

# MEMORANDUM

April 8, 1997

To: Michelle Combs  
cc- Jeremy Gunn

From: Joe Freeman

Subject: Report of April 4, 1997 Interview with Paul Garbler

## Introduction and Summary

I met with Mr. Garbler at his home in Tucson, Arizona, in the late morning and early afternoon of Friday, April 4, 1997. I arrived at his home at the appointed time -- 11:00 AM -- and we had some fifteen minutes of general and introductory conversation (most consisting of me explaining the origins, purpose and statutory responsibilities of the Review Board in response to queries from Mr. Garbler) before we were interrupted by a phone call that Mr. Garbler had evidently been expecting and which consumed the next 60-70 minutes. During this time I remained in Mr. Garbler's office/den. I noted a copy of the Warren Commission Report on Mr. Garbler's bookshelves, as well as a copy of *Case Closed*. There were numerous books concerning the Soviet Union, intelligence issues, history of U.S. and Soviet intelligence agencies, etc. It is clear that Mr. Garbler maintains an active interest in intelligence issues and the history of U.S.-Soviet relations. At approximately 12:20 PM, Mr. Garbler's phone call ended, whereupon he excused himself to make some coffee. He returned shortly thereafter and we began our interview proper at approximately 12:30 PM. Mr. Garbler readily granted his permission to tape the interview (unfortunately, due to my incompetence and lack of attentiveness to the tape recorder, only some one-third of the interview was actually recorded), though I also took contemporaneous notes. The interview lasted approximately an hour and a half, ending about 2:00 PM. At 79 years of age, Mr. Garbler remains articulate and focused.

While fascinating, the interview yielded no substantive bombshells. Mr. Garbler stated that he had never heard of Lee Harvey Oswald prior to President Kennedy's assassination, and that the Moscow station had no interactions with Oswald during his tenure as Chief of Station (COS). Nor did the station monitor Oswald in any way during his stay in the Soviet Union. Mr. Garbler stated that James Angleton was not operationally involved with the Moscow station, and that to the best of his knowledge Angleton never ran any agents or assets of his own in the Soviet Union during Garbler's tenure as COS.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, Garbler stated that Angleton "was not above that sort of thing,"

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<sup>1</sup> Garbler recounted the events chronicled in David Wise's *Molehunt* wherein Angleton had asked Garbler, before the latter's departure for Moscow, to pick up messages that might be left for

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acknowledging that it was theoretically possible that Angleton might have run agents or assets in the Soviet Union without Garbler's knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Garbler does not seem to believe this happened, however. Mr. Garbler declined to provide the identities or even the exact number of CIA officers working under cover at the Moscow embassy during his tenure as COS. He did state that there were *no* CIA officers at the embassy at the time of his arrival in November of 1961. The only CIA officer in Moscow whose name Mr. Garbler mentioned was his Deputy Chief of Station, Hugh Montgomery.

Mr. Garbler was unable to shed light on the roles of either Richard Snyder or John McVickar (both having left Moscow before his arrival). Nor could he offer any assistance in nailing down the physical layout of the ground floor of the embassy: his recollection of the ground floor was so unclear that he declined to attempt a sketch of its layout. In his more general physical description of the embassy, however, Mr. Garbler provided information which both supplemented and sometimes contradicted the statements made by Idar Rimestad during the latter's interview of March 25, 1997.<sup>3</sup> One of the most relevant aspects of the interview was the adamancy with which Garbler maintained that the status and activities of American defectors in the Soviet Union were *not* issues of concern to the Moscow station he set up.

### Interview Report

In my meeting with Mr. Garbler, I hewed closely to your "Proposed Topic Questions for Paul Garbler Interview" (Combs t:\wp-docs\garbler1.wpd). Accordingly, this report reflects the topic order as laid

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him by a contact of Angleton's in Moscow. Since this individual was an FBI asset, and Angleton's role -- through Garbler -- was one of simply facilitating communication with him, Garbler did not consider this asset as having been run "by" Angleton. The rest of Garbler's retelling of these events was consistent with the account laid out by Wise.

