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#### **4. In Mexico City**

Lee Harvey Oswald's visit to Mexico City in September-October, 1963, remains as another one of the more vexing subplots to the assassination story that has never been fully understood nor explained to the satisfaction of researchers. Oswald's fascination with the Soviet Union and Cuba is not news, however, there has never been a real consensus as to why he spent time at both the Soviet and Cuban embassies during his brief stay in Mexico City. Did Lee Harvey Oswald make this mysterious trip to Mexico just six weeks prior to the assassination as part of some sinister conspiracy? Or was the purpose of this trip merely to apply for a transit visa at the Cuban Embassy in a desperate attempt to return to Moscow because he had struck out when he tried to approach the Soviets directly? Because the Mexico City chapter is so puzzling, and provides fertile ground for speculation and conspiracy weaving, the Review Board sought to ensure that all government records on this subject were released and took action to pursue additional records. To this end, the Review Board has facilitated the release of thousands of previously sanitized and closed documents on the subject of Oswald's trip to Mexico, including but not limited to records from the CIA, FBI, Department of State, the Warren Commission and the HSCA. The Review Board also pursued leads that were suggested by researchers, and submitted requests to

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agencies for additional records and/or evidence based on staff members recommendations.

*a. Technical Surveillance*

At the time of Oswald's trip to Mexico, when the Cold War was well underway and the Kennedy administration was preoccupied with Cuba, CIA's Mexico City station housed one of CIA's major foreign clandestine operations in the western hemisphere. It is particularly curious that despite its multifaceted surveillance coverage of the Soviet and Cuban diplomatic installations at that particular time in history, , that CIA never found photographic evidence of Oswald's visit to either Embassy. What is known from the records that do exist is that CIA electronic surveillance determined that Lee Harvey Oswald visited and communicated with both the Cuban Consulate and Soviet Embassy between September 27 and October 1 or 2, 1963. Although transcripts exist of the calls believed to made by Oswald, no tapes were ever retained or found from that particular period. According to the transcripts, only one of the calls, made to the Soviet Consulate, actually identified Lee Oswald as the caller. No post-assassination voice comparison could be made, presumably because the tapes had already been erased in accordance with the station's standard procedures.

In light of the importance of the Mexico City station, the Review Board

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sought to ensure that the records on this subject in the JFK Collection represented the full universe of records, and that there were no other relevant records in existence that might have been overlooked by previous investigative bodies who had been given access to CIA files. Recognizing the possibility of gaps in the collection, the Review Board wanted to verify whether there were any additional records that could have provided further information or more tangible evidence of Oswald's trip to Mexico City and alleged contacts with the Soviet and Cuban embassies. The effort included looking beyond the CIA Sequestered Collection and the Oswald 201 File, as well as making a closer inspection of the Microfilm Collection, since it had not been fully mined by the HSCA. Although the microfilm collection represented the files to which HSCA was given access, not all of it was actually reviewed by HSCA investigators nor was all of it determined to be relevant. The Review Board also inspected the unprocessed Russ Holmes files to determine whether he had maintained any unique information on this subject. **[HAS RUSS HOLMES ALREADY BEEN DISCUSSED ELSEWHERE IN REPORT??]**

*i. Audio and photographic*

CIA has acknowledged that in 1963, at the time of Oswald's visit, the Mexico City station had in place two telephone intercept operations covering both the Soviet and Cuban embassies; three photographic surveillance operations

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targeting the Soviet compound; and one photographic surveillance operation, which employed at least two cameras, targeting the Cuban compound. Painstaking negotiations early on between the Review Board and CIA regarding the protection of technical and operational details resulted in the disclosure of a great deal of previously withheld information concerning audio and photographic surveillance. This process then paved the way for the Review Board to ask for specific types of records pertaining to surveillance activities.

The Review Board submitted formal and informal requests to CIA relating to electronic surveillance operations. Several members of the Review Board staff reviewed the Microfilm Collection, which contained a wider universe of records on CIA technical operations and covered a period that extended beyond the assassination timeframe. Because the release of the Warren Commission Report in September, 1964 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 around the time that the report was released were also included in the Collection. In addition, any newly identified operations or surveillance activity covering the subject and timeframe of interest were also explored.

