

JFK Death Probe Failed to Quiz Defector, Book Charges

Washington

The Warren Commission failed to question a Soviet defector despite being warned that he might have been a double-agent assigned to mislead the commission about Lee Harvey Oswald's Soviet connections, according to a new book.

Edward Jay Epstein, author of the book on the assassination of John F. Kennedy which is due to be published in April, said a top Central Intelligence Agency official suspected that the defector, Yuri Nosenko, was a phony who actually was still working for the Russian secret police.

Two excerpts of the book, entitled "Legend: The Secret World of Lee Harvey Oswald," appear in the March issue of Reader's Digest.

Nosenko defected in early 1964, shortly after Kennedy's assassination. He told U.S. intelligence agents that Oswald had no ties to



EDWARD EPSTEIN
The Oswald mystery

the Soviet secret police. At the time, the Warren Commission was trying to determine whether Os-

wald acted alone or was part of a foreign conspiracy in the shooting of Kennedy on Nov. 22, 1963, in Dallas.

In his book, Epstein contended the FBI seized upon Nosenko's statements to support its position that Oswald was a deranged person who acted alone in killing Kennedy.

However, James Angleton, former chief of the CIA's counter-intelligence section, suspected that Nosenko was not really a defector but had been sent by the Russians to deceive American intelligence officials, according to Epstein.

Epstein, who wrote a book 12 years ago criticizing the commission's work, said Angleton doubted the authenticity of Nosenko's account of Oswald's activities in Russia as a defector.

Oswald spent 2½ years in the Soviet Union after renouncing his U.S. citizenship in 1959. He returned to the United States in June, 1962.

The theory that Nosenko was a bogus defector was conveyed privately in mid-1964 to then-Chief Justice Earl Warren by Richard Helms, who at the time was head of the CIA's covert operations division, Epstein said.

According to Epstein, the chief justice was shaken by the questions Helms raised. But at a closed meeting later that same day, the Warren Commission decided not to interrogate Nosenko, Epstein has written.

Epstein, who had examined the Warren Commission's investigation of the assassination in the 1966 book "Inquest," said his latest work is based on information from present and former CIA, FBI and other officials.

The new book focuses on a particularly mysterious part of Oswald's life, his time in Russia. Epstein said the FBI had a big stake in picturing Oswald as someone in whom Russian intelligence officials had almost no interest.

As a result, Epstein wrote, the late FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover tried to suppress any doubts about the defector Nosenko. Hoover believed the FBI would be discredited if there were evidence that Oswald might have been a Soviet agent,

Epstein said.

Epstein wrote that Hoover believed in 1964 that the FBI had already been seriously damaged by disclosures that there were major gaps in its surveillance of Oswald from the time of his return to America until Kennedy's death.

Some of the points raised by Epstein have been explored in previous books.

For example, in a 1975 book entitled "They've Killed the President," Robert Sam Anson wrote that the Soviet defector Nosenko played a key role in putting to rest the fears of American intelligence officials that Oswald was a Soviet agent.

According to Anson, an unidentified high-ranking former intelligence official told him in 1975 that Nosenko's supposed defection was "a phony and a notorious deception."

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