<sup>2</sup> This awareness, or belief -- that Angleton could and did run assets on his own -- was behind the confrontation Garbler had with Angleton in Stockholm in 1956 (as recounted in *Molehunt* on page 62): Garbler assumed at the time that the message Angleton wanted to send from the Stockholm station followed upon an Angleton contact with an asset in Sweden that the CI chief was running without the station's knowledge.

<sup>3</sup> See "Report of March 25, 1997 Interview with Idar Rimestad", memo from Joe Freeman to Michelle Combs, dated March 26, 1997 (032697.wpd).

out in your questions.

**Headquarters** - Mr. Garbler informed me that his position in the Soviet Russia Division (prior to his posting to Moscow) was "Chief of Foreign Intelligence" and that he was not "branch chief of SR/10" as my first question to him had stated.<sup>4</sup> He stated that he had never encountered Lee Harvey Oswald's name while in this position. In fact, he volunteered that he had never heard of Oswald in any connection prior to President Kennedy's assassination. Mr. Garbler stated that he was very familiar with the legal travelers program (especially from his stint at the Stockholm station) and that legal travelers were not asked to perform operational tasks. In fact, Mr. Garbler stated that legal travelers were actually cautioned against doing anything out of the ordinary for fear of their drawing undue attention to themselves. When asked if this general rule was a hard and fast one, Mr. Garbler replied: "Passive observance was the name of the game: do nothing out of pattern."<sup>5</sup> Mr. Garbler stated that he had never seen Richard Snyder's cable concerning the defection of Oswald, nor any other document referencing Oswald, either in his capacity as Chief of Foreign Intelligence for the SR Division, nor as part of his preparation for his posting to Moscow as COS. I asked several questions in an effort to get a better handle on what material he *did* see in Washington during the 4-6 week period after he learned he was going to Moscow but before he left. I specifically asked him whether he reviewed files relating to -- or was briefed on -- American defectors to the Soviet Union. He replied in the negative. He stated at one point that he knew "very little" about American defectors in the Soviet Union, and at another that he knew "nothing" about them. He stated that his most important task in going to Moscow was running Oleg Penkovsky; his second most important task was the setting up of a functioning and effective station. Checking on American defectors resident in the Soviet Union was "not in my charter" and the issue "was never mentioned" to him as a task he or the new station was charged with undertaking. Mr. Garbler stated this last point very strongly. He said that, even *had* someone tasked him with sending someone to Minsk to check up on Oswald, he would not have thought it important enough to do so: according to Mr. Garbler, Oswald "was a nothing thing until he shot Kennedy" and Garbler would not have wasted scarce station resources on him.

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<sup>4</sup> And as John Newman states on page 59 of *Oswald and the CIA*.

<sup>5</sup> Garbler's statement on this issue is consistent with what he told John Newman: "We would brief them to be passively aware. They were not supposed to take specific actions, but sometimes this rule was violated." (John Newman, *Oswald and the CIA*, p. 59). It is unclear in Newman's text whether such violations were initiated at the request of the Agency or undertaken independently by the travelers.

