

MEMORANDUM

March 26, 1997

To: Michelle Combs
cc - Jeremy Gunn

From: Joe Freeman

Subject: Report of March 25, 1997 Interview with Idar Rimestad

Introduction and Summary

I met with Mr. Rimestad at his home in Fountain Hill, Arizona, on the afternoon of March 25th, 1997.

The interview commenced at approximately 3:25 PM and ended at approximately 4:10 PM. Mr. Rimestad, 80 years of age, is mentally alert but his eyesight has failed him, and he was not able to review any documents during our interview (lists of embassy personnel or maps of the layout of the embassy, for instance). While alert and articulate, his memory of the period in question is, as might be expected, uneven. Disappointingly, he could not recall either Richard Snyder or John McVickar.

He could therefore provide no insight as to the duties of these two men, or the location of their offices. Nor did he have pre-assassination knowledge of Lee Harvey Oswald's visit to the Moscow embassy. He did, however, provide a lead as to someone who might have information of value. Mr. Rimestad indicated that his chief of general services was a man named T.J. "Ted" Chariott [there is a Theodore Charriot listed as building superintendent at the embassy on the 10/59 Foreign Service list]. Mr. Chariott is presently living in Florida, at 407/496-7019. Mr. Rimestad stated that he had spoken to Mr. Chariott between his (Mr. Rimestad's) initial phone call with me (about 1:00 PM yesterday) and our interview later yesterday afternoon. Mr. Rimestad stated that Mr. Chariott had told him that he, also, had been unaware of Oswald's visit to the embassy prior to the assassination, but Mr. Rimestad added that Mr. Chariott would be likely to have a greater command/better memory of who was in what office, how many desks each office had, etc. While Mr. Rimestad had no recollection of Snyder or McVickar, he did identify two other members of the embassy staff as employees of CIA (see below), though he was unaware of the identity of the Chief of Station.

Mr. Rimestad is relocating to San Diego on April 4th (next Friday). He did not have either his new address or phone number available to him yesterday, but said if we wanted to talk with him again, we should send him a letter at his current address and that it would be forwarded to him at his new abode (his new number may be available from information in San Diego after next week, as well).

Interview Report

In my meeting with Mr. Rimestad, I hewed closely to your "Proposed Topic Questions for Idar Rimestad Interview" (Combs t:\rimestal.wpd). Accordingly, this report reflects the topic order as laid out in your list of questions.

Background Information - Prior to his service in Moscow, Mr. Rimestad served in Germany for seven years, from 1947 until 1953. From 1947 until 1949 he served as a G-1 in the military. In 1949 he transferred to the Office of the High Commissioner, where he formed a lifelong friendship with John McCloy. In 1953 he went to Washington where he worked in the State Department's personnel assignment office until 1957. He sought and received the posting to the Moscow embassy in 1957, arriving in Moscow in December of that year. He was the chief administrative officer at the embassy. In this capacity he was in charge of all budgetary and fiscal issues regarding the running of the embassy, as well as having administrative responsibility for the day-to-day operation of the facility (general services). He also had overall responsibility for embassy security. As he put it, he was in charge of just about everything except the political, consular and diplomatic functions of the embassy. He lived in the embassy, on the fifth floor (of eight). He was to have stayed on at the embassy until after the anticipated Eisenhower-Khrushchev summit meeting but, subsequent to its cancellation (as a result of the shooting down of Gary Powers' U-2), Mr. Rimestad left Moscow in June of 1960 and returned to Washington.

Embassy Details, 1959 - Mr. Rimestad described the embassy as having eight floors [for purposes of this interview, Mr. Rimestad counted the embassy's floors in what might be termed the American way; that is, the floor above the ground floor would be the second floor]. Mr. Rimestad's office was on the ground floor, along with the consular section and work space for the embassy's Russian employees. Mr. Rimestad's office was away from the embassy entrance, back a hallway, and as such he would have been physically buffered from what was happening closer to the embassy's entrance. He was vague, but thought that there might have been three or four offices between the front, or entry area, of the ground floor and his office in the back. Mr. Rimestad said there was no receptionist-type desk in the hallway near the entrance to the embassy; that is, there was no physical barrier to someone who had been admitted past the Russian guards simply walking down the hallway past the consular offices. He may not have recalled (I neglected to ask him) that there may have been such a desk (as recounted by Mrs. Hallett) for a limited period in mid-1959, during the American Exposition. He said that, as a matter of practice, any stranger wandering down the hallway would be intercepted by any number of people in the consular offices before they got very far. Though he had difficulty explaining how the process of greeting visitors to the embassy worked, he stated that there

