

Confidential

To Jim Garrison From Harold Weisberg 4/18/68

Kerry Thornley

Because your Thornley file seemed to be incomplete, after my return last month I began an independent search of the federal information. Together with what I recall, the accuracy of which I can<sup>x</sup> guarantee, it is interesting.

Also interesting is what is not in the files.

Thornley seems to prefer to claim that someone "fingered" him--now Barbara Reid, then Tony Shembroske (sic). Neither is true.

He seems to prefer a later date than the first federal interview with him. The private information I got in New Orleans is correct. He was interviewed by the Secret Service, two days before the FBI sought him out. Shembroski did not contact the FBI until 11 days after the assassination, 10 after the first federal interview.

If one is to take the Commission's letters at face value, it did not know where Thornley was on April 23, 1964 but did know that he was no longer at 1824 Dauphine. Under date of May 8, Hoover told the Commission his address.

I have copies of the reports and memoranda and will give them to you when I see you.

The manuscript of "The Idle Warriors" should be available. It is 250 pp. long and is allegedly complete. There is also a short novella, 37 pp. Xeroxing the first will cost \$50.00.

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Someone in Dallas knew where Thornley lived, for that Secret Service office phoned the one in New Orleans 7:30 p.m. 11/23/63, asking that he be interviewed because "Thornley had served in the Marine Corps with Oswald at El Torro (sic) California, and ~~that~~ he had been in Mexico recently."

I recall no reference to this Secret Service report in the deposition. Inquiry that night disclosed Thornley had been at that address about 2 weeks. "During the late evening" he was interviewed at Armand's by SAs Corréts and Rice. I understand this was about 11 p.m.

Thornley "understood" that Oswald had learned Russian "while stationed in Japan; S...felt at that time that Oswald was not a Communist"; that he liked Oswald.

He had written the novel and "had considered looking up Oswald in order to obtain information concerning his experience in Russia for the final chapter, but that he had not done so". Thus we have indication of the content of that final chapter.

Of his trip to Mexico, Thornley said he left New Orleans in May of 1963, going to Whittier, where he worked for a while "and returned to New Orleans by bus, via Mexico; that he was in Mexico for approximately six days—three days in Mexico City...knew nothing of about Oswald having been in Mexico."

This language is as indirect as the "return", unnecessarily so, as the FBI reports show. Whether the evasion has significance I do not know. In their second report, the one written after Thornley went to them, Regis Kennedy and Claude Schlager (11/27/63) quote him as saying that "on May 1, 1963, he took a six day trip into California and approximately July 25, 1963, he took a six day trip into Mexico...returned to New Orleans about August 1, 1963."

According to their report typed 11/25/63, FBI Agents Alderson and Farrell interviewed Thornley that date, also at Armand's. They do not give the time. Because the report was typed the same date as the interview, and because I understand Thornley worked nights, I suggest that this late-night typing might be indicative of greater than average <sup>INTEREST</sup> in Thornley.

This report quotes him thus: "He was of the opinion that Oswald took Russian lessons in Japan during the time he was stationed there with the Marine Corps."

There is an ambiguity in this paragraph. One possible interpretation is that Thornley was saying he was the Communist:

"Thornley stated that his association with OSWALD was suddenly terminated at the Marine base when one day he told Oswald that he was 'a Communist and that things would be different when the revolution came'. He stated that OSWALD made the statement, 'not you, too', and turned around and left. OSWALD never associated with him or talked to him after this incident." <sup>This leaves no question about OSWALD's reaction to being called a Communist.</sup>

This is a somewhat different version of the "et tu" incident than in the deposition, on several counts. I do not believe that anywhere else Thornley said this was the end of their relations.

In this report, Thornley is quoted as giving the same beginning and end-

ing dates for his trip but was not giving any for the Russian part. It says he entered Mexico via Tijuana, and left through Matamoros.

The next afternoon, 11/24/63, at 12:30 p.m., Thornley appeared at the FBI office "to offer his services in any way to determine the guilt or innocence of LEE HARVEY OSWALD". But here there is a different "flair":

"He advised that his association with OSWALD was terminated when he, THORNEY, was transferred overseas..."

