

## MEMORANDUM

July 18, 2017

To: The File

From: Irene Marr

Subject: Mexico City Surveillance Wrap-up Memo

### **Introduction**

The primary goal of this research project is to ensure that the Review Board has identified and reviewed all existing CIA records and production or “take” pertaining to electronic surveillance of the Cuban and Soviet diplomatic compounds in Mexico City, during the time of Lee Harvey Oswald’s visit in September 1963 through the assassination of President Kennedy. Specifically, this research pertains to the identification of production and related reporting from photographic, telephonic and other possible audio surveillance between September through December 1963. Another goal is to determine whether there are any significant gaps or lapses in the various types of operational reporting documenting these activities. This also represents the effort on the part of the Review Board to determine whether any of the electronic surveillance operational at the time captured additional evidence of Oswald’s visits to the Soviet and Cuban compounds not located by previous investigative bodies. Despite the multifaceted surveillance operations the CIA had covering these two primary targets in Mexico City, the CIA has never been able to locate actual photographic “take” of Lee Harvey Oswald entering or exiting the Soviet and Cuban compounds. Furthermore, although the transcripts of the calls that were linked to Oswald are in the JFK Collection, neither CIA nor prior investigative bodies have ever been able to locate a tape containing his voice.

To complete this task, the Review Board staff reviewed all the project files in the CIA's JFK microfilm collection, and analyzed the documents on all known telephone and photographic surveillance operations that the HSCA had reviewed and which subsequently became part of the sequestered collection. In most cases, the microfilm copies duplicated records already processed in the sequestered collection. These project files originally had been requested by the HSCA investigators and contained documents spanning a timeframe that extends beyond the window of the assassination. During their initial review of this collection, CIA reviewers designated much of this material as NBR (not believed to be relevant.) After the Review Board staff reviewed this material, it identified additional records as assassination-related. One result of this effort was that the Review Board declared all photographic coverage for 1963, including that before Oswald's arrival in Mexico City, as assassination records. With the cooperation of the CIA those records are now being made available to the public.

For the purpose of this exercise, the Review Board is interested only in those records which could document CIA activities around the time of the assassination or those which could enhance the historical understanding of the events leading up to and following the assassination. Because the release of the Warren Commission had a bearing on certain surveillance operations in Mexico City, the Review Board sought to ensure that all records reflecting any changes in or suspension of surveillance activity are also included in the JFK Collection. In addition, any newly identified operations or surveillance activity covering the subject and timeframe of interest were also explored. Within both the sequestered and microfilm collection, there were files on the following operations:

LIEMPTY  
LIMITED  
LILYRIC  
LICALLA  
LIFEAT  
LIENVOY  
LIONION  
LIERODE

The Review Board identified four major categories of operational reporting in the project files:

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REVIEW\S-ADM-G-WORKING FILES\S-ADM-G\CATHY\MEXCTY.WPD  
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1. **Progress Reports:** monthly operational or quarterly operational reports
2. **Project renewal reports:** project renewal requests, approvals, project briefings and related documents submitted with a project renewal request
3. **Logs:** telephone, photographic, ""resuma""
4. **Photographic ""take"":** copies of photographs, negatives or contact sheets

Additional documents in these files included reports or cables discussing administrative matters, property issues, source assignments, financial and bookkeeping, security evaluations, surveys, and announcements of project amendments and terminations.

### **Summary of Findings**

The Review Board reviewed the projects files of the operations identified below. Where appropriate, a brief overview of the operation is provided to establish the context and explain why the Review Board had an interest in these records.

#### **I. Photographic Surveillance: Cuban Compound**

**LIERODE** was the name of the overall operation aimed against the Cuban compound pre-1964 and refers to the name of the basehouse.

**LIONION** was the name of the photographic surveillance aimed against the Cuban diplomatic compound after July 1964. However the file with this name contained records for the 1963 period of interest. LIERODE continued to be the crypt for the name of basehouse. All production on the Cuban target for the months of September, October and November 1963 that was made available and reviewed came from the LIONION manual coverage. At that time, coverage of the embassy was fairly consistent between the hours of 0900 to 1400 on weekdays, with no coverage on weekends. The agent located in the basehouse kept logs corresponding to photographs taken, primarily arrivals and departures of visitors.

