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INTERVIEW OF THOMAS CASASIN
AUGUST 17, 1978
AMERICAN EMBASSY/ [redacted]

By Surell Brady

Casasin stated that he retired from the Central Intelligence Agency in [redacted] At the time of the assassination of President Kennedy in November, 1963 he was stationed [redacted] he was working in the area of Soviet operations, but had [redacted] He arrived [redacted] in September, 1962.

He stated that in September, 1960 he was assigned [redacted] as [redacted] Chief. He worked for two years in [redacted]

Casasin said that during his assignment [redacted] he had not infrequent contact with the CIA station [redacted] He estimated that the contact occurred every two and a half weeks. The contact was made on the outside by telephoning a person with [redacted] cover. He said he never made written contact with the station.

Casasin explained that the function of [redacted] was operations in support of the Soviet Russia Division of the CIA. He said the work consisted of amassing information in support of the SR Division;

[redacted]

Casasin worked [redacted] from [redacted] to [redacted] He served as Chief of the Soviet Base [redacted] He said his

[redacted]

[redacted]

Casasin said that his base had extremely limited work with the

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military. He said it consisted primarily of briefing the military on items of mutual interest. He said the CIA had tried to work with clandestine units of the military, including the Army (he said the Navy had no clandestine units), but it was the opinion of the CIA that the military had too low a degree of professionalism for the successful operation of clandestine projects. Casasin stated that during this time the military said it was actually running operations, but it was never confirmed by the CIA and they found no evidence of such military operations.

Casasin identified two military intelligence personnel in the area when he was stationed [redacted] OSI, and [redacted] [redacted] Army head.

Casasin said, however, that the Navy did provide some operational support for his base. It consisted of providing [redacted] for persons running operations against the Soviets.

Casasin said he cannot recall any specific information that the military was using American military personnel in any of its operations. He said, however, that there ~~was~~ occasional rumors that an American serviceman was trafficking with suspected foreign subversives. He said the individual intelligence agencies would have handled any such cases. He stated that he never heard any concrete information of American contact with the Soviets.

Casasin could not recall the name of the Chief of [redacted] [redacted] he believed the man was a retired vice admiral and that his last name began with the letter "O." [redacted] succeeded that person in [redacted].

Casasin said that most of his communications during that time [redacted] [redacted] went back to headquarters. He explained that [redacted] [redacted] at that time was tied up with the situation [redacted]

Casasin said that he does not know who had the oversight responsibility or authority for the U-2 program. He cited that as an example of how well compartmentalized their work was. He said he never learned who was in charge of the U-2 program out of Japan. He said that he assumed it was some type of paramilitary operation. He said the [redacted] base ran no paramilitary operations and that most such smaller units usually did not.

Casasin said he does not recall any discussions concerning the possible use of [redacted] the Soviets. He said one reason for no interest in such use was probably that the First

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Chief Directorate of the KGB would suspect [redacted]
[redacted]. He said the CIA at that point knew a lot about the KGB and its thinking because they had [redacted]
[redacted]

Casasin explained further that American intelligence interests were much [redacted]
[redacted] He said that was simply not the American way of conducting intelligence and that that thinking precluded such programs.

Casasin said lessening of tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union from such things as the Spirit of Camp David did
[redacted]

I referred Casasin to CIA Document 435-173-A, which is a memo dated 25 November 1963 from Thomas B. Casasin to Walter P. Haltigan on Mr. Lee Harvey Oswald. Casasin says he does remember the memo. I asked him to explain the cover memo dated 12 December 1963 by Robert G. Lamprell to Chiefs of SR and WH re: GPFLOOR-Lee Harvey Oswald.

2 Casasin explained that Lamprell (whose real name was [redacted]
[redacted] he died of cancer a few years ago) was one of Casasin's contacts [redacted] He said that Lamprell was the Senior Officer in the Soviet Office in [redacted] Station, and served as the second in [redacted] command. Casasin said that Walter Haltigan (whose real name was [redacted]
[redacted] was his normal contact [redacted] He surmised that his memo was sent out by Lamprell because Haltigan might not have been available. He does not know the reason for the delay between the date of his memo, 25 November, and the transmission by Lamprell, 12 December.

Casasin said he recalls that he wrote the memo spontaneously when he heard a news cast about Oswald after the assassination. He recognized Oswald when he heard the news information that Oswald had lived in Minsk in the Soviet Union and had married a foreigner. He remembered those details from State Department information he had seen.

Casasin explained the cryptonym REDWOOD as clandestine operations; the Chief of the SR Division was responsible for that project. He explained that was separate from the REDCAP program, which was operation against Soviets outside of the USSR.

Casasin explained the relationship of [redacted]

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Casasin said he cannot remember who served as Chief of the while he was there. He said the deputy chief was an older woman near the age of retirement. He said that Rudolf Balaban worked with him and is still at the agency; he could probably remember the names of the others in the section.

I asked when Casasin recalled the discussion took place which he refers to in his memo. He said it was the last days of his work with the section; he assumes it was the third or fourth week of July, 1962 when he left the section, so he believes the conversation about Oswald took place the first week of July, 1962.

Casasin said at the time he assumed Oswald had been sent out of the Soviet Union by the KGB, so he exercised caution and did not attempt to debrief Oswald.

Casasin gave the following dates in an effort to pin down when the conversation took place. He said he left and

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travelled through Europe on leave with his family until Spetember, 1960. He said therefore the conversation could not have taken place in the summer of 1960 as the memo states. He said he used the wrong year in the memo.