During its review of all project files and operational reports, the Review

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Board found direct references to electronic bugs and hidden microphones at the Cuban Embassy and requested CIA to provide additional information. It was important to follow up on this lead to determine whether there could have been any other electronic intelligence gathering that possibly recorded Oswald's visits inside the Cuban consulate or discussions about the visits. In response to this request, CIA provided evidence from the Mexico City history which stated that the bugging operation was not in place at the time of Oswald's visit. No further information on hidden microphones was provided.

Although CIA had photographic surveillance targeting the front gates of both Soviet and Cuban consulate entrances, no photographic evidence of his visits has been found. In an effort to obtain additional records on this subject, the Review Board submitted requests for additional information pertaining to technical surveillance. The Review Board staff also reviewed project files concerning all known telephonic and photographic operations. The Review Board designated all technical operational reports pertaining to the 1963-64 timeframe that were not already in the collection as assassination records. This included periodic progress reports, contact sheets, project renewal reports and related documentation on telephone and photographic surveillance; logs that corresponded to photographic surveillance; contact sheets from photographic surveillance; and transcripts of telephonic surveillance.

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*ii. Tapes, transcripts and photographic evidence*

According to CIA procedures, the tapes from telephone operations were routinely erased after two weeks, unless there was a conversation of particular intelligence value that warranted retention. Despite the station's interest in the Oswald conversations at the time they were intercepted, transcribed and then reported to CIA headquarters in an October 8 cable, tape[s] containing his voice and the other related calls were destroyed, apparently as a matter of routine procedure.

On the day of the assassination when Oswald was named as the alleged assassination, the Mexico City Station was instructed to not to erase any tapes until further notified. **(CHECK)** Although no tapes were ever found from the September-October timeframe, CIA did locate 250 7-inch reels of tape from the LIENVOY telephone operation covering the period 22 November to 13 December 1963. Although relevant transcripts of post-assassination phone calls had already been declassified and sent to the JFK collection, these tapes represent the first sampling of original "take" from the Mexico City Station. The Review Board declared these tapes as assassination records and has instructed CIA to complete the process of review. As these conversations are primarily in Russian and Spanish the Historical Review Group at CIA will need to hire contract linguists to complete the task.

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Efforts to locate photographic evidence on Oswald in Mexico City were unsuccessful. The Review Board explored the possibility that there were additional records pertaining to CIA photographic surveillance of the Soviet Embassy. Although the station was running three operations during the 1963 period of interest, HSCA investigators found photographic evidence and log sheets from only one of these operations<sup>1</sup>. This material is open in the collection and includes the photos of the mystery man who was initially misidentified as Oswald.

Beyond the photographic evidence from the time period of Oswald's visit, the Microfilm Collection contained additional log sheets and copies of film from the Cuban and Soviet surveillance operations. Much of this had previously been designated as NBR, however, the Review Board believes these records could be useful to researchers in terms of establishing a frame of reference or *modus operandi*, and for understanding the scope of CIA coverage at that time. In light of the historical value of this material, The Review Board has declared all photographic coverage for 1963 found in the Microfilm Collection, including what was collected before Oswald's arrival in Mexico City, to be relevant to the assassination.

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<sup>1</sup>See *The Lopez Report* compiled by HSCA, where this subject is discussed at length.

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*b. Cable traffic.*

The Review Board determined that, while much of the Mexico City cable traffic was reflected in the JFK Collection, there were a number of gaps in this type of reporting, particularly in communications between Mexico City and JMWAVE. This was deemed significant because of the latter's role in Cuban operations. The Review Board was not able to locate cables or dispatches from the following periods: Mexico City Station to Headquarters (September 26-30, 1963); Headquarter to Mexico City Station (September 26-30, 1963); JMWAVE to Headquarters (September 26-November 21, 1963); Headquarters to JMWAVE (September 26-November 21, 1963); and all traffic between the Mexico City Station and JMWAVE for the periods September 26-October 20, 1963 and November 22-December 30, 1963. The cable traffic found in the Sequestered Collection commences on October 1, 1963 and contains earliest known communication between the station and headquarters concerning Lee Harvey Oswald, which was reported in a 8 October, 1963 cable.