**Background Information on Moscow** - Mr. Garbler stated that he arrived in Moscow in November of 1961 (*Molehunt* puts the precise date as November 30, 1961).<sup>6</sup> He was sent to Moscow as the CIA's first Chief of Station at the Moscow embassy, but his cover at the embassy was that of assistant naval attache. Mr. Garbler stated that preserving cover was "so much of a problem" in Moscow that he spent "at least" one-third of his time performing duties associated with his cover as assistant naval attache. His cover position required frequent travel outside of Moscow, but he stated that he was able to arrange to be in Moscow anytime anything important was expected to happen regarding the Penkovsky case. While stationed in Moscow, Garbler lived in the embassy on the third floor on what he described as the embassy's north wing (see section on "Embassy Details, 1959"). Mr. Garbler declined to state how many CIA officers were stationed at the embassy during his tenure as COS, but he did maintain that there were *no* CIA officers at the embassy prior to his arrival in November of 1961.<sup>7</sup> I pressed him on this assertion, but he was adamant that all previous CIA interventions in the Soviet Union had been "singletons"-- agents sent into the Soviet Union by the CIA on a "target of opportunity, catch-as-catch can basis... without the knowledge of the embassy...[and] completely unsupported except for a very tenuous line back to Langley." While Mr. Garbler stated that he was as well prepared to take up his duties in Moscow as time allowed, he also stated his opinion that "it was not necessary for me to know what had transpired with the singletons, most of which were failures, except as an object lesson in what not to do." I raised with Mr. Garbler an anecdote recounted in *Molehunt*, presumably based on information he had previously given to

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that the Foreign Service listings provided to me list Garbler's posting date as *August 31, 1961*. This is inconsistent with both Garbler's recollection and the account in *Molehunt*. It would be useful to determine: 1) whether the Foreign Service listing is incorrect, 2) whether it references the date of an appointment as opposed to an actual arrival date, or, 3) otherwise explain the discrepancy.

<sup>7</sup> Initially, Garbler stated that his Deputy Chief of Station, Hugh Montgomery, had arrived in Moscow before he had, and that therefore there had been one CIA officer in place before his, Garbler's, arrival. Subsequently, he amended this recollection and stated that Montgomery had arrived subsequent to his own posting: therefore it is Garbler's contention that there were no CIA officers at the embassy prior to his arrival. Garbler's amended recollection, re: Montgomery's arrival, is confirmed by the July, 1962, Foreign Service listing, which indicates Montgomery's posting date as February 4, 1962. Garbler stated that Montgomery was in charge of security at the embassy, and that Montgomery's predecessor in this position was John Abidian (who was at the embassy when Garbler got there). This also squares with the Foreign Service listings, as Abidian's posting date is listed as February 7, 1960 in the January, 1962, listing, whereas Abidian is not listed at all in the July and October, 1962 listings (where Montgomery's name appears).

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David Wise, which relates how Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson summoned Mr. Garbler into the embassy's secure "bubble" shortly after his (Garbler's) arrival in Moscow in order to query him about who else in the embassy were undercover CIA officers. The clear implication in Wise's account was that there *were* other CIA officers in the embassy at the time of Thompson's interrogation of Garbler, though not many.<sup>8</sup> Mr. Garbler insisted to me, notwithstanding what may have been written in *Molehunt*, that there were no CIA officers in the embassy prior to his arrival. Mr. Garbler acknowledged that, subsequently, some number of CIA officers were brought in, but he declined to state how many. He also stated that, as COS, he had a good relationship with Ambassador Thompson and had, in fact, briefed him in Washington about plans to open the station prior to his own (Garbler's) arrival in Moscow. Mr. Garbler also confirmed that the Moscow station was an especially clandestine one (this is consistent with Idar Rimestad's recollection, for instance) and that far fewer individuals at the embassy would have been aware of which co-workers were undercover CIA officers, as compared with embassies elsewhere. Mr. Garbler stated that James Angleton had no operational role vis-a-vis the Moscow station. When asked to describe the level of Angleton's involvement in the day-to-day running of the station, Mr. Garbler replied: "not at all." Mr. Garbler stated that, as COS, he took his direction from the Soviet Russia Division, not Angleton. He allowed as how Angleton could have impacted the station's operations at one remove, by influencing the direction it got from the Soviet Russia Division. But Mr. Garbler does not believe this was much of a factor: "I did not perceive his [Angleton's] hand." Nor, to the best of Mr. Garbler's knowledge, did Angleton run any agents or assets in the Soviet Union during Garbler's tenure as COS. The only exception (though Mr. Garbler does not view it as such) was the single instance -- recounted at length in *Molehunt* -- where Angleton had requested that Garbler service a dead-drop in Moscow where a message might be left by a FBI asset who had returned to the Soviet Union from the United States. Mr. Garbler's account of this episode closely paralleled the version in *Molehunt*; he also offered that the asset in question was either "Tophat" or "Fedora," but that he couldn't quite recall which was which after all these years. Mr. Garbler made clear that he did not consider this episode a genuine case of Angleton running agents in the Soviet Union. As Mr. Garbler sees it, the asset in question was an FBI asset and Angleton -- in his capacity as CIA liaison with the FBI -- was merely attempting to comply with a request from the Bureau that the Agency facilitate their staying in touch with their asset when he returned to the Soviet Union. Mr. Garbler stated that he regarded this instance as an "informal" association with Angleton. He stated that he did not inform the Soviet Russia Division of this episode, and that this was because Angleton had made it clear to him that this operation was to be very tightly held. At the same time as he disavowed knowing of any Angleton agents in the Soviet Union, Mr. Garbler acknowledged that Angleton "was not above that sort of thing." While

