

# MEMORANDUM

February 7, 1996

To: Jeremy Gunn  
cc: David Marwell; Mary McAuliffe; CIA team

From: Robert J. Skwirot

Subject: Interview of Richard Helms.

Today ARRB staff members Jeremy Gunn, Mary McAuliffe, and Robert Skwirot conducted an interview of Richard Helms at his residence. The former DCI was cordial and seemed willing to answer our questions. However, Mr. Helms, who faulted a memory faded by the years, was unable to offer any information which might help in our search for additional assassination records. The following summary of the hour long interview is, in the interest of brevity, presented topically and does not reflect the sequence of Mr. Gunn's questions.

Helms remembered where he was the day of the assassination and recounted the message sent to stations to be alert to any evidence of a conspiracy or of foreign intervention. But he could not recall the specifics of the investigation of the assassination. For example, when asked about the alleged conflict between the head of WH/3, who coordinated the investigation for the first two months, and Angleton of CI, who was then given control, Helms could not even remember the name of the head of WH/3 [Scelso (ps)], let alone any alleged conflict. Regarding why the investigation was passed to Angleton and CI, Helms stated that it was standard operating procedure that such an investigation would be a Counterintelligence issue because Oswald had visited the Soviet Union. Helms was unaware of any Angleton contacts with Chief Justice Warren. He characterized Angleton as respectful of hierarchy, and certainly "not a freewheeler." He asserted that a lot of things have been said about Angleton that are not true.

Of issues related to Mexico City, Helms remembers very little. He does not recall whether he knew about Oswald before or after the assassination. He has no memory of the photos of the "mystery man" or of a recording of Oswald's voice at the Soviet Embassy. When asked about what should have been reported concerning Oswald's visits to the Cuban and Soviet embassies, Helms stated that it would have been standard operating procedure to notify headquarters about both visits and added, "If that didn't happen, I'm surprised." On another Mexico City issue, Mr. Gunn reminded the former DCI that FBI files indicate that it was known at the time that Oswald met with V. V. Kostikov while in Mexico City; Helms claimed to have no recollection that any particular attention was paid to the fact that Kostikov was with the Thirteenth Department. When asked about the possibility that a tape of Oswald in Mexico city existed after the assassination, Helms responded, "I can shed no light on this whatsoever."

Mr. Gunn also asked Mr. Helms a number questions concerning Win Scott. Helms has no

knowledge of a Win Scott diary. When told of Scott's allegation that the Agency tracked an airplane from Mexico City to Dallas and then to Havana on the day of the assassination, Helms responded, "it seems to me that in his later days he became a bit strange.... Scott made statements that didn't make sense."

Mr. Helms was also asked about the relationship between the Agency and the FBI during the investigation. As in the past, Helms asserted that CIA played a supporting role to the FBI and the Warren Commission and that domestic investigations were outside of CIA's purview. So, according to Helms, it would have been logical for the CIA to contact the Bureau when Oswald returned from the USSR and to pass the investigation on to them. When told that there is no record of this having been done, Helms said that he has an idea that even if there was nothing formal, the FBI would have understood that it was their task. Mr. Gunn noted that when the CIA picked up the intercept of Oswald in Mexico City, the station did not notify the FBI in Mexico City. Mr. Helms thinks that the station would have informed headquarters and headquarters would have contacted the Bureau. He claimed that relations were too formal at the time to permit Win Scott to go across the hall in Mexico City and personally tell the Legat.

Mr. Helms offered nothing that might suggest the existence of unidentified assassination records. Mr. Gunn presented the Ambassador with text from a Michael Beschloss book (*The Crisis Years*, pp. 682 & 787) which quotes Helms as having said that Johnson asked for a study of the assassination by the CIA. Helms replied that there was no additional inquiry and no report. He did not remember ever saying this to Beschloss. Mr. Gunn also asked about the possibility that some sort of back-channel communication existed. Mr. Helms stated that, other than the official channel, there was no channel of communication between Mexico City and headquarters or between other stations, such as JMWAVE, and headquarters. He added that Counterintelligence did not have its own channel of communication and that in Mexico City the FBI did not have its own channel of communication. And when Ms. McAuliffe asked him about President Johnson's notion that JFK's assassination might have been an act of retribution for the death of President Diem of Vietnam, Helms responded that this was Johnson's idea and that CIA would not have followed up on a "red herring." Helms also called suspicion of Cuban involvement a "red herring."

As the interview drew toward its conclusion, Helms commented on the persistence of conspiracy theories in a characteristic manner: "One of the problems of secrets is that Americans are incapable of keeping secrets very long. Anything like this would have leaked out by now." Our short discussion with Mr. Helms yielded no revelations and no new information. It suggests that a follow-up interview or deposition would not be productive.

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