Memo to Michelle Combs, re: Rimestad interview

March 26, 1997

Page 3

was a Russian-speaking receptionist in one of the forward consular offices (not in the hallway), and that she would normally be the first to interact with visitors. Again, Mr. Rimestad's eyesight is such that it was impossible for him to review the ground-floor layout as depicted by Mrs. Hallett, and impractical to ask him to draw one himself. Mr. Rimestad said the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th floors of the embassy were "mainly" residential, though he allowed that these floors may also have contained "scattered" offices. Mr. Rimestad said the 6th floor contained the offices of the political and economic officers of the embassy; the 7th floor contained the Ambassador's office, a conference area and security offices. Mr. Rimestad initially said that "there wasn't much" on the 8th floor. Subsequently, as he tried to remember where the military attaches had their offices, he allowed that they might have been on the eighth floor, although he was uncertain on this issue. He seemed to come to the conclusion that the military attache offices were on the 8th floor by a process of elimination: he couldn't remember them being anywhere else. He said the embassy was "heavy with military attaches." As he put it, "they had a lot of them, and they had to be somewhere!" As indicated in the summary section of this memo, Mr. Rimestad had no recollection of either Richard Snyder or John McVickar. He did recall the names of two individuals on the embassy staff who he said were CIA employees. One, he recalled, was named "Winters" and nominally worked in the economic section. Reading from the 10/59 Foreign Service list I had brought with me, I asked Mr. Rimestad whether this person might be George P. Winters, Jr., and he responded affirmatively. The other name he recalled as "Langley" or "Langsley" and, after some reflection, he stated that he thought, but could not say for sure, that this individual's first name was "Russ". He recalled that the Russians had somehow identified "Langley", as he had been picked up by the Russians within blocks of the embassy "carrying a box of rubles". [NOTE: Both Winters and a Russell Langelle are referenced in a footnote on p. 169 of David Wise's *Molehunt*. Presumably, Langelle is the "Langley" or "Langsley" recalled by Mr. Rimestad.] Mr. Rimestad stated that these were the only agency personnel he knew to be such at the time, and that he never subsequently learned whether any other embassy employees worked for the agency. He did not then, and does not now, know who the Chief of Station was. He says that in other postings he had, he sometimes did know who the COS was, but that at the Moscow embassy this sort of information would have been held much more tightly and would have been highly compartmentalized. Although he did not know specifically of any other CIA operatives in the embassy, he stated that, as a general proposition, "most military attaches were suspect." I took this comment to refer to *any* embassy, not just the *Moscow* embassy. Mr. Rimestad stated that, to the best of his recollection, the 6th, 7th and 8th floor of the embassy were assumed to be secure (that is, free of Soviet listening devices). His recollection, however, seemed uncertain on this question. Finally, Mr. Rimestad stated his opinion that "it would not be an ordinary event" for a visitor to the embassy to be taken on the elevator to one of the upper floors. He then qualified this assertion by stating that, perhaps, if a visitor insisted on seeing the Ambassador, he/she might be taken upstairs for that purpose.

Memo to Michelle Combs, re: Rimestad interview

March 26, 1997

Page 4

Oswald - Mr. Rimestad had never heard of Lee Harvey Oswald prior to President Kennedy's assassination. He had not seen Oswald during the latter's visit to the Moscow embassy in 1959, nor was he contemporaneously or subsequently (during his tenure in Moscow) informed/made aware of Oswald's visit. Nor has anyone from any government body or official investigation ever questioned him about Oswald since the assassination. Mr. Rimestad was back in Washington by the time of the assassination, and so has no information to offer as to the reaction in the Moscow embassy to that event. Mr. Rimestad was returning to the State Department from lunch at the Watergate complex when a colleague told him that the President had been shot in Dallas.

032697.wpd