The Review Board submitted in 1995 a formal request for additional information regarding the absence of CIA cable traffic. CIA was not able to locate additional traffic for the specified periods. CIA completed its response to this request in February 1998 with the explanation that:

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*“In general, cable traffic and dispatches are not available as a chronological collection and thus, for the period 26 through 30 September 1963 it is not possible to provide cables and dispatches in a chronological/package form. During the periods in question, the Office of Communications (OC) only held cables long enough to ensure that they were successfully transmitted to the named recipient. On occasion . . . cables were sometimes held for longer periods but not with the intention of creating a long-term reference collection.”*

In addition, CIA informed the Review Board that there was no repository for cables and dispatches from the stations and that the offices of record for the origination of cable traffic and dispatches did not create cable and dispatch files for reference collection purposes. Although originating offices maintained a temporary chrono files, copies of such traffic was normally not retained for more than ninety days. It is assumed that the reason that those chronological compilations which do exist were assembled and preserved solely because of the assassination of the President. The traffic that was retained was used to compile the Mexico City chronology. It should be noted that if the 90-day rule applied, there might have been copies of cable traffic commencing as early as August 22, 1963 rather than October 1, 1963.

*c. Win Scott files.*

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Win Scott was the CIA Chief of Station (COS) in Mexico City at the time of Oswald's visit. In light of the fact that he was such a prominent figure in the Mexico City community at that time and was known to have had a certain interest in the assassination, the Review Board included Win Scott in its pursuit of additional records. To this end, the Review Board followed up on several leads suggesting that there were Win Scott files from his Mexico City days in the custody of CIA. According to Anne Goodpasture, Win Scott had kept a collection of classified documents from his tenure as COS which he stored in a safe in his home since his retirement. The Review Board understands that shortly after Win Scott's death in 1973, James Angleton traveled to Mexico City to make arrangements with Scott's wife for CIA personnel to review the classified material. CIA compiled inventories of the items removed from Win Scott's home. The Review Board reviewed the inventory lists compiled by the CIA of the documents that were removed from Win Scott's home. The Review Board was granted access to his manuscript, but no additional assassination records resulted from this effort.

**[Check with Michelle or Jeremy who reviewed this material]**

*d. Silvia Duran*

Silvia Tirado de Duran, a Mexican national working as a receptionist at the Cuban Consulate in Mexico City at the time of Oswald's visit, became a principal

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character in the Mexico City chapter of the assassination story. CIA has released copies of transcripts of the phone calls made between Silvia Duran and the Soviet consulate that were believed to be related her dealings with Oswald. In the immediate aftermath of the assassination, after it was known that she assisted Lee Harvey Oswald in his quest to apply for a visa to ultimately return to the USSR, Silvia Tirado de Duran was arrested and interrogated by the Mexican D.F.S. Her statement in effect corroborated what CIA was able to determine from electronic intercept; that Lee Harvey Oswald had been at the Cuban Consulate to request a transit visa. Reports of her interrogations were provided to U.S. authorities in Mexico City and widely disseminated to U.S. federal agencies in the immediate aftermath of President Kennedy's death. However, there was some evidence to suggest that beyond the reports made by Mexican authorities, there was also an original transcript of Duran's first arrest.

The initial 10-page "confession" or interrogation was actually a summary report of Duran's account and the statements of several other individuals were also arrested and questioned along with Duran. An actual verbatim transcript was never found. The Review Board submitted a formal request to CIA to go back through its files. All searches returned to the 10-page summary. No additional records were located.

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As the Mexican government also conducted an investigation into the activities of Lee Harvey Oswald, and the Mexican D.F.S. conducted the interrogations of Silvia Duran, the Review Board sought the cooperation of Mexico in its search for additional records. At the behest of the Review Board, the State Department requested the Mexican Government to search its files for possible records relevant to the assassination. To date, the only records the Mexican government made available were copies of the same diplomatic correspondence between the Mexican Foreign Ministry and the State Department, submitted as part of the Warren Commission's investigation. Copies of these communications were already placed in the collection.

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