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MEMORANDUM

September 25, 1998

To: Laura Denk
Executive Director

cc: Bob Skwirot
CIA Team Leader

From: Michelle Combs
Associate Director for Research and Review

Subject: No Evidence of Contact Between Lee Harvey Oswald and the CIA's Office of Operations

One of the enigmas that has surrounded Lee Harvey Oswald's defection and re-defection is the question of whether the CIA's Office of Operations (later the Domestic Contacts Division) interviewed or took note of Oswald either before his trip or upon his return from the Soviet Union. The available evidence is somewhat contradictory. The CIA has long claimed that Oswald was never a source, asset, or employee of the CIA. Yet, a November 25, 1963 memorandum discusses the recollections of a CIA staff officer that the Agency considered interviewing Oswald. Further, another former CIA officer [redacted] has stated that he recalls reading an OQ debriefing report in the summer of 1962 from a former Marine re-defector who had worked at the Minsk Radio Factory. The Review Board could not corroborate the recollections of the two former CIA officers with additional records or information.

In an effort to clarify the mystery, the Review Board searched for records that might confirm or deny any contact between Oswald and the CIA before or after his time in the Soviet Union. In the early 1960's, the Office of Operations (OO) was a part of the Directorate of Intelligence. This office, which interviews American citizens who might have come into contact with information or individuals of intelligence interest overseas, later became the Domestic Contacts Division (DCD) of the Directorate of Operations. This office normally only contacts individuals after receiving questions or requirements from intelligence community customers looking for particular types of information.

The Review Board staff examined OO records and operational histories to gain an understanding of OO practices in the late 1950's and early 1960's. The Review Board staff could find no evidence of contact between Oswald and OO either before or after his time in the Soviet Union. Had Oswald departed for his trip to the Soviet Union through New York City, as did most travelers, he possibly might have come to the attention of OO. The Review Board staff did not locate any reference or record to Oswald's departure from New Orleans via freighter that predates the assassination. The Review Board staff also could not locate any information to

document an OO interest in Oswald upon his return from the Soviet Union. While OO was interested in interviewing tourists to the Soviet Union for general information in the 1950's, by 1962 only travelers with special access, knowledge, or skills were of intelligence interest. OO had no specific policy covering contacts with returning defectors although a local field office could initiate a contact if justified by a particular situation. According to the records located, OO only made contact with three of twenty-three defectors in the 1954-1962 time period. No records or reporting showing any OO contact with Oswald could be located. The Office of Operations did interview re-defector Robert Edward Webster in June 1962 on his work at the Plastics Institute of Leningrad.

While a DCD "A" file on Oswald does exist in the CIA's sequestered collection, most of the documents in the file are from the mid-1970's, none predate the assassination, and the file appears to have been created as DCD personnel attempted to locate any evidence of contacts with Oswald in response to various congressional investigative bodies. This file has been processed for inclusion in the JFK Collection at the National Archives.