Here also Thornley said that Oswald studied Russian in Japan and "it was his opinion that OSWALD was not a Communist while he was assigned to the El Toro Marine Base".

He gave "the news media" as his source of the information that Oswald "had returned to the United States disillusioned about Communism."

Thornley read papers I have never seen or heard quoted.

Although he says he was in New Orleans beginning August 1, 1963 he is quoted as saying that he "had no knowledge that OSWALD was living in New Orleans until he read the news reports after OSWALD was implicated in the murder of President KENNEDY".

He thus claims to have known nothing about Oswald's 8/9/63 arrest, quite naturally, the agents reflect no questioning along this line. After all, aside from having known him, Thornley had only written a novel about him.

Strangely, this sentence: "He stated that he had made no secret that he was not particularly disturbed over the death of President KENNEDY, although he does not approve of assassination nor does he approve of the subsequent murder of OSWALD". Rather an understatement, designed to raise the question before it might be raised for him. <sup>Sounds like the language used in letters to Oswald's mother</sup> <sup>also was told to have been in letters to Oswald's mother</sup> <sup>the FBI was investigating, allegedly.</sup>

In this spirit, Thornley volunteered that while in California he "adopted an extremely liberal point of view", went with a girl named Sylvia Barton, now married, name Unams (Yann), "who is now resident and studying in Moscow, Cuba". Then Thornley volunteered that she had "adopted the Communist philosophy".

Thornley then placed his present political position "somewhere between the Communist Left and the John Birch right".

In a sense Thornley didn't intend, Anthony Shachtel did "finger" him in reporting his December 1, 1963 conversation with Joan Kelly, "wife" of Henry Thornley. She "told him that OSWALD and THORNEY were very good friends, and that THORNEY had stated to her, 'If OSWALD hadn't killed President KENNEDY he would have done it himself.' She said that Thornley had a shotgun at home and that she did not think he would hesitate to use it".

What better reason can there be for the absence of any FBI observation

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with Jean Hack?

Or of them any others than possible from this concluding sentence alone:

"SHEMBROSKI stated that "THORNLEY sometimes caused trouble at the Bourbon House, a place Thornley frequented quite often".

As Wesley Liebeler put it, Albert Jenner was too busy running for the Presidency of the American Bar Association to do much work. It is he who deposed Thornley, a very polite affair in which none of this came up, except Oswald's politics, which suddenly became Communist.

The testimony is well known to you. Perhaps the exhibits are not. There are three, two of which are not printed. The first is a States-Item story of 11/27/63 (21H669), to which I shall return. The second is "The Idle Warriors", all 250 pages of it (and there has been no response to my request inquiry about its availability) and the third is the 37 pages of the novella.

Although staff memoranda are scarce and Jenner was so busy campaigning, he nonetheless thought it necessary to write two different notes to Melvin Eisenberg <sup>On the same day</sup> ten days later, differently captioned but on these exhibits. In one Oswald was "inspiration" for the central character, Johnny Shellburn, in the other it "depicted" Oswald.

The news story is interesting, probably important, and I believe the picture with it is significant. That picture shows Thornley with his hair parted on the LEFT, as I show it in the pictures I had Clancy paint backward. I would hope this picture is still available at the States-Item. For what it proves is that at the time of the assassination, Thornley's hairline was like Oswald's. With the other evidence he could have played the role of Oswald. I draw particular attention to it and to Phil Beatrix's statement to me that if everything else about Thornley was untidy, his hair was something to which he devoted special attention.

This story is also the beginning of the falsehood about Oswald having lost his security clearance and the garbage about him being "the outfit janitor", a hardly a description of one of the few members with the unusually high security clearance, as Thornley's testimony reveals he knew.

Here, too, is the beginning of the characterization of Oswald as a "loser", again something not supported by his Marine record.

Perhaps also we can lay to rest the story about the fantastic sum Thornley is said to have refused for the last chapter of his book;

"...in the light of recent events an agent is now seeking to sell the last few chapters as the basis for a television script".

