



Lee Harvey Oswald

OSWALD - as only a Marine Buddy Could Know Him

by Kerry Thornley

In the Marines they called Lee Oswald a Subversive

NO clear picture of the first time I saw Lee Harvey Oswald remains in my memory. He did not make a lasting first impression on me, for in appearance he was practically nondescript.

I had transferred into his outfit, Marine Air Control Squadron Nine, Santa Ana, California, in either the late winter or early spring of 1959. It was here that I got to know Oswald.

When I think of Oswald's name in connection with those days, I hear it being shouted by an officer in a voice that seems worn thin by irritation.

And in my mind's eye I see a jarhead private with a swab in hand, slopping soapy water over the wooden plank porch of the operations hut.

The private has the bill of his

cap pulled down over his eyes, apparently so he will have to see as little of the unpleasant military world around him as possible.

With this picture, there is a vague feeling of sympathy that might find expression in the question: Why are they picking on that poor guy?

As time went on I came to gather other, more vivid impressions of Private Oswald — but that image of him as a poor, persecuted soul never entirely vanished. Oswald kept it fresh.

When he was ordered to do something, he would answer: "Yes, sir," in a tone of voice that showed clearly that he had expected to be ordered to do the job, but that he sure didn't have to like doing it.

And if, by chance, you didn't

see that Oswald was obviously being picked on he would mention it to you.

But as his words and tone made clear, Oswald was willing to be grimly amused by the whole thing.

I don't want to give the impression that Oswald's persecution complex was a central aspect of his personality at that time. It was not.

It was instead observed out of the corner of an eye while considering the whole man. In my unprofessional opinion he was not paranoid.

But as I told the Warren Commission, I did think there was in him a tendency toward paranoia that, in certain circumstances, might become more pronounced.

I'm certain that in his own eyes Oswald was the most important

ABOUT the AUTHOR

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John F. Kennedy

and a 'Born Loser'

man in our Marine unit. To him the mark of destiny was clearly visible on his forehead. The fact that some people were blind to it was to him an eternal source of aggravation.

It was far more comforting for him to know that there were those who would gladly kill him than it would have been for him to think he was just another faceless Marine in the ranks at morning muster.

For, deep within, he feared that he really was that faceless nobody — and the hostility of others, when directed at him alone, was his reassurance that he was, indeed a very unique somebody.

A somebody who could provoke anger, and perhaps a little fear, in those an unjust system had placed above him. This was the

image of himself he required and which he strove to maintain.

In contrast to Oswald's image of himself was his appearance. He was not much taller or much shorter than most other people. Nor was he much heavier or much leaner.

His hair was medium brown. His eyes were blue-grey. If anything he was a bit smaller than most men, a bit lighter in weight. That was all. But considering that he had such a poor foundation on which to build a striking appearance, Oswald did pretty well.

First, he set himself off by maintaining a tight and angry little smile at all times.

Then, he managed to look a little sloppier in his dress than any other Marine.

But beyond that there was nothing

striking about his appearance. For the most part he had to rely on his words to emphasize his individuality.

An observer who saw Oswald in the Marines might have concluded that he was a real object of persecution.

After all, he was most often involved in some menial job usually associated with disciplinary actions.

But Oswald brought this on himself. He went out of his way time after time to do whatever he could to displease those in authority.

There were other times, though, when Oswald had good reason to believe that "they" were after him and that he was being persecuted.

The most dramatic example

came before I arrived in MACS-9. A young lieutenant happened to notice in the mail room a newspaper, addressed to Oswald, which was in Russian and which had been mailed from the Soviet Union.

According to the story, the lieutenant grew very excited over his discovery and possibly made an open issue of Oswald's probable sympathy to the Communist cause, making him out to be some kind of "subversive."

Most of the troops, who by this time had learned to take Oswald with a grain of salt, were very much amused at the lieutenant's having pushed the panic button. Oswald, needless to say, wasn't so amused.

But apparently the lieutenant's warning of a "subversive" in the camp was ignored by his superiors — who perhaps had learned to take enthusiastic young lieutenants with a grain of salt.

So this was Marine Private Lee H. Oswald. The outfit's eighth ball. A born loser.

And what did Oswald — who was very bitter about his position — believe to be the reason for his eighth ball status?

