

Agent Oswald

Statement of Kerry Wendell Thornley Dated September 28, 1967
Regarding His Warren Commission Deposition

1. My name is Kerry Wendell Thornley. I testified before Mr. Jenner, on the staff of the Warren Commission. My published testimony appears in Volume Eleven of the Warren Commission's 26 volumes. After the conclusion of my deposition before Mr. Jenner, a copy of the manuscript of my book, "The Idle Warriors", was being photoduplicated for the records of the Commission, and the material that I gave them to copy was not going to be available for a short while. I was invited by Mr. Jenner, in the meantime, to have lunch with him in the Supreme Court cafeteria.

2. On reaching the cafeteria, we stood in line and got our food. Having bought our food, and having put our trays down at a table, Mr. Jenner said, "Just a minute, I'd like to introduce you to some people over here." He took me over to another table and introduced me to a group of men, four or five of them as I recall. One of them was Mr. Tom Wicker of the New York Times. I remember Mr. Wicker asking Mr. Jenner when the Report would be released and expressing jocular skepticism at Mr. Jenner's answer, which was to the effect of "June", or "July", or "next month". I don't recall which of these it was. At some time during the lunch hour, I also was introduced to Mrs. Jenner, whom we saw while at the cafeteria. Mr. Jenner and I sat alone together. I remember that Mr. Jenner mentioned that Mrs. Jenner had written a novel based upon a relative of theirs, one who lived near my home town of Whittier, California, and who I believe was

geologist.

3. During the meal, I took advantage of the opportunity to ask Mr. Jenner some questions about old Marine Corps buddies in my unit, MACS 9. I asked him if he had spoken to Lawson. He said yes. He mentioned also that he had spoken to Powers, and to Delgado.

4. One of the things I asked him was: "Who the hell was it that used to speak Russian in the ranks with Oswald in the mornings, at morning muster?" This subject had been discussed previously that morning while I was under oath, testifying before Mr. Jenner. It had also been discussed when I was interviewed by two Secret Service agents, shortly after the assassination.

5. Here, as briefly as possible, is some of the detailed background relevant to understanding why I asked Mr. Jenner this question at lunch that day, with the emphasis on the word "was". On Saturday night, November 23, 1963, the day after the assassination of President Kennedy, I was waiting tables at Arnaud's (a well-known New Orleans restaurant in the French Quarter). The head waiter came up to me, and told me that there were two men who wanted to see me. The two men were from the United States Secret Service. One of them was named Mr. Rice. I do not remember the name of the other man. They wanted to question me, and I recollect that it was Mr. Rice who did the questioning. (This took place near midnight of the 23rd, the midnight between the 23rd and the 24th of November, 1963.) By this time, one day after the assassination, it was common knowledge among many acquaintances of mine in the French Quarter that I had known Lee Oswald while I was in the Marine Corps. I was, therefore, not surprised that the authorities involved might want to eventually speak to me although I was somewhat surprised at the rapidity with which they had come to see me.

5a. During the course of the questioning by these two Secret Service agents, there were two lines of inquiry that were pursued more than once. One was: "Do you own a gun?" (I answered "No". I was then asked: "Are you sure?" And I answered, "Yes".)

6b. The other question asked me more than once by the two Secret Service agents at this time was: "Do you recall having heard the name Alex J. Hidell?"

7. During my deposition for the Warren Commission, Mr. Jenner also had asked me: "Did you hear of anybody in the Marine Corps, whose last name was Hidell?" (See page 111 of Volume XI)

8. When the Secret Service agents asked me the question, near midnight of November 23rd, I had the recollection of Oswald speaking Russian with some other Marine, in the mornings, at morning muster. (Muster is a roll call.) For some reason, I made a mental association between the name "Hidell" and this person with whom Oswald would speak Russian. I told this to the two Secret Service agents at that time, although not in a tone of absolute certainty.

