

## Memorandum

September 9, 1997

To: File (Interviews)

By: Michelle Combs

Subject: Interview with Russell A. Langelle

On August 21, 1997, Russell A. Langelle, senior CIA officer in Moscow from 1957 to 1959 was interviewed by Michelle Combs. The interview was not recorded.

- Mr. Langelle provided an overview of life in the U.S. Embassy in Moscow from 1957-1959. He outlined his duties and activities as the embassy security officer and as the senior CIA officer in Moscow during that time period.
- Mr. Langelle noted that he had no contact with Lee Harvey Oswald in Moscow and did not remember ever hearing the name until after the assassination of President Kennedy.
- In discussing his duties in Moscow, Mr. Langelle said that he had been sent to Moscow specifically to meet with GRU Lieutenant Colonel Pyotr Popov, recruited in Vienna in 1952, who was then working as an agent-in-place within the GRU, the Soviet military intelligence service. Langelle explained that meeting Popov in the Soviet capital was his number one priority and that he was given instructions not to draw attention to himself in any way which might endanger Popov.
- Mr. Langelle noted that his other responsibilities for CIA included finding, checking, and locating potential dead drops, and the general assessment of the various Soviet officials he met as potential recruitment targets. He emphasized that his activities on behalf of the CIA were very passive and that none of these activities was allowed to overshadow the importance of meeting Popov safely. He made no attempts to recruit any Soviets for fear of calling attention to himself as a CIA officer and thus endangering Popov.
- When asked about other CIA officers in the embassy, Mr. Langelle said that he had a loose supervisory role over the other officers in the embassy in that he knew each of them (they did not necessarily know each other as CIA officers) and generally what they were doing. However, Langelle emphasized that he did not know the specifics of anyone's work but his own and that there was no "station" which functioned as any kind of a unit. The CIA officers in Moscow functioned as individuals, acting on instructions from Headquarters, with

no coordination of their activities in-country.

- Mr. Langelles thought that it was likely that George Payne Winters, Jr. had his own communications channel with Headquarters and that possibly the other officers did too. He stated that he was never instructed to pass a message from Headquarters to any other officer and that no officer ever asked him to pass any information on to Headquarters.
- When asked about CIA files, Mr. Langelles noted that the few CIA files that existed in Moscow were kept in one drawer of his safe and that only he had access to them. No one else had the combination. He said that to the best of his recollection, the files consisted mainly of communications materials such as one-time-pads, a few records of dead drop locations, and communications protocol.
- Mr. Langelles explained that tourists and defectors were never part of his responsibilities in Moscow either as the embassy security officer or as a CIA officer. He said that he had no contact with any of the American defectors. Mr. Langelles explained that any potential counterintelligence risk from an American defector would not have been viewed as important enough to expose Langelles's presence as a CIA officer.
- Asked about the CIA's legal traveller program, Mr. Langelles said that he knew about the existence of the program but that he had no contact with any of its participants. He thought it possible that George Payne Winters, Jr. had some contact or role in the program because he had many contacts in the Russian community. Mr. Langelles emphasized that he had no specific knowledge whether Winters did have a role in the legal traveller program.
- Mr. Langelles thought that it was possible that the military attaches would have met with any defector with a military background, but that he did not know if any of the attaches had met with any of the defectors. He also thought it was possible that an attache could have taken Oswald to the upper (restricted) floors for counseling but again, he did not have any specific knowledge of such an occasion.
- When asked about the HTLINGUAL program, Mr. Langelles said that he knew about the mail opening program. He noted that he was the only person in the embassy who knew that American non-diplomatic pouch mail was seen by both the Soviets, through regular KGB screening, and the CIA through HTLINGUAL.

- Mr. Langle said he had no contact with or instructions from Counterintelligence Chief James Angleton either before or during his tour of duty regarding any Moscow related operations.
- Asked about the U-2 flights, Mr. Langle said he had no knowledge of the U-2 development or flights until after he had returned from Moscow.