Certainly not the real ones. Rather, Oswald chose the explanation which was most attractive to him.

He was "persecuted" because of his superior intelligence and because he was regarded as a "subversive."

It took a special kind of mind to evade the real facts for these fanciful ones.

As the Warren Report later said concerning this period in Oswald's life:

"He (Lee Harvey Oswald) used his Marxist and associated activities as excuses for his difficulties in getting along in the world, (difficulties) which were caused by different factors."

But Oswald at this time in his life, was far from despairing.

For one thing, his service in the Marine Corps was about to end.

And, beyond his coming day of discharge, a whole new world awaited him — a world that would somehow be different from what he'd known in the past.

Perhaps he would go to the Soviet Union and play an impor-



tant role in the building of a new humanity.

Perhaps he would go to Cuba and join Castro in the fight to free the rest of the Caribbean from the clutch of the imperialists.

A thousand opportunities awaited the man who bore the mark of destiny. He had only to choose among them.

While he marked time in the service, and dreamed of his future greatness, I had chances to observe him often.

My first really vivid memory of Oswald was a brief conversation we had one afternoon, when we were sitting around the base recreation area in the afternoon.

Lee was reading a note book, possibly studying Russian. Other troops were involved in a religious discussion.

Gradually, I lost interest in the book I was reading and joined the bull session on religion. When one

of the men asked my views, I said I was an atheist.

"So am I," said Oswald, glancing up from his note book. "I think the best religion is Communism."

"Yeah, Oswald's a Red," one of the other men said.

"No, I'm not a Communist. I just think they have the best system."

"Why?" I wanted to know.

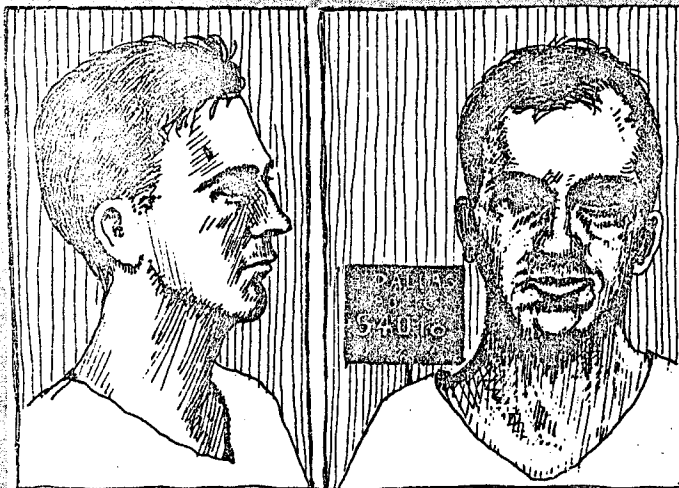
"Because they have a purpose. And the Communist way of life is more scientific than ours. You don't have to believe in a bunch of fairy tales to accept it."

So much for our first conversation. As I think back, he made it even more clear in our next few talks that he was a Marxist.

— Next month —
in *MEN'S DIGEST*:
Part Two
Oswald and Communism

MEN'S DIGEST

MARXISM *was* only religion



— Part 2 —

Lee Harvey Oswald once told me he found Marxism the only modern philosophy with a vital, relevant connection to life on this planet. Though some Marxists lose all feeling for people as individuals and worry only about the state, this did not happen to Oswald.

I have never known a person more motivated by what appeared to be a genuine concern for the human race than Lee Harvey Oswald. He was moved by what people usually call the purest humanitarian sentiments. Oswald was a philanthropist.

As I told you in my first article, I first got to know Lee Harvey Oswald in the late winter of

1959. I had been transferred into his outfit, Marine Air Control Squadron Nine in Santa Ana, California.

After we got to know each other better, we had quite a few long discussions.

Sometimes we both took the side of the atheists (which we both were) and argued with the more excitable Christians in the outfit.

At other times we practiced our arguments on each other. The result was that we developed a close kinship tempered with sharp differences.

We were never close friends. Oswald wasn't the type to form close friendships. Yet I came to know him pretty well because of our disagreements.

For example, I soon learned that his concern for other people

— as a mass, not as individuals — was so real that he couldn't concentrate on his own affairs.

Instead, he was busy solving mankind's problems.