9a. These Russian-speaking incidents involving Oswald and this other Marine at morning muster again came to mind when, during my deposition, Mr. Jenner inquired about any close acquaintances Oswald may have had while in the Marines, about which I might know.

My published testimony reads as follows:

Mr. Jenner. I take it that Oswald had no close personal friends at least that you observed?

Mr. Thornley. That is correct. And the name of his closest friends I do not know. I do

remember he had a close acquaintance that he seemed to get along with pretty well.

Mr. Jenner. In the unit?

Mr. Thornley. Yes; but I don't recall this man's name. If it was mentioned to me, I probably could...

(Volume XI, page 111; emphasis added)

9b. At this point, Mr. Jenner then suggested the name of another individual as possibly the one I had in mind, but I rejected this possibility. (This is discussed in detail in section number 11 of this statement.)

9c. Immediately following that, the published record reads as follows:

Mr. Thornley. ***There was somebody else, and these are my associations, but who it was who used to talk Russian in the ranks with Oswald in the morning I don't know, but that is who it was.

Mr. Jenner. Is this particular man you now mentioned the man who occasionally talked Russian with Oswald in the ranks, is he the man who you had in mind?

Mr. Thornley. Yes.

Mr. Jenner. As having been a friend of Oswald's?

Mr. Thornley. Yes; in that in the same respect that I was a friend of Oswald's. Once, again, the exact terminology I would use would be close acquaintance.

(Volume XI, page 111; emphasis added)

9d. The published record shows that there then follow five exchanges between myself and Mr. Jenner. Mr. Jenner then asked me the question about the name "Hidell" (previously quoted in Section 7 of this statement). The record reads as follows:

Mr. Jenner. Did you hear of anybody in the Marine Corps, whose last name was Hidell?

Mr. Thornley. At the time this name was mentioned to me that was---that person, whoever it was that Oswald used to speak to in the ranks in the morning came to my mind. But I can't say that that was the name, and I am---of course, now, I am very leery that that---very uncertain as to ever having heard the name Hidell, and I doubt it very much.

(Volume XI, page 111 (bottom) and page 112 (top))

9e. In the aforementioned quote, when I told Mr. Jenner, "At the time this name was mentioned to me...", I had reference to my interview with the Secret Service near midnight of November 23, 1963, and the incident previously described in Section 8 of this statement.

10. As time passed, (from the time I was interviewed by the Secret Service near midnight of the 23rd, until the time I testified before Mr. Jenner), I was reading in the papers that "Hidell" was an alias used by Oswald on various occasions. The effect of this information on me was that I came to doubt very seriously that I had ever known anyone in the Marine Corps named "Hidell". Specifically, I came to dismiss my own initial association between this name and the man with whom Oswald spoke Russian in the Marine Corps, at morning muster. I did, however, retain the recollection of someone speaking to Oswald in Russian at those times, and it seemed to me that his name started with an "HR". Perhaps, I came to think, I was somehow making a false connection in my memory between the name Hidell and the man with whom Oswald used

to speak Russian in the ranks in the morning at muster. That is why I told Mr. Jenner: "But I can't say that that was the name, and I am---of course, now, I am very leery that that---very uncertain as to ever having heard the name Hidell, and I doubt it very much."

11a. It should also be noted that, in searching my memory for recollections at the Secret Service interview, I had told the two agents that someone who I thought might know Oswald was Charles Weir. Shortly thereafter, and well before giving my testimony to Mr. Jenner, I recollected that Weir was in an entirely different Marine Corps outfit.

In any event, at no time did I confuse Weir with the person that spoke Russian with Oswald in the ranks at morning muster.

11b. Weir's name appears in my deposition on page 111 of Volume XI when, during the course of the discussion, Mr. Jenner suggested (apparently on the basis of information he had concerning my interviews with the FBI or Secret Service) that this was possibly the name for which I was searching my memory. It was this to which I referred in Section 9b of this statement. (Mr. Jenner, incidentally, said "Weis", but the record shows that I corrected him to "Weir".)