It is not entirely clear how many cameras were in place during the time of Oswald's visit. According to the records, from the time the basehouse was established until September 1963, the operation used only one camera, manually operated, covering the main entrance to the Cuban Embassy compound. The Cuban Consulate entrance had been closed from

November 1962 through August 1963. The CIA has insisted that there was no coverage of the consulate entrance at the time of Oswald's visit, and that the pulse camera was not installed until December 1963. There is, however, evidence that another camera was in place on the dates that Oswald made his visits to the Cuban Consulate as will be explained below.

On September 23, 1963 the Mexico City station decided to initiate coverage of the consulate street entrance. The case officer asked the technician to supply additional photographic coverage, because the base agent, then using a single manual camera, could not cover both the embassy gate and the consulate entrance. During the morning of 27 September, a Robot Star camera equipped with a VLS-2 trigger device and a Kodak K-100 was installed at the LIERODE basehouse. The base agent was instructed to test the Robot Star equipment for four days and the K-100 for another four days and to forward the results to the Technical Services Division (see HMMA - 22307 18 October 1963). On November 7, the Mexico station filed a report on the results of the VLS-Trigger Device. According to this report, the Robot Star camera in place on 27 September broke down *after* four days of operation<sup>1</sup>. If this report was accurate, this indicates that the Robot Star was operational at least on the 27th, the 28th, 29th and 30th of September which would have covered the timeframe of Oswald's visit. Despite the evidence provided by this cable, there is no record of actual photographic take or test results from this camera. The first Robot Star was replaced by another Robot Star which also broke down five days after it was installed and the station requested that a substitute camera be shipped to the Station as soon as possible to replace the Robot Star camera on this project. A 35mm pulse camera, also equipped with the VLS trigger device, ended up replacing the Robot Star and was not installed until 17 December (see HMMA-22726). The CIA's insistence that there was no *pulse* camera covering the Cuban Consulate at the time of Oswald's visit obscures the fact that there was still at least one if not two other cameras with a view of the consulate entrance being tested at the end of September and early October, 1963.

According to the Review Board staff's examination of the photographic logs covering the Cuban activity, there was "take" only from one source, identified as the LIONION operation. There was no indication that more than one camera was used at this base, but

the logs did not specify. The first *test* pictures of the VLS-2 trigger device were sent as attachments to HMMA-22433 on 7 November, but the dates on these photographs are unknown as no logs accompanied the negatives. This same cable also revealed another detail about the performance of the cameras that could offer an explanation as to why the camera did not get a shot of Oswald. During the first two week of operation, "the VLS-2 was focused on the shaded area of the [Consulate] entrance instead of the door. It was found that since Mexicans generally wear dark colored clothing and have black hair, they can pass into the office without triggering the VLS-2. When a person leaves by this entrance, the man's shirt or face will trigger the device photographing a front or side view depending on how the subject leaves the entrance. This system does not work when a person enters the building with light clothing." If the device was indeed this sensitive then it would only pick up people wearing dark clothing, but only when they were leaving, not entering, the building.

## II. Photographic Surveillance - Soviet Diplomatic Compound

**LIEMPTY** which was formerly named **LIPSTICK**<sup>2</sup>, was the overall photographic operation aimed at the Soviet compound and consisted of three separate basehouses: **LIMITED**, **LILYRIC**, and **LICALLA**. All periodic operational/progress reports and project renewal reports for **LIEMPTY** also covered the three separate surveillance projects. The project files maintained for the three contained miscellaneous reporting, equipment updates, administrative matters and only in the case of **LIMITED**, the log sheets and photographic take. The following is a brief description of the differentiation between the three projects.

**LIMITED** was the operation's primary base and was located directly across the street from the main Soviet Embassy gate. Although this base concentrated its photographic coverage on visitors to the Soviet Embassy as opposed to employees, it did maintain daily logs documenting all arrivals, departures and, where possible, identities of every person visiting or working at the Soviet compound. **LIMITED** was the source of the photograph of the unidentified "mystery" man which was supplied to Warren Commission. It was also the only basehouse covering the Soviet compound for which take and logs still existed at the time

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<sup>2</sup>No separate files on **LIPSTICK** were reviewed as it predates the time period of interest and all relevant material was subsumed in the **LIEMPTY** files.

the HSCA made its request. Copies of the logs and take from this operation can be found in the collection.

According to the records of photo production, coverage of the Soviet Embassy prior to the assassination was uneven. An examination of the logs for the months of September and October 1963 reveals that there was no coverage by the LIMITED basehouse on the following dates:

September: 7-8, 13,15-16,18, 20-22, 24, 26, 28-30.