Famines, plagues, revolutions and wars were more challenging to him than, say, whether his shoes were shined before tomorrow's inspection. So he always stood inspection with unshined shoes.

When he was punished for it, he said he was being picked on, but that it didn't matter.

He would be remembered and his tormentors would be forgotten, he said.

As I told the Warren Commission, "He looked upon the eyes of future people as some kind of tribunal, and he wanted to be on the winning side so that 10,000

Lee Harvey Oswald's



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years from now people would look in history books and say, 'Well, this man was ahead of his time.'

You see how his mind worked. What could this "man of the future" care if his shoes were smudged?

Marxism and his own place in the future world were not all that Oswald thought about.

He had some definite ideas about the U.S. and capitalism.

He thought that the capitalistic nations, and especially the U.S., were moving toward dictatorship.

And he definitely thought his country was playing the imperialist role in the Far East (I'll have more to say about this later because it had a lot to do with Lee's defecting to the Soviet Union after he got out of the Marines).

But if freedom was being choked off in his own country, Oswald believed it must exist somewhere.

And the only possible place for such freedom had to be on the other side of the Iron Curtain. If freedom wasn't there, it was nowhere.

So despite some hesitation, Lee meant it when he said his religion was Communism.

And, tragically, his religion was Communism not because it was superior, but because he couldn't find a better alternative in the United States.

As I said, Lee had great ideas. But to execute them he needed power.

And as a private in the Marine Corps, he didn't have too much of that.

Instead, as far back as he could remember Oswald was an object of ridicule. For instance, in 1952, when he moved with his mother to New York other children teased him about his Texas accent.

And in 1954, upon returning to the South, he found the children in his ninth grade class laughed at him because of his acquired northern accent.

After he joined the Marines in 1956, he got nicknamed "Ozzie Rabbit," after a cartoon character.

Like many men who are laughed at Lee took refuge in being a comedian. He made jokes at his own expense, perhaps in hopes he would beat others to the punch.

He joked a lot about Communism. Once when our section chief told us to gather around him and

listen, Lee exclaimed in a mock Russian accent, "Ah, a collective farm lecturer!"

Sometimes he referred to himself and others as "comrade." Even when his jokes had no direct relation to Communism, he still cracked them in his Russian accent.

In a group, Lee was loud and boisterous, joking or arguing the case for Communism, or both.

As you might expect, his loud-mouthed wit often got him in trouble when he tried in on a humorless officer.



And when he ended up swabbing, raking or picking up cigarette butts he would complain he was being picked on.

But he didn't mind it when the other troops returned his smart-alec quips. And he did not seem to mind such nicknames as "Comrade Oswaldovitch" as long as he was the center of attention in a large group.

However, he didn't go for teasing on a person-to-person basis.

I remember one time I answered one of his complaints about the Corps by saying:

"Well, Lee, when the revolution comes you can change all that."

He gave me a look of pained surprise and shouted, "Not you too, Thornley!" And he walked away without another word.

When he wasn't in a crowd, he wasn't so bad, especially in a serious discussion.

Then he didn't have a front to keep up and, without an audience, he would more often admit he was wrong on a point.

By observing Oswald alone and in a group, I was able to draw some more conclusions about this unhappy Marine.

I learned that in Oswald's own eyes he was two conflicting things. On one hand he was Oswald the Oppressed. On the other he was Oswald the Great, the future liberator of the human race.

Oswald the Great lived within the shell of Oswald the Oppressed.

All that Oswald the Oppressed had to do was throw off his chains, at which time Oswald the Great would step out of the shell and Oswald the Oppressed would be



destroyed forever.

I saw Oswald for the last time when I transferred to Japan, where Lee had already served.

But instead of forgetting about Lee, I became more aware of his thinking because of conditions that he and I both observed in Japan.

Oswald, the Warren Commission reported, once said, "The thing that turned me to Marxism was my service in Japan."

He said conditions over there convinced him something was wrong with the American system, and that Marxism was the probable answer.

It was in Japan, he said, that he made up his mind to go to Russia and see for himself how a revolutionary society operates.

I did not find conditions in Japan that bad. But Lee was very dis-

turbed about what he called U.S. imperialism.

This imperialism, Oswald said, was the conduct of U.S. servicemen in their dealing with the Japanese and other Far Eastern peoples.

Just before I shipped out, Lee and I had a heated discussion on the subject.