11c. I clearly indicated that this was not the man for whose name I was groping. The published record shows that I said, in part:

"Weir, but that was not the man...At this time perhaps, also, I was thinking of a possibility it might have been Weir and since then I have remembered definitely who Weir was...I don't remember whether his first name was Charles but I remember who he was."

(page 111, Volume XI; emphasis added)

11d. In the previous quote, when I said, "At this time perhaps...", I had reference to my interview with the Secret Service near midnight of the 23rd, and the incident previously described in Section 8

of this statement.

12. Returning now to my lunch with Jenner at the Supreme Court cafeteria, I had (as previously noted in Section 4 of this statement) asked Mr. Jenner:

"Who the hell was it that used to speak Russian in the ranks with Oswald in the mornings, at morning muster?"

13. Mr. Jenner then replied, with a perfectly straight face: "It was Hidell". His tone, in effect, was: "You were right all along, it was Hidell"; but his words were simply "It was Hidell", stated simply, as a fact.

My reaction was one of surprise, naturally, because by this time I had come to accept the fact that "Hidell" was simply the name Oswald had used on various occasions, and had no other significance, specifically with regard to the man who conversed in Russian with Oswald in the ranks at morning muster. I was confused and bewildered, and that was probably obvious to Mr. Jenner.

Mr. Jenner then smiled, and, as if to let me in on a joke he had just played on me, said: "No, his name was really Heindel". In a tone of voice that indicated to me that he (Mr. Jenner) had momentarily been pulling my leg by letting me think that I had been right all along and that Hidell was the name of that other Marine I had in mind who spoke Russian with Oswald.

14. Upon hearing the name "Heindel" (which, when pronounced as I recollected it at that time, is pronounced so that the first syllable rhymes with "spin" rather than "sping") I realized that this was the name that I had been searching my memory for in connection with the man who spoke Russian with Oswald in the ranks at morning muster.

15. This is the type of scene that I vividly recollect, at El Toro Marine Base. The men would "fall in" in the morning at muster.

master is a roll call. As I recall, I am standing in ranks. From behind me, I hear Oswald and this fellow, Heindel, (who are standing near each other) speaking to each other in Russian. Oswald would say something in Russian. Heindel would reply, in Russian. Oswald would answer in Russian. The other would reply again, in Russian. After a few such exchanges, at a conversational pace, they would then both laugh. When they both laughed at the same time, the clear impression was that one of them had told a joke. To tell a joke in a foreign language takes some ability with that language so that, over a period of time during which I witnessed such incidents as this involving these two men, I received the impression that both had some fluency in Russian.

16. I should make it clear that I did not independently recollect the name Heindel. It was Mr. Jenner's mention of this name at lunch that day which caused me to immediately recollect that this was the name I had been groping for, and could not remember.

17. I next asked Mr. Jenner: "Oh, was his first name Alex J.?" Mr. Jenner said: "No, it was John Rene."

18. Although I do not remember the exact words, I am sure that I made it clear to Mr. Jenner that John Heindel was the man I had reference to in my previous testimony, and whose name I could not recollect while under oath. I think I said to Mr. Jenner: "Oh, Heindel, of course---that was the name?"

19. The next part of my conversation with Mr. Jenner was as follows. I said something to this effect: "Well, what's with this guy?", or, "What's the story on him?" Mr. Jenner replied: "Oh, I spoke to him. He's harmless." With that, we dropped the subject. It did, however, come up one more time during lunch.

20a. Mr. Jenner said that the people he had enjoyed talking to the most were the people in the Russian speaking colony in the Dallas/Fort Worth area, and Nelson Delgado, another Marine. I said, "Yeah, Delgado is an excitable type of guy." Mr. Jenner said "You bet he is", or something to that effect. Mr. Jenner was amused by Delgado's unwarranted excitability, and that is why he had enjoyed speaking with him.

