

MEMORANDUM

October 25, 1995

To: Jeremy Gunn
cc: Mary McAuliffe

From: Michelle Seguin

Subject: Research Project: Organization and SOPs of U.S. Embassy in Mexico City¹

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Embassy in Mexico City was housed in a 20-story building and located in the heart of downtown, with the CIA occupying the top floor and the FBI the 15th floor. There were 1,200 employees in the Embassy, making it the largest U.S. Embassy in the world at that time. In addition, the State Department operated 17 other consulates throughout the country, the FBI operated three other Resident Agencies located at Monterrey, Guadalajara and Mazatlan, and the CIA operated at least two other bases in Merida and Monterrey. Of the 1,200 employees, the FBI was represented by the Legal Attaché, with 16 agents under his supervision, and the CIA station was run by the Chief of Station, with at least 16, probably more, case officers under his supervision. Moreover, Army, Navy, and Air Force were represented in the Embassy with one employee.²

STATE DEPARTMENT

¹ To avoid inserting a footnote after each sentence, I have inserted a footnote after each section.

² FBI Mexico City Legat administrative file.
Interview with Ambassador Boonstra, 10/05/95.

The Ambassador was the formal head of the Embassy and in theory all components of the Embassy answered to the Ambassador. But in practice, each component had its own sphere of influence and controlled the flow of information to the Ambassador. This situation existed, among several reasons, because the State Department was the diplomatic channel and played a limited role in intelligence gathering operations. In the latter capacity, the State Department coordinated with the CIA on maintaining biographical files on various individuals, which was the focus of CIA and State liaison.³

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATIONS

At the time of the assassination, Special Agent Clark D. Anderson served as the Legal Attaché in the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City. Special Agent Joseph Garcia served as the Assistant Legal Attaché. The Legal Attaché's office functioned much like a FBI field office, with Special Agent Anderson performing the functions of a Special Agent in Charge. Although it seems that most people in the Embassy (and many Mexicans) knew that the Legal Attaché's office was, in fact, an FBI post, the Legal administrative file indicates that the Bureau did not officially disclose their presence in the country.

The majority of the work handled by the FBI involved locating fugitives and recovering stolen property, particularly automobiles, that had been brought across the border. In order to be successful with these criminal cases, the Legal worked closely with the Mexican police (Gobernacion). The remaining types of cases handled by the Legal dealt with American communists, border coverage, Mexican subversive organizations whose activities had a direct bearing on the internal security of the United States, Cuban matters, espionage matters, and political matters. In addition, there was one FBI agent who was responsible for traveling regularly to Central American countries in an effort to develop contacts with individuals in those areas. As described in the Mexico City Legal administrative file, the espionage matters were considered one of the most important phases of the FBI's work in Mexico City. The Bureau attributed this to the presence of a large Soviet diplomatic establishment in Mexico City, as well as several satellite diplomatic establishments. The FBI believed that the Soviets were carrying on a large scale third country operation against the United States from Mexico. As far as the political matters were concerned, FBI recognized that such matters were not its primary responsibility. But the Bureau "felt that [it] must maintain coverage sufficient to keep the Director fully and currently informed of developments of a political nature in Mexico and the Central American countries." (For further information on the extent of FBI operations in Mexico, please refer to the sensitive 04/30/62 memorandum from the Legal

³ Beck, Melvin. *The Secret Contenders*. New York: Sheridan Square Publications, Inc., 1984.

Interview with Ambassador Boonstra, 10/05/95.

administrative file.)

Consistent with the manner in which he ran the Bureau, Director Hoover kept a close watch over day-to-day decision making in the Mexico City Legal's office. The administrative file contains a good bit of "Hoover blue ink" with which the Director made his characteristic comments on a range of activities in the Legal's office, from whether agents could drive Bureau cars for personal use to the advisability of agents revealing information about American activities in Mexico to acquaintances at dinner parties.⁴

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

The organization of the CIA station in Mexico City is more difficult to ascertain. In *The Secret Contenders*, Melvin Beck provides general information about the organization of a CIA station.

He breaks down the assignment groups into three categories with the corresponding type(s) of officer under each: Operations (case officers), Support (report and commo officers, technicians), and Administration (administration officers). The first category includes the areas of Counterintelligence, Positive Intelligence, Covert Actions (Propaganda and Political Action), and Special Targets.