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<sup>8</sup> See *Molehunt*, p. 51. I recounted the anecdote to Garbler from memory; I did not locate it in the book and confront him with it in black and white.

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conceding the theoretical possibility that Angleton ran agents in the Soviet Union while he (Garbler) was COS, Mr. Garbler left me with the strong impression that he thought this possibility unlikely. When asked if there were any back-channel means of communication between Headquarters and the Moscow station, Mr. Garbler stated that there none that he was aware of, though he volunteered that there was always a possibility that some of the other CIA officers at the station communicated independently with the Soviet Russia Division when they traveled back to the United States, or when their tour of duty took them elsewhere. (In this context, I took "independently" to mean without Garbler's knowledge or supervision as COS). Finally, Mr. Garbler had no recollection of John McVickar, Richard Snyder, Marie Cheatham or Verna Deane Brown, and so could offer nothing on the issue of whether any of them had supplied information to the station.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Snyder left Moscow in July of 1961; McVickar in September of 1961 -- that is, prior to Garbler's arrival at the embassy. I am unaware of when Cheatham and Brown left Moscow. In any case, Garbler did not remember any of them.

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**Oswald** - Mr. Garbler made very clear from the outset of the interview that he had never heard of Lee Harvey Oswald prior to the assassination of President Kennedy. Similarly, he stated that he had never seen Oswald at the embassy or anywhere else in the Soviet Union. No one had ever discussed Oswald with him, or mentioned Oswald's name to him, prior to the assassination. Nor does he have any recollection of ever being asked about Oswald *after* the assassination. To the best of his knowledge, Oswald never met with any CIA officers during his visits to the embassy, though Mr. Garbler allowed as how it was theoretically possible that one of his officers could have spontaneously met Oswald in their cover capacities during the latter's 1962 visit to the embassy.<sup>10</sup> If such an encounter did take place, however, Mr. Garbler was never informed of it. In short, to the best of Mr. Garbler's knowledge, the station had no contact with Oswald at any time during the latter's stay in the Soviet Union. Mr. Garbler has no knowledge of any CIA officers (including non-station officers visiting the Soviet Union) ever making contact with Oswald in the Soviet Union. The station did not monitor Oswald in Minsk, Moscow or anywhere else, according to Mr. Garbler. Finally, Mr. Garbler was in London on November 22, 1963. He received a message to call the London COS, who told him that Headquarters wanted Garbler to return to Moscow ASAP in light of the President's assassination. Mr. Garbler returned to Moscow the next day, November 23rd, where he found embassy staff "confused" and "concerned." Mr. Garbler thought this was a very reasonable state of affairs, given the uncertainty in many people's minds at the time about what the assassination might mean for Soviet-American relations.