Casasin identified KUJUMP as the Operations Division. He said it had a contacts division [redacted]

[redacted] He said he believed he had received maybe one State Department dispatch on the returning American. He said the dispatch probably originated if Oswald had given up his passport at the Embassy in Moscow and had had to reapply to the embassy to be able to return to the United States. Casasin said he believes Oswald's contacts with the Embassy in Moscow were initiated by Oswald. Casasin said he only knew whatever appeared in the State Department dispatches about Oswald.

He said his statement in the memo that Oswald looked "odd" was the CIA's evaluation of Oswald. This was based on the fact that he was allowed to live in the Soviet Union and permitted to marry a Soviet citizen. Casasin said he believed some type of controlled intelligence station should approach Oswald; they would be able to contact and talk to him in a perfunctory manner for debriefing purposes.

Casasin said that during the period 1945-60 no more than 10 American defectors came to their attention from the State Department and the military.

Casasin identified the REDSKIN cryptonym as the [redacted] program. It involved [redacted]

Casasin said [redacted] He believes therefore that if Oswald had been debriefed he would have seen the information in that form.

Casasin said he believes it is inconceivable that Oswald would have been any type of operative of the CIA. However, he also gave his opinion that the nature of KGB operations made it conceivable that Oswald could have been a "lay-low" Soviet operative.

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[redacted]
[redacted] Casasin said he
is confident that Oswald was not working in any type of security faci-
lity. [redacted]

I asked Casasin what the reference to the "Harvey Story" in the last line of his memo referred to. He said at first that it must have been some kind of cryptonym he was using at the time. He pondered a while. Then he said he would need some kind of prompting of his memory. He said he doubts that it would have been someone's true name.

Casasin said he has never been contacted by anybody, including the Warren Commission, about the memo.

He said that his interest in Oswald as expressed in the memo was just a lead. He said the fact of no follow-up on that lead was not unusual. He said Oswald's going to the Soviet Union was unusual, but that left him open to the possibility of KGB contact. He therefore

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ultimately was of only marginal interest to the agency.

Casasin said it was normal to not make a check for a 201 file on a person like Oswald, meaning that it was not unusual that he did not check for Oswald's 201. He said this was especially not unusual since they had made the decision not to use Oswald. It's possible that a colleague of Casasin's might have checked, but Casasin said he doesn't recall any such check.

Casasin said his subordinates in the [redacted] were Balaban, a man named Richard, last name possibly [redacted] and [redacted] who was the liaison with the Technical Support Division (i.e., [redacted] [redacted]). He said deputies in the branch were [redacted] (in 1960 for three or four months), [redacted] (possibly [redacted]; [redacted] stayed on in the branch and Casasin believe he could be of more help in remembering details about the branch; also, Becky Balaban, who is married to Rudolf Balaban.

Casasin said that the purpose of a 201 is to indicate that a request had been made for provisional operational approval. He said the file would indicate operational interest and would then refer one to the specific office with the interest in the individual. He said he doesn't know that actual criteria for opening 201's. He said also that after initial interest was shown in an individual by the opening of a 201, the number might remain with the individual without the person actually being developed as an asset.

Casasin mentioned that agency people were assigned to the military base at [redacted]

Casasin referred again to the "Harvey Story" reference in his memo. He stated that "Whatever I meant by Harvey had nothing to do with him (Oswald)."

I showed Casasin the Personality (201) File Request form from Oswald's 201 file. He said he had never seen it before and did not know there actually existed a 201 file on Oswald. Referring to the source of the form, CI/SIG, Casasin said CI stood for Counterintelligence. He said he thought SIG stood for Signal Intelligence, but he was not sure. He said that notation would mean that NSA or the military had picked up Oswald's name in some type of transmission. He asked if Oswald had access to any type of radio transmissions. He said he thought the 201 section of the Registry Office could answer questions about the notations on the form.

Referring to the "AG" notation in the Other Identification

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block on the form, Casasin said he does not know what it stood for. I asked him if he understood why some of the notations were crossed out and new notations had been made; he said he could not explain that. He said he thought the Permanent Charge notation meant that the file would stay in the Office of Registry and that the file therefore had no operational significance. In this file he said he thought it would be routine to open a file on defectors such as Oswald, so it may have had some other office charge because of that. He said did not have an interest in the Oswald file.

I asked how he would have come across the State Department communications on Oswald. He said the normal distribution of such State Department information would mean that the dispatches would be circulated for information and then routed back to registry where they would be kept on file as Third Agency documents. He said he believes from the dispatches he saw on Oswald that they were in a consecutive series as received from the State Department. He believes from the memo that he must have seen several such dispatches with information about Oswald.

Casasin explained the operational interest various divisions within the agency might have in this way:

He said he believes the 201 Personality form in Oswald's file is passive and not operational and sees nothing to indicate operational interest. He said the above scheme means that only the line divisions would carry the operations, and he does not see any indication of such an interest on the form. The fact that only Counterintelligence is indicated on the form seems to preclude any operations.

Casasin talked further about suspicions about Oswald. He expressed the feeling the Oswald and Marina got their visas to leave the Soviet Union too easily. He explained the "unusual behavior" of Oswald as being his defection: his reasons were unknown, he seemed disoriented, he married a Russian. Casasin said that while he does not believe Oswald was sent back to the United States by the Soviets, he cannot preclude that possibility.

I asked if the Americans were able to follow Oswald's activities

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while he was living in the Soviet Union. Casasin said he doesn't believe we were able to monitor him inside the USSR. He said it would have been too risky [redacted]

I asked if Oswald's threat at the Embassy in Moscow to reveal military secrets to the Soviets wouldn't have made Oswald of more intelligence interest. Casasin said if he had revealed secrets he would have been of interest for security.

I asked Casasin if a memo would have existed from the time of the conversation referred to in his 1963 memo about interest in Oswald. He said he doesn't think so; he said it was not customary to write memos about such leads which were discussed and not follow-up. He does not remember preparing any such memo.

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