

MEMORANDUM

August 29, 1997

TO: Doug Horne

CC: T. Jeremy Gunn

FROM: Jim Goslee

SUBJECT: Post-Defection Investigation of Oswald by ONI

1. I could find no direct evidence of an investigation by the Office of Naval Intelligence after Lee Harvey Oswald's defection to the Soviet Union and prior to the assassination of President Kennedy. During the HSCA investigation, the committee staff contacted Roy Elmquist of the Office of Naval Intelligence. Elmquist stated that the only investigation request to ONI that related to Oswald concerned the death of Martin Schrand in the Philippines. However, there are indications that the ONI may have conducted an investigation at the request of Headquarters, Marine Corps.
2. The Warren Commission Report states that Oswald's defection was the occasion for opening of files by the State Department, CIA, and ONI.¹ The Warren Commission Report indicates that the FBI was the lead agency in conducting an investigation of Oswald's defection, "for the purpose of correlating information inasmuch as he was considered a possible security risk in the event he returned to this country", and continued to accumulate information from the Department of State and ONI up to the assassination of President Kennedy.²
3. There is a trail of documents which indicate that ONI was provided copies of correspondence between Oswald and the Marine Corps from late 1959 through the Spring of 1962. In March 1962, Director, Naval Intelligence communicated with the Naval Attache in Moscow regarding Oswald's citizenship and discharge status. A Memorandum from HQ, Marine Corps to Mr. Pross Palmer of ONI, dated 8 Mar 1962, makes reference to "your file, serial 05883P92, which is being returned to you under separate cover." (See Attachment A). This would imply that ONI had prepared a file on Oswald at the request of HQ, Marine Corps at about the time of Oswald's defection and prior to the

¹ Warren Commission Report, p. 434.

² Ibid, p. 434.

assassination of President Kennedy.

4. Recently released from active duty with the Marine Corps, Oswald should have been seen by the US intelligence community as a possible source of information for the Soviets. In any event, he certainly could also have provided the Soviets with general information on life in the Marine Corps, a potential tool for further intelligence gathering.

5. There are conflicting reports regarding whether Oswald had access to Secret information. This was a topic of interest for the Warren Commission, but was never adequately addressed. The Intelligence Division of Marine Corps Headquarters had conducted a records check of local records within individual commands, but its survey did not include records classified Secret or Top Secret. The Naval message from Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) to Naval Attache, Moscow, dated 4 Nov 1959, states that there is no record of clearance at Headquarters, Marine Corps, but there is the possibility that he had access to Confidential information. An FBI report, dated 4 Dec 1963, regarding an interview with Oswald's former commander, John Donovan, contains a statement from Donovan that Oswald's position required a Secret clearance. The HSCA, however, reviewed files belonging to 4 of Oswald's enlisted peers and found that each of them had a clearance of Confidential and not Secret³.

6. ONI would likely have been involved in any investigation of Oswald's defection after 3 Nov 1959. A message from the US Naval Attache, Moscow to CNO, dated 3 Nov 1959, stated Oswald had offered to provide the Soviets information that he possessed on US radar. The unauthorized release of possibly sensitive information to a hostile power by a former employee of the Navy would be within the scope of ONI's investigative authority. The response from CNO to the Naval Attache, Moscow, dated 4 Nov 1959, identified Oswald's training as an aviation electronics operator and provided a brief overview of his assignments in Japan and Taiwan. In that cable, the CNO also requested an update of any significant developments as there is "continuing interest of HQ, Marine Corps and US intelligence agencies."

7. The assumption is that investigations of Naval personnel would involve Naval investigators. In testimony before the HSCA, HSCA Hearings, Vol. 4, pp. 178-184, former CIA director Richard Helms reiterates this point when asked as to whether the CIA investigated possible damage to national defense caused by Oswald's defection. He states that the CIA might have conducted an inquiry, but

³ HSCA Report, p. 219.

said, "I would have thought that the feeling would be that that was the Navy Department's responsibility" and "it would have been up to the Navy to take him over and talk to him." Helms adds that "the understandings were that military officers were handled by the intelligence organs of the Defense Establishment."

8. It would seem likely that any post-defection investigation would involve ONI personnel, particularly someone with some familiarity with radar, to ascertain whether any technical details were divulged to the Soviets. An ONI memorandum for record, dated 23 Nov 1963, states that any specialized knowledge Oswald had as a radar operator could not be too damaging since he reportedly had no access to classified material in the Marine Corps. (See Attachment B). This is contradicted by an FBI report, dated 4 Dec 1963, in which Oswald's former commander, John Donovan, is interviewed by Special Agent James F. Morrissey. Donovan states that Oswald's assignment would have given him access to "secret radio frequencies, call signs and codes" which were compromised and changed at the time of his defection. Oswald would also have known "displacement of most military squadrons of all services on the West Coast, the number and type of aircraft of all services on the West Coast, the ranges and locations of radar control sites of all services on the West Coast, and knew the practical effective ranges as distinguished from theoretical or book ranges on all radar sets in the USMC." An inquiry into the nature and scope of information that Oswald knew would have had value in controlling possible damage, even though he denied talking with Soviet intelligence officers.

9. Reference have been made to a military intelligence file on Oswald, Dossier AB 652876, that was identified for deletion from IRR, March 1973, and subsequently destroyed. As noted in the HSCA Report, this file was described by some witnesses as containing newspaper clippings and some Army investigative records. It is not believed to have contained any significant ONI records. A photo taken of Oswald at the time of his reduction and provided by ONI to CIA at the time of his alleged visit to Mexico may also have been included in the file.

10. A regional investigation would likely have taken place, even if its findings were not sent forward to Director, Naval Intelligence or CNO. Files were likely maintained at a regional level. There is record of some correspondence between the District Intelligence Office for the Eighth Naval District and the FBI. An investigation could have been initiated in another district with a geographic connection to Oswald and his duty assignments. Fred Reeves may have participated in a regional investigation with the District Intelligence Office for the Eleventh Naval District, with results that may or may not have been sent forward to Director, Naval Intelligence.