October: 5-6, 13, 15-16,19-21

While there are gaps in dates, there are no gaps in the log film series, indicating that all take from this basehouse has been accounted for. However, in many cases, the log entries documenting observed activities at the site do not correlate with the recorded hours of operation. This suggests that the target site was not being monitored for the entire duration of the surveillance shift. For example, the log sheet for September 19th recorded coverage for 09:00 to 19:00, but had log entries only for the hours 11:05-16:54. Log film #143 covered the 25th and 27th of September. While the hours of operation were reported as 0900-1900H, the period of activity recorded covered 10:40 to 11:46 on the 25th and 10:18 to 11:46 on the 27th. LIMITED coverage did not resume again until Tuesday, October 1, beginning with log film #144.

The explanation for the lack of correlation between logs and hours of coverage is further confused by an LIEMPTY Progress Report for February, March and April 1964 (HMMA-23343 30 April 1964). This particular report restated the operating procedures, including hours of coverage last reported in dispatch HMMA-14793 from 8 April 1960. The station wanted to give Headquarters an "updated frame of reference in which to view the roles of the various basehouses." The report specifically states that the LILYRIC basehouse generally operates from 0900 to 1400 or 1500 weekdays. LIMITED operates from 1200 to 1800 or until "dark" on weekdays and 0900 to 1400 on Saturdays. Special coverage for Sunday is arranged on an as-needed basis. This schedule is at odds with what had otherwise been the accepted version of the photographic production. If the LIMITED basehouse operated under these later post-1200 hours, it is curious that the logs films for the September 25 and 27 recorded only morning coverage especially when the late morning and early afternoon were considered the peak hours of activity. It is even more peculiar that there

was no production available between 1200 and 1400 since those were the hours most likely to have duplicate coverage.

The Project Review for LIEMPTY for the period of 31 December 1960 to 30 November 1961<sup>3</sup> gave additional insight as to how LIMERICK was used to identify American visitors. According to this report, “ a recent example of the base’s contributions to station efforts is the case of (name redacted).” In this case, a LIENVOY lead indicated that an American might visit the LIMERICK target on a certain day. The base was alerted to dispatch the radio-controlled surveillance team on any person appearing to be an American. The results of this assignment were indicated in MEXI-6392 and several other cables. LIMITED was also able to provide photographs, which when compared with photographs provided by Headquarters left no questioning as to (name redacted) identity.” It is particularly interesting that this example of coordinated vigilance of *American* visitors to the Soviet Embassy, was used to boast the base’s contributions to the CIA’s overall Mexico City operation. Yet, in September 1963, when the same telephone operation had intelligence, i.e. the Silvia Duran intercepts, that an American visiting the Cuban Consulate had been advised to go the Soviet Embassy, the system did not work with the same efficiency.

LILYRIC was another basehouse under the LIEMPTY operation which served as the secondary or alternate base located across the street down from the Soviet Embassy, and provided a slanted view of the gate. One of the earliest documents on this subject stated that this basehouse had a better view of the front gate, ran on a staggered schedule and provided full daylight coverage (see HMMA 14793). Yet, no take from this base covering the time period of Oswald’s visit was retained. Project files contained reports on visitors to the Soviet Embassy for a period well before the assassination and again for 1967, however, nothing was in the file covering the period of the assassination. Most reporting consisted of running traces on license plates. As the production logs were not made available for HSCA review, the actual effectiveness of its coverage of the Soviet facility cannot be made. Evidence that there were photos from the LILYRIC and LICALLA basehouses was revealed in HMMA 37674 dated 11 Aug 69, which provided instruction to retire two boxes of photos from 1959-68 and hold for ten years. In addition, HSCA investigators reported in a Summary of File Review Conducted at CIA Headquarters on 31 October 1978 that

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<sup>3</sup>Doc. #104-10088-10328

“A thorough review of Agency files containing production from the LILYRIC photographic surveillance operation in Mexico City reveals the existence of no LILYRIC logs or production earlier than 3 April 1967. It appears that earlier photographs may have been destroyed in a purge of Mexico City Station files...”<sup>4</sup>

**LICALLA** This was the third basehouse under LIEMPTY which was located on the south side of the Soviet compound and overlooked the garden or “backyard” of the embassy. This basehouse was used to gain access to the inside of the target. Very little information of interest was available covering the time frame of interest. Most information pertaining to LICALLA can be found the LIEMPTY Progress Reports.

