosecution.

Following the FPCC leader's non-testimony before the Senate and House investigating committees, he received a letter from Lee Harvey Oswald.

Oswald, who then was in New Orleans, wanted information on joining the FPCC. His first two letters to the FPCC were addressed to "Dear Sirs," indicating he did not know Lee.

However, subsequent letters were to Lee personally.

By May 1963, the Lee-Oswald relationship had developed to the point where the FPCC leader advised Oswald to contact the Tampa chapter of FPCC for information and assistance on setting up a similar chapter in New Orleans.

**LEE HAD STARTED** the FPCC movement in Tampa in 1960, and had left his friend, Harold S. Wilson, in charge when he left for New York to be the group's national chairman. He

had kept in close contact with his Tampa chapter.

Just how many letters went back and forth between Lee and Oswald during the next few months remains controversial. Initial reports from the FBI following confiscation of Oswald's personal effects in November 1963 listed nine letters from Lee to Oswald.

However, when FBI agents went to the New York office of Lee at 799 Broadway to request copies of any communication Lee may have received from Oswald, the FPCC leader was inexplicably given 24 hours to search his files for any such letters.

**THE FBI AGENTS** had no search warrant for the letters.

When those agents returned the next day, Lee handed over six letters, plus some change of address cards he had received from Oswald.

Just before the close of 1963, the FBI launched an investigation based on the agency's belief that it was Lee who had engineered a trip that Oswald made to Mexico City only a few weeks before the assassination of Kennedy.

**AND, ALTHOUGH** no public record has ever been made of that investigation, it is important for two reasons.

First, it shows that the FBI believed in a relationship between Lee and Oswald.

Second, the Dallas-to-Mexico City trip was the route used by Lee and others as the first leg of their illegal journeys to Fidel Castro's Cuba.

**SEVERAL STRANGE** incidents occurred during the period Oswald was supposed to have been in Mexico City, but the most mysterious concerned his alleged visits to the Cuban and Soviet consulate offices there.

The United States kept agents in Mexico City to monitor the comings and goings of persons visiting these offices. Part of their duties were to make photographs of persons entering and leaving those buildings.

When, in 1964, the Warren Commission was conducting its work on the Kennedy assassination and subsequent investigation, they were supplied with the photograph of Oswald in Mexico City. There was one problem: The man in the picture bore no resemblance to Lee Harvey Oswald.

**THE PHOTOGRAPH** incident was labeled a "clerical error," but no fur-

ther photographs of Oswald in Mexico City were forthcoming.

Although no one in the CIA or FBI contacted by The Tribune registered any concern over this incident, several private investigators in New York who have spent years delving into the Kennedy assassination are convinced that Oswald's trip to Mexico City was only a stopover on his way to Cuba.

One of these privately financed Kennedy investigators, Jones Harris, said, "Others had made the same trip by the same route, including Gilberto Lopez and Vincent Lee. Why shouldn't their friend (Oswald) do the same."

(Lopez was the "Cuban-American" referred to in the recently released Senate intelligence committee report as being an "unpursued lead" in the Kennedy assassination investigation. It was this man who took a mysterious trip into Mexico on the day following the Kennedy assassination and from there flew to Cuba as the only passenger on a commercial flight.)

**HOWEVER SPECULATIVE** the assertion may be that Oswald may have been in Cuba less than a month

before Kennedy was killed, the meeting in Tampa between Vincent T. Lee and Lee Harvey Oswald and others was verified by Lee himself, said Joe Burton, a Tampa man formerly associated with the FBI.

It was here in mid-1963 that Oswald received his instructions on carrying out Fair Play for Cuba Committee activities in New Orleans and also received his membership card from Lee, the FPCC national director, said Burton, whose comments were backed up by an FBI agent formerly stationed in Florida.

Although there is strong suspicion by some investigators that Oswald was back in Tampa on Nov. 17, 1963, the day before Kennedy's trip here and five days before his death in Dallas, it has never been confirmed at any source higher than paid informants of the FBI.

**HOWEVER,** The Tribune has learned that a meeting did take place on that date here between Vincent T. Lee, Gilberto Lopez and at least two other persons.

So, despite having met personally at least once with Oswald in Tampa, despite numerous letters to Oswald and despite the FBI's belief that he arranged Oswald's mysterious trip to

Mexico City, Lee was virtually left alone by investigators.

The only other contact made with Lee concerning the assassination investigation came on April 17, 1964, when Warren Commission representatives took his testimony in New York.

By that time the Fair Play for Cuba Committee had disbanded, citing

bad publicity generated by Oswald's ties to the FPCC as the reason for its demise.

**ONE OF THE** first series of questions posed to Lee by commission counsel J. Lee Rankin was:

Rankin: Do you have any official connection with the Fair Play For Cuba Committee?

Lee: The Fair Play for Cuba Committee is no longer a functioning organization.

"Rankin: Did you at one time have such a connection?

Lee: Yes. I did.

Mr. Rankin: During what period?

Lee: From the year of 1963 — yes, last year.

**BUT LEE** did not begin his association with the FPCC in 1963. He was the founding father of the organization in Tampa in 1960 and was its most vocal exponent here until 1962, when he dropped out of sight for several months.

It was in 1963 that Lee emerged in New York City as the national director of the FPCC, but had been with the organization for at least 2½ years before.

The rest of Lee's testimony to the Warren Commission was centered on the letters from Oswald that he had surrendered to the FBI agents.

He told the Warren Commission that he did not remember any of the letters because he had had to answer so many in his work.

**HE ALSO** denied he ever knew Oswald.



**Lee Harvey Oswald Shown In Dallas Jail After Shooting  
...was in Tampa one day before President Kennedy's visit**

At the close of Rankin's questioning, Lee was asked if he had any other information that may be helpful to the Warren Commission.

"No," he answered.

It was the last time Vincent T. Lee would be called for testimony.

— NEXT: Where is Vincent T. Lee? —

---