I challenged him to back up Soviet propaganda about U.S. imperialism.

At this time he became very excited. "If you ever go overseas, Thornley, you'll see what I mean," adding that our fellow Marines equalled any Nazi storm trooper for brutality, given the opportunity to get away with it.

His face became chalky as he discussed this and he appeared to be genuinely sickened, so I did not press him for details.

In the course of my tour I saw perhaps a half-dozen incidents of brutality on the part of Americans



toward natives of the Far East.

These ranged from the beating of taxi drivers to the dropping of a garbage-filled crate from a ship onto an old man's back.

I heard of a dozen more, usually in the form of boasts.

I call this sort of thing juvenile delinquency. Oswald called it U.S. imperialism.

— NEXT MONTH —

in MEN'S DIGEST

PART THREE

OSWALD INSANE??

MEN'S DIGEST



Lee Harvey Oswald

OSWALD - as only a Marine Buddy Could Know Him

by Kerry Thornley

PART THREE

OSWALD

Marine Private Lee Harvey Oswald and I parted company for the last time when I was transferred to Japan in 1959.

Lee had told me to be on the lookout in Japan for what he called "U.S. imperialism" — the behavior of American servicemen toward the natives of the Far East.

He was much more bitter about this problem than I was at first. I thought the serviceman's bad behavior, a result of boredom in the peacetime occupation forces, was more private delinquency than diabolic imperialism.

However, I became increasingly perturbed over G.I. behavior and the long-range effect it

was having on Japanese good will.

More and more I came to feel that the book I was planning should deal with this problem. And at last, stimulated by a chance comment, I hit upon the perfect title: "The Idle Warriors."

Yet I still lacked an essential ingredient for a good novel. I needed a central theme to tie in with all the minor themes I wanted to handle.

Then, one afternoon in the barracks, a friend who had also known Oswald handed me a copy of "Stars and Stripes" and said, "Look!"

There was an article about a Marine who after getting out of the service had gone to Russia

and requested Soviet citizenship. Of course it was Oswald.

It was not until then that I really believed his commitment to Communism was serious. I was surprised, and I wondered how he had come to his decision.

And then I sat down and began work on "The Idle Warriors." I had my theme.

The book was about the gradual moral breakdown of a Marine who finally defects to Russia. In earlier drafts, certain sections were based almost entirely on Oswald.

As a matter of fact, my main character's name originally was Lee — Lee Shellburn. Later I changed the first name to Johnny.

But the book was not intended

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INSANE?



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as a carbon copy of Oswald's life and philosophy, although it certainly reflects Lee's character in many places.

Working on the book took most of my off-duty hours for the rest of my duty tour, during which time I heard nothing more about Oswald.

After getting out of the Corps, I went to live in the New Orleans French Quarter and, working part-time, I finished a type-written draft of my novel.

After two publishers rejected it I decided the manuscript needed more work. So I put it away to "incubate" and turned to other things.

In June of 1962 I received a

newspaper clipping from my parents, who knew of my interest in Oswald. It was headed, "Ex-Marine Loses Love for Russia," and it told of Lee's decision to return to Texas with his Russian wife and baby.

Once again I was surprised. It seemed unlike Oswald to ever admit to the world that he was wrong.

At that time I thought seriously about going to see him before starting the rewrite. He could provide valuable information.

But after considering the time and expense involved, and that my outline for the new draft of the book had strayed away from the character of Oswald, I decided against it.

Then came the assassination. I was working as a bartender in New Orleans when the terrible news was flashed of JFK's death and Oswald's quick arrest.

From the moment I heard that it was Oswald who was in custody until after he was gunned down by Jack Ruby, I did not believe he could be guilty.

But as the facts came in I changed my mind. I decided there must have been more violence in him than I thought.

I didn't see Lee being killed on television and I'm glad I missed it.

It was enough of a shock to see a picture on every newspaper front page of a person I once knew being shot in the belly.

But on looking at a sequence of photos that included a snap of Lee just before Ruby rushed up with his pistol, I noticed that same defiant little grin, perhaps a sinister smile, that hid such a complexity of pain and confusion.

When the news of Oswald first began to appear, I wondered how any man could have changed so thoroughly in a few short years.