### III. Electronic Surveillance of Telephones at Soviet and Cuban Compounds

Two major telephone operations targeted the Soviet and Cuban installations were LIFEAT and LIENVOY. The project files revealed that all phone calls believed to be related to the Oswald story were picked up by LIENVOY.

The Review Board sought to determine whether there were additional surveillance operations targeting the Soviet and Cuban diplomatic compounds during the 1963-64 timeframe. Several documents in the collection suggest that in addition to telephone tapping, the CIA had additional audio surveillance aimed against the Cuban Embassy. For example, doc. no. 104-10079-10289 mentioned a bugging operation. The Review Board requested CIA to provide clarification and specific dates. In response, CIA provided documentation that appeared to verify that such bugging operations were not in place at the time of Oswald’s visit.

While CIA reportedly did not retain the tapes containing Oswald’s telephone calls nor the calls placed by Silvia Tirado de Duran between the Cuban and Soviet embassies, during the Review Board’s tenure, CIA did locate an additional 185 reels of tape covering the period of 22 November to 13 December 1963. These tapes were retained by the Mexico City Station in response to DIR-88680 dated 13 Dec 63, instructing “not to erase tapes made between 22 November and present.”

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<sup>4</sup>HSCA 180-10143-10144

They contain information obtained from telephone taps on certain offices of the Cuban and Soviet embassies in Mexico City, and are conversations primarily in Spanish and Russian. According to the CIA, the pertinent assassination-related conversations recorded on these tapes had already been transcribed by CIA and are in the JFK Collection. However, because these tapes represent a unique type of record; cover a period of time when the assassination of President Kennedy was a major news story around the world; and could contain additional conversations relating to the assassination; the Review Board declared them assassination records.

CIA will send copies of these tapes to the JFK collection, after the tapes have been converted from the original reel-to-reel format to cassette is attached. The documentation accompanying the tapes indicates the point of origin (either the Soviet or Cuban embassies), the date of the calls, and in some cases the line number that was intercepted (not telephone number.) Some of these tapes were marked "Cubana" which probably refers to phone calls pertaining to the calls to Cubana airlines. A list of the tapes that the Review Board designated to be processed is attached at the end of this document.

### **Conclusions**

- The CIA did not produce additional records for the Review Board to review; all project files had already existed in the microfilm collection.
- While the HSCA was apparently given access to these files, it was apparent in some of the sign-out sheets that they did not review all of the records that were available; the microfilm collection contained much more of this type of material than did the sequestered collection. The Review Board was able to examine all of the project files to determine which should be processed a assassination records.
- The Review Board identified additional assassination records from the existing collection; much of these records had previously been designated as NBRs by the CIA.
- The Review Board determined all copies of the photographic "take" from 1963 to be relevant to the assassination because it enhances the understanding of the nature and scope of CIA's technical operations during the time period of interest; enables the public to be able to

see whether or not there was a picture of Oswald; and establishes a frame of reference or modus operandi.

- CIA located actual audio tapes from the Mexico City Station's technical surveillance of certain telephone lines of the Soviet and Cuban embassies/consulates. The tapes cover the period commencing November 22, when the station received instructions from Headquarters to suspend its usual practice of erasing and re-using tapes. Although CIA asserted that the relevant conversations had already been transcribed and sent to the JFK Collection, a sampling of these tapes by contemporary CIA linguists did detect additional conversations of interest. These tapes will be processed and made available to the public in the JFK Collection. Because of the additional resources required for processing these foreign language tapes, the Review Board understands that CIA will not have these tapes ready for the JFK Collection at NARA before the Review Board expires on September 30. The CIA will, however, send these tapes to the Collection in due course.

### CIA AudioTapes to be processed for the JFK Collection

The following table identifies the tapes from CIA's telephone surveillance of the Cuban and Soviet Embassies. This table was compiled from the log sheets accompanying the boxes of tapes, and accounts for a total of 174 tapes. A subsequent manual count of the tapes came up with 185 as a total.