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<sup>10</sup> In this context, it must be remembered that Garbler maintains that there were no CIA officers in the embassy prior to his arrival in November of 1961. Therefore, the only known Oswald visit during which any theoretical contact could have taken place was the 1962 visit, shortly before Oswald's departure with his family to the United States.

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**Embassy Details, 1959** - Mr. Garbler stated that the embassy could be characterized as having three wings: a central wing, a north wing and a south wing. The central wing housed the embassy's offices and had ten floors, or nine floors and an attic, depending on how one chose to characterize the top floor.<sup>11</sup> The north and south wings, says Mr. Garbler, had no more than five or six floors, and housed the residences of those employees who lived on-site. The north wing housed officers, according to Mr. Garbler, while the south wing housed other embassy personnel. Mr. Garbler lived on the third floor of the north wing. Mr. Garbler said the north wing contained some 12-15 apartments which were "very spacious" and "very comfortable." Mr. Garbler's recollection is that there was no intermingling of office and residential space: the central wing was all office space; the north and south wings were strictly residential. Mr. Garbler's office was on the 10th floor (or attic), where the offices of the military attaches were located.<sup>12</sup> The security office, according to Mr. Garbler, was located on the 9th floor, as was the embassy's "secure room" or "bubble". This secure room, or bubble, was, according to Mr. Garbler, the only place in the embassy where a classified conversation could be safely held. All other floors and offices, as well as the telephone system, were assumed to be tapped or bugged by the Soviets. This made internal communication inside the embassy laborious and helped account for the extreme compartmentalization of information inside the embassy. Mr. Garbler declined to draw a sketch of the ground floor/consular area of the embassy on the grounds that his recollection of it was so imprecise as to make such an effort worthless.

Similarly, he had no information to offer on the physical layout of the consular offices (how many offices, how many desks and where they were, etc.) or job responsibilities of any consular staff (again, Snyder and McVickar had left the embassy before Mr. Garbler arrived in November of 1961).

Mr. Garbler stated that there was no physical impediment to an embassy visitor walking to the elevators on the ground floor and getting in to go to an upper floor. But in the unlikely event that no one in the consular area intercepted such a visitor, Mr. Garbler said that in any case military guards were generally posted by the elevator doors on the upper floors. Mr. Garbler stated that it would be "highly unusual" for an embassy visitor to be taken to an upper floor. The only circumstance he

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<sup>11</sup> Relative to numbers of floors, intermingling or non-intermingling of office and residential space, secure nature of the upper floors, etc., Mr. Garbler's recollections differ significantly from those of Mr. Idar Rimestad, who I interviewed previous to Mr. Garbler. For what it is worth, the author would judge Mr. Garbler's recollections as crisper, and as offered more quickly and less tentatively than Mr. Rimestad's. To that extent, all other things being equal, I would give greater weight to Mr. Garbler's recollections where his and Mr. Rimestad's differ.

<sup>12</sup> Rimestad stated there were only eight floors to the embassy, but his recollection was consistent with Garbler's insofar as Rimestad, after some reflection, believed that the top floor was allocated to the military attaches.



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could recall which might have generated an exception to the rule would be if the parents of someone stationed on one of the upper floors of the embassy visited Moscow to see their children . (Mr. Garbler proffered this example tentatively, as a possible generic exception to the rule, not as a specific recollection.) Mr. Garbler stressed the relative inviolability of the upper floors by noting that it was very rare for even the spouses of embassy employees to make an appearance in the offices of the upper floors.

Near the close of our interview, I asked Mr. Garbler if he would look at the Foreign Service lists of Moscow embassy employees and identify those who were CIA officers. He declined to do so, whereupon I reassured him that the Review Board's authorizing statute requires that the CIA be given an opportunity to review any Agency equities contained in our interview, and that the CIA would have an opportunity to ask the Board to protect any names the Agency thought sensitive. Mr. Garbler still declined to identify any