For instance, a national news magazine called him a psychopath, neurotic, schizoid, paranoid and a probable homosexual — all in the same column of print!

Suddenly I was reading that he had fought constantly with his fellow Marines and that in the service he displayed a conspicuous zest for physical violence.

I had observed no such traits when I knew him in the Marines.

Oswald had his psychological problems all right, but I doubt that he would have been found legally insane had he lived to face a jury.

I told the Warren Commission this, and the fact that a large part of its report was devoted to rooting out rumors is proof enough to me that a great deal of fabrication and exaggeration was put out and is still believed.

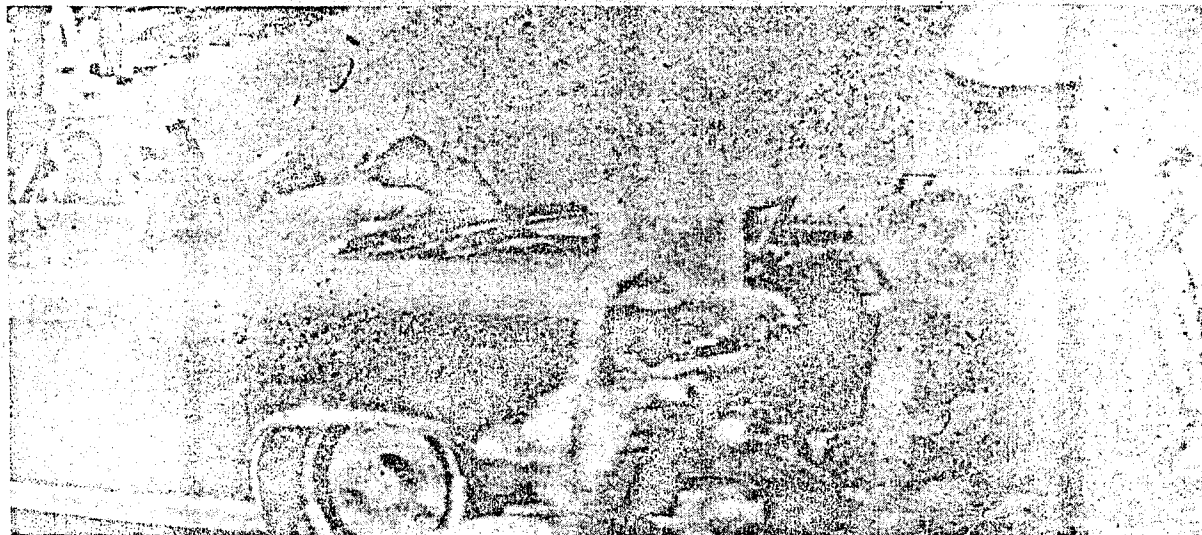
It might be argued that anyone capable of committing the crime for which Oswald stands accused would have to be insane.

If that's the case, then Oswald's type of insanity is so prevalent in the world today that it could be considered "normal."



*Next Month
in MEN'S DIGEST
the conclusion
OSWALD,
THE ASSASSIN*

How It Felt To The President of the



A tangle of sharp pain gathered inside Lee Harvey Oswald as he hid his clipboard in a pile of book cartons.

Moving swiftly and efficiently, Lee went to work on the boxes, at last positioning two heavy cartons near the window and bringing two smaller ones over to stack on top of one of them for a rifle rest.

Concentrating on his work, he tried to forget his hurt.

He didn't want to feel it. He didn't care to identify it — for it was an ugly mixture of fear and hostility and self pity.

And now, as he slid the brown paper bag from its hiding place,

he no longer had reason to heed the pain, the disappointment with . . . the hell with it!

No, face it, he told himself. He was disappointed with the Marines, with Russia, with Cuban red tape and with Marina — but mostly with Lee Harvey Oswald, 1653230.

His old Marine serial number! It came out automatically!

He sat down on one of the cartons he had placed by the window. Carefully, he removed the rifle parts from the bag.

Then, after putting the bag on the floor, he spread the smaller pieces out on the brown paper and

began assembling the weapon.

He noticed now that the sky had cleared. Just so there were no strong winds. That was important.

Now each thing he did was magnified a thousandfold. This was the real thing. This was history!

His hands were putting together the instrument that would once and for all blast down the barrier between himself and the world in general, the barrier between him and happiness.

At last he was throwing himself into the struggle! And this time he was resolved to succeed.

Yes, himself, he thought.

KILL



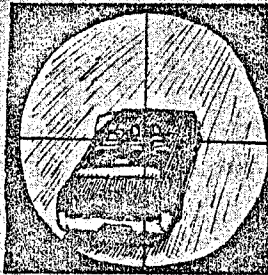
United States...



John F. Kennedy



Lee Harvey Oswald
and Marina



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That's the thing this rifle will murder.

Not the President, but Lee Harvey Oswald — the wretched, the suffering and the oppressed.

No room after this act for petty selfish wounds of the spirit. This act will erase petty concerns. Curtain rods! Ha!

And washing machines. Marina had asked him to buy her a washing machine — last night, during the argument. He said he would. Then, cruelly, she told him to save his money. Fine thing.

Curtain rods, washing machines and money. It was all a trap. He should have known

better.

Then, as he leaned the rifle against the pipes that ran up the wall to his left, he realized with a sweeping finality that all his actions of the past had been leading him to this.

How had he been so stupid? Why had insignificant failures bothered him for one moment? He was above all that.

But wait! Someone was nearby! Lee grabbed the rifle and put it on the floor, covering most of it with the bag. Then he crept forward to peer between the cartons that hid his window and view. He held his breath.

Lee relaxed. Just some poor guy eating lunch — chicken and a bottle of pop. Now if that guy just doesn't come over here to watch the parade.

If he does, I'll shoot him. Just before I shoot Kennedy I'll pull out the rifle and shoot him.

He returned to his seat by the window.

People were gathered along the Elm Street ramp in front of the building and in the plaza across the way. He could hear them.

A thrill quivered through his body. He knelt by the window and looked out over the throng thinking: Step right up folks, to the greatest show of a lifetime!

See Lee Harvey Oswald gun U.S. oppression! See the Yankee tyrant die!

Then he heard the nearby worker's footsteps. Good, the guy was leaving. One less problem.

Oswald picked up his rifle again. Keeping it low beside him, he sat near the window again, appraising the curve in Elm Street where the motorcade would have to slow down.

There was some foliage in the way, from an oak tree, but he would have time for one shot below it and several more after the car moved on toward the Triple Underpass.

He had practiced reloading for hours at a time and estimated he could get in four or five shots if necessary.

Now he could hear noise over on Main Street. Cheering. Blocks away yet.

He locked and loaded with one round.

In his head he heard a voice.

"Ready on the right; ready on the left; ready on the firing line." The Marine rifle range chant.

The cheering was growing louder.

He eased the weight of body forward to the window, keeping the weapon just below the sill behind the boxes. It was an uncomfortable position.

Motorcycles were passing. A



car was behind them. No, it wasn't the President, yet.

More motorcycles rounded the corner of Main and Houston, fol-

lowed by another. They turned onto Elm and roared past the Depository.

The din grew deafening as the President's car came into view on Houston.

As the Presidential car moved toward Elm, Lee looked out toward the Triple Underpass and wondered if he would really go through with it. He would almost surely be caught.

His eyes fell on the spot below the oak leaves. He brought the rifle to his shoulder.

With his left eye he could see the President's car, followed by four motorcycles as it passed directly below the window.

He pointed the rifle down and caught the waving figure in the right rear seat with the intersecting cross hairs, followed it forward to the destined spot.

His trigger finger tightened, squeezing. The cross hairs rode along the base of the target.

His hand seemed to lose its strength.

No. He wasn't going to do it. He knew he couldn't pull the trigger any farther.

CRACK!

Everything shook. The target vanished behind the leaves. Pigeons fluttered around the window.

"Damn!" he swore, reloading.

He zeroed in above the branches and fired again as the President, clutching his throat and falling to the side, came into view.

A siren screamed.

Reloading quickly, he fired again.

Looking over the sill, he saw he had hit his mark. He saw a splash of bright red.

Walking quickly along the aisle toward the stairs, Lee fought to suppress the growing sense of panic that had now replaced his tangled hurt.

He waited to feel the happiness he longed for.

As he thrust his rifle between the book cartons he wondered if people might not be wrong — to seek happiness.

Lee Oswald observed that he was not happy as he trotted down the stairs to the fifth floor.

Instead, a sense of panic gripped his mind.