Location	Source	Date of Calls	Reel or line Number	Number of Tapes
Box 1	Russian Emb.	22 Nov 63	reel # 24, 51	2
	"	23 Nov 63	reel # 9, 52	2
	"	24 Nov 63	reel # 10, 52	2
	"	25 Nov 63	reel # 25, 53, 54	3
	"	26 Nov 63	reel # 26, 55	2
	"	27 Nov 63	reel # 27	1
	"	28 Nov 63	reel # 12, 56, 57	3
	"	29 Nov 63	reel # 13, 28, 58	3
	"	1 Dec 63	(Did not record reel #)	1
	"	2 Dec 63	"	1
	"	3 Dec 63	"	1
	"	4 Dec 63	"	1
	"	6 Dec 63	"	1
	"	8 Dec 63	"	1
	"		"	

		9 Dec 63		1
	"	10 Dec 63	"	1
	"	11 Dec 63	"	1
	"	12 Dec 63	"	1
Location	Source	Date of Calls	Reel or line Number	Number of Tapes
Box 1	Russian Emb.	13 Dec 63	Did not record reel #	1
	Cuban Emb.	12 Dec 63	reel # 83, 84, 85	3
	"	13 Dec 63	reel# 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91	6
Box 2	Russian Emb.	8 Dec 63	reel # 215	1
	"	9 Dec 63	reel # 216, 217	2
	"	10 Dec 63	reel # 218, 219	2
	"	11 Dec 63	reel # 220, 221	2
	"	12 Dec 63	reel # 222	1
	"	13 Dec 63	reel # 223	1
	"	14 Dec 63	reel # 224	1
	"	15 Dec 63	reel # 225	1
	"	27 Jan 64	reel # 259	1
Box 2	"Cubana"	2 Dec 63	reel # 31, 32, 33	3
		3 Dec 63	reel # 34	1
	"Special	14 Feb 64	reel # 334	1

Location	Source	Date of Calls	Reel or line Number	Number of Tapes
Box 3	"Cubana"	22 Nov 63	line 11	2
	"	22 Nov 63	line 13	1
	"	22 Nov 63	line 24	2
	"	22 Nov 63	line 30	2
	"	23 Nov 63	line 30	2
	"	24 Nov 63	line 11	1
	"	24 Nov 63	line 30	1
	"	25 Nov 63	line 11	1
	"	25 Nov 63	line 24	1
	"	25 Nov 63	line 30	1
	"	26 Nov 63	line 36	1
	"	25 Nov 63	Unnumbered	1
	"	26 Nov 63	"	7
	"	27 Nov 63	"	6
	"	28 Nov 63	"	5
	"	29 Nov 63	"	5
	"	1 Dec 63	"	3
	"	2 Dec 63	"	2
	"	10 Dec 63	"	10

Location	Source	Date of Calls	Reel or line Number	Number of Tapes
Box 4	"Cubana"	3 Dec 63	35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40	6
	"	4 Dec 63	41, 42, 43, 44	4
	"	5 Dec 63	45, 46, 47, 48, 49	5
	"	6 Dec 63	50, 51, 55, 56, 57, 58	6
	"	7 Dec 63	52, 53, 54	3
	"	8 Dec 63	59, 60	2
	"	9 Dec 63	61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66	6
	"	10 Dec 63	67, 68, 69, 70, 71	5
	"	11 Dec 63	72, 73, 74, 76, 77, 78	6
	"	12 Dec 63	79, 80, 82	3
Box 5	Russian Emb.	22 Nov 63	reel # 196, 155	2
	"	23 Nov 63	reel # 197, 198	2
	"	24 Nov 63	reel # 199, 200	2
	"	25 Nov 63	reel # 201, 202	2
	"	26 Nov 63	reel # 203	1
	"	27 Nov 63	reel # 204	1
	"	28 Nov 63	reel # 205	1
	"	30 Nov 63	reel # 207	1
	"	1 Dec 63	Did not record reel #	1

	"	2 Dec 63	"	1
	"	3 Dec 63	"	1
	"	4 Dec 63	"	1
	"	5 Dec 63	"	1
Location	Source	Date of Calls	Reel or line Number	Number of Tapes
Box 5	Soviet Emb.	6 Dec 63	Did not record reel #	1
	"	7 Dec 63	"	1
	"	8 Dec 63	"	1
	"	9 Dec 63	"	1
	"	10 Dec 63	"	1
	"	11 Dec 63	"	1
	"	12 Dec 63	"	1
	"	13 Dec 63	"	1
	"	14 Dec 63	"	1
	"	15 Dec 63	"	1