Clint Belton told me he could do nothing with the book, and that he tried.

Nothing is less likely than that either Thornley or Belton would have rejected any offer, leave alone a very generous one. (According to Jenner's two-page memo, the manuscript was then almost two years old, sure sign its prospects were not bright.)

The shorter memo contains this assurance by Jenner:

"In his deposition, Thornley certified to the accuracy of the article and particularly the quotations".

Returning to the story, the very next quotation reads, "'I think Oswald became a Communist before he became a Marine, but I believe the Marines only made things worse for him.'"

Soon this: "He said he though communism was the best religion." This coming from the Thornley who just a few days earlier had been telling federal investigators exactly the opposite.

I can only wonder why Jenner wrote two memos when usually there were none. Therefore, I quote language about "The Idle Warriors" from the longer one not in the shorter one:

"Thornley testified that the evidence given by him on his deposition covered fully adequately and factually Thornley's contacts with and views concerning Oswald, and that, therefore, it appeared to him that there was nothing in the book that had not already been placed in the record in the course of his deposition insofar as concerned any issue involving Oswald being investigated by the Commission."(sic)

If nothing else flagged interest in this garbling, which is more than even Jenner usually came up with, the qualification "being investigated by the Commission" should, for we know that what it should have investigated it didn't.

If I may conjecture: is it possible that your source on the unlikely story that he turned down a very good NBC offer made up this story to direct you to the manuscript without being in the position of having deliberately told you what it might contain?

Strangely, for any body but this one, the manuscripts "did not come into our possession until the day of Mr. Thornley's ~~main~~ deposition was taken". Only because they didn't want it. The federal investigators knew about it. Therefore the Commission did. As late as May 15, when Rankin wrote Thornley, it could still have been requested/ in advance of the deposition. Thornley was in the same town, virtually, and the FBI and the Commission had messengers. Instead of asking for the manuscript in advance, so the lawyer could read it prior to taking the deposition, Rankin asked him to bring it with him!

I believe it is in one of <sup>I sent you</sup> (the transcripts of) his radio-TV appearances in the Tampa area that Thornley, knowing it to be entirely false, said federal attention was directed to him by Shambroski (FBI spelling). With the Secret Service lead coming from Dallas, do you suppose it is possible the source was Oswald, during his interrogation?

Note that although Thornley had been at 1324 Dauphine, the Dallas Secret Service had his correct address. Whatever the source, it would seem to have been one keeping tabs on Thornley.

We know that the federal reporting is notoriously inaccurate. Yet these would have to be errors against interest for the reports quoting Thornley as saying Oswald was not a Communist to be errors. What the federal investigators very much wanted is just this statement. Odd that as soon as he was away from them or their report, Thornley said exactly what they wanted.

Possibly Shambroski has been interviewed to learn whether the FBI quoted him accurately. After first seeing this attribution by Thornley I planned to look him up. I've not had time on my two most recent trips to New Orleans. If one of your people cannot do it, if his address can be <sup>checked</sup> for me, when next I'm there I can do it when I have a few free moments. If he has left the New Orleans area, he might be somewhere I may someday go.

If Jeanne Hack is still in San Francisco, I'd like the last address you have. If I do not get out there in the near future, I have friends who can interview her for me. If she is elsewhere, I'd like to know in case I go near. It is always possible the FBI or Shambroski misrepresented what she said. Yet it also is consistent with what we know.

Of all the people I have spoken to about Thornley, only one ever said he did not hate Kennedy. That is Barbara Reid. And even when she heard Clint Bolton answer my question, did Thornley hate Kennedy, in the affirmative, she persisted, in signs behind Bolton's back, that it wasn't so.

She could have faulty recollection, or she could have been protecting a friend. But is it also not possible that Thornley believed any search would reach her, and he deliberately told her the opposite of what he felt, so that she would repeat it?

Aside from friendship, he knew that any investigation would reach her, because it is with her that he left his files when he went to Washington. Your files have a letter from him on this that I got from her long ago.