20b. Mr. Jenner said: "Delgado thought that Heindel might have been a spy or an agent and that Oswald was passing information to him in Russian.

20c. This statement of Mr. Jenner indicated to me that Delgado, also, had apparently remembered that Heindel used to speak Russian with Oswald, and had told this to Mr. Jenner.

21a. I had absolutely no idea that "Hidell" was Heindel's nickname and did not know this until around Christmas of 1965. This is discussed in Section 22 of this statement. When Mr. Jenner, in response to my inquiry ("Who the hell was it...." etc.), had said: "It was Hidell", and then seeing my look of surprise and bewilderment added, "No, his name was really Heindel", I did not get the impression that these names were used by the same man. I had no idea at the time that I testified before Mr. Jenner or had lunch with him afterwards that "Hidell" was a nickname used by Heindel.

21b. I had always distinctly recollected the existence of these Russian speaking incidents between Oswald and this other Marine at morning muster, but could not recollect the name of the other man involved. When the name "Hidell" was mentioned by the Secret Service, near midnight of November 23rd, I originally associated this name with that individual. This, perhaps, was because it started

It is also possible that I might have known Heindel
"Hidell", but if so, I do not remember this now, nor did I
at the time I testified before Mr. Jenner, nor did I at the time
that I had lunch with him.

21a. To me, at the time that I testified before Mr. Jenner, the
following were two separate entities:

- 1) "Hidell", a name the newspapers said Oswald used as his alias;
- 2) The name of a Marine, which I could not recollect during
my deposition with Mr. Jenner, with whom Oswald spoke Russian
in the ranks in the morning at muster.

21b. I came to believe that my association of the name Hidell
with this other Marine involved in the Russian speaking incidents
with Oswald was purely on my part. I did not know otherwise until
I learned, about one and a half years later (See Section 22), that
Heindel used the nickname "Hidell".

21c. When Mr. Jenner supplied the name Heindel, he provided the
name of the second person in these incidents which I had always
clearly recollected. Despite the fact that Mr. Jenner first said,
"It was Hidell", before he said, "No, his name was really Heindel". I
did not gather from this conversation with Mr. Jenner that Hidell
was a nickname used by Heindel. I merely thought that Mr. Jenner
had simply told me the true answer the second time, after first
having lightly jested with me by pretending for a brief moment
that "Hidell"----the name I had come to believe was an incorrect
recollection----was, after all, the name of the other Marine with
whom Oswald spoke Russian.

22a. To my conscious knowledge, I learned for the first time
that "Hidell" was a nickname for Heindel around Christmas of 1965.

22b. At that time, an acquaintance of mine, David S. Lifton,

who owns a set of the 26 volumes of the Warren Commission, told me that Heindel says that he (Heindel) used this name "Hidell" as his nickname while in the Marines. I had related to David Lifton my conversation at lunch with Mr. Jenner the day that I testified.

22c. Lifton knew that Heindel was "Hidell", something which I did not know until that time. I know, ever since the time of my conversation with Mr. Jenner, that the name of the second party in the Russian speaking incidents was John Heindel.

22d. From our conversation, Lifton apparently learned for the first time that such incidents were described in my testimony before Mr. Jenner, and I learned for the first time that Heindel's nickname was "Hidell".

22e. This statement is divided into 23 numbered sections, some of which are divided into one or more lettered subsections.

22f. There are eleven typewritten pages in this statement.

22g. My initials appear in the lower right hand corner of each of the eleven pages. My initials also appear wherever I may have corrected the final typewritten copy of this document.

Kerry Wendell Thornley

STATE OF CALIFORNIA SS
COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

On September 28, 1967 before me, the undersigned,
personally appeared

KERRY WENDELL THORNLEY

known to me to be the person whose name is subscribed to the
within instrument and acknowledged that he executed the same.

Signature _____

Name (Typed or Printed)

Notary Public in and for said County and State