At present, the two best sources we have for illustrating the inside workings of the CIA station in Mexico City in 1963 are a memo prepared by Ann Goodpasture in response to HSCA requests for information and the Lopez Report. We still do not have an exact figure on the number of CIA officers working in the station, but we can conclude from reading several primary and secondary sources that the station was one of the largest in the world at that time. As detailed in Ann Goodpasture's memo to CI/SIG, all case officers at the CIA station were assigned specific operational duties. Ann Goodpasture broke down the areas into the following: Covert Action, Cuba Operations, Soviet Target, Soviet Translators, Electronic Surveillance (further broken down into the various targets), Photographic Surveillance (again, further broken down into the various targets), Mobile Surveillance, and the "Outside Unit".⁵

As far as pinpointing the standard operating procedures within the CIA station, we only have

⁴ FBI Mexico City Legat administrative file.

⁵ One of the only names out of this list that is not classified is David Phillips. One interesting note about his tour of duty in Mexico City was that he was Chief of Covert Action and of Cuban Operations at the same time, 1963-1965. Based on the extent of covert operations occurring in Mexico City, David Phillips probably had a tremendous amount of responsibility, influence, and knowledge about the activities in the station. The remaining information is still classified, so please refer to these documents for specific names and duties.

information relating to photographic and electronic surveillance, not the day-to-day workings of the station nor the strategy in developing agents and/or covert operations. After having reviewed many documents and speaking with Ambassador Boonstra, we can assume that Win Scott, the Chief of Station, did maintain a tight reign over the station. The extent of his control went so far as Mr. Scott personally screening the daily resuma and transcripts of the conversations recorded from the surveillance posts for operational leads and preparing the monthly operational reports. These reports seem to offer a good understanding of certain surveillance operations undertaken by the CIA station in Mexico City. It is important to emphasize that each report summarized only one operation, not all of the activities of the station. Based on these reports, we can draw some conclusions about the nature of the operations.

One issue that remains extremely important to the Oswald story was the treatment of a U.S. citizen who was discovered to have visited a target embassy. Looking at the reports dated August 1963 and September 1963 for the LIENVOY operation, one can get some sense of the standard operating procedures that were in place in 1963: "The outside staff agent...has instructions to alert the Station immediately if a U.S. citizen or English speaking person tries to contact any of the target installations....Only in rare cases is information on a U.S. citizen passed without prior Headquarters approval. " (See document for further classified explanation of the procedures that were in place if this situation had arisen.) In addition, the September report details various cases of U.S. citizens contacting one of the target embassies in Mexico City. They could be considered as examples comparable to Oswald's visit. It seems that most of the contacts were first reported to Headquarters before dissemination to FBI and the remainder was disseminated to FBI locally. As stated earlier, only in rare cases did the station not notify headquarters of a U.S. citizen's contact with a target embassy.

The following are excerpts from the Mexico City chronology that I prepared in the spring extracting information from the operational reports and the Lopez Report. These excerpts detail the photographic operations of the general time period during which Oswald visited the Soviet and Cuban embassies in Mexico City.⁶

The photographic coverage of the Cuban Embassy for the months of September, October, and November was between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. on weekdays. The Cuban Consulate was open to the public Monday through Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. As part of Project LIONION, the VLS-2 (an automatic camera device) was set up in front of the Cuban Consulate. This camera had some operational difficulties, so the HSCA was unable

⁶ In line with these surveillance issues, the FBI had increased its coverage of the Cuban embassy as of September 9, 1963. The reason for this increase was due to the lack of hard intelligence on the Cuban internal situation.

to determine on exactly which days during Oswald's visit to Mexico City the camera was operational. (see Lopez, pgs. 25-27 and 10/18/63) Normal working hours of the Soviet Embassy were from Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The photographic surveillance of the Soviet Embassy (and Consulate, as the same entrance was used to enter both) was between 9:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. on weekdays and from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. on Saturdays. (see Lopez, pgs. 28-29 & 31, 34-35) In addition to photographic surveillance, the Mexico City Station initiated three other types of coverage of the Soviet and Cuban Embassies: mobile surveillance and two others which are classified (see document entitled "Mexico Station Coverage of Soviet and Cuban Embassies (1963)).

Another Operational Monthly Report for September, **HMMA-22307**, references the Cuban Embassy and the COS reports that on September 26, the VLS-2 Trigger Device covering the Consulate door was tested. It was found that new batteries would have to be purchased for this device; otherwise, the system tested out well. Furthermore, on the morning of September 27, " ' installed the VLS-2 Trigger Device ... and used the 500mm lens issued with this system, one 400mm Telyt, one reflex housing to be used with the Telyt adapted to fit the Robot Star camera, one Robot Star camera, one solenoid release for mounting and triggering the Robot Star camera, one Kodak K-100 ... one 52 mm f/4 Cine Ektar Lens, and two additional tripods. ' was requested to test the Robot Star camera for four days and the K-100 for another four days. When satisfactory results of this testing become available to the Station, they will be forwarded to ' POB for examination." In addition, the COS reports that there was only one operational target survey completed during this month.

In **HMMA-22433**, the COS discusses the use of the VLS-2 Trigger Device at the basehouse that covers the Cuban Consulate entrance. The COS reports that the Device is "performing well with little false triggering.... During the first two weeks of operation, the [Device] would trigger traffic entering and leaving the target entrance. Concerned with the consumption of film and the necessity of reloading the camera twice daily, ' devised a system whereby the [Device] would only photograph people leaving but not entering the target building. ' 's system works about 80 percent of the time...." (Although, two records created after the assassination present two other time tables. MEXI 7098, dated November 27, 1963, states: "Station photographic coverage of Cuban Embassy did not include consulate gate until October." And HMMA 22726, dated January 16, 1964, states: "On the morning of December 17, 1963, [agency personnel] met at the ' ' base house to install the 35 mm SEQUENCE camera and the VLS-2 trigger device....Although the Consulate door was closed for a period of six days for unknown reasons as of the night of December 17, 1963, tests were made using the SEQUENCE camera photographing people walking by the

Consulate door.")⁷

COORDINATION AMONG AGENCIES

As a general rule, intelligence coordination among CIA, FBI, and State was a major problem. (The defense attaches were not deeply involved in intelligence gathering activities.) There were weekly staff meetings with the heads of all offices, during which no notes were taken and no subsequent memoranda were written. Further contact among the different offices occurred on a case-by-case basis without official directives and most requests for information and/or assistance outside of the originating office were generally handled orally. As another general rule, the amount of liaison among the different offices was up to the discretion of the heads of each office, namely Win Scott and Clark Anderson. All action went through these two men. Ambassador Boonstra remembered Clark Anderson and Win Scott as very cooperative individuals, but the latter could be very deceptive; one never knew if Scott had ulterior motives. Ambassador Boonstra described Scott as one of the most brilliant men he has ever met, someone who could outwit anyone.

An example of a situation that required liaison, a situation discussed above that is very important to the Oswald case, occurred when a U.S. citizen visited one of the embassies in Mexico City and was picked up over the taps. In theory, the CIA was under instruction to report immediately all such cases to the Legal's office, but Ambassador Boonstra admitted that this could very well not have happened. Because coordination between the FBI and CIA was ineffective much of the time, there could have been a large lapse of time or no reporting at all.

⁷ Beck, Melvin. *The Secret Contenders*. New York: Sheridan Square Publications, Inc., 1984.

Interview with Ambassador Boonstra, 10/05/95.
Lopez Report.
Memoranda prepared by Ann Goodpasture, 1978.
Monthly Operational Reports, 1963.

Creating even more difficulty in sharing intelligence, CIA, FBI, and State all had their own communication capabilities. Each agency was able to send cables without any of the others' awareness. Moreover, all communications should have been authorized by Win Scott or Clark Anderson, but Ambassador Boonstra admitted that cables could have been sent without their review. In fact, the FBI office in Mexico City was the only one its kind in the world, remaining from Hoover's reign over Latin American counter-intelligence operations, because it was authorized to operate a separate communication channel. To complicate matters, many speculate that the nature of the working relationship among the three components was characterized by arrogance, envy, and mistrust, creating an inefficient and somewhat hostile work environment. Melvin Beck, a CIA case officer, admitted: "CIA people enjoy an 'elite' reputation within the embassy community, although sometimes the deference may be grudging and lead to friction with other elements of the embassy." Nevertheless, he added, "the embassy is in a sense one big family, and the CIA fits in closely among the social and recreational activities that are a constant of embassy life."⁸

⁸ Beck, Melvin. *The Secret Contenders*. New York: Sheridan Square Publications, Inc., 1984.

Interview with Ambassador Boonstra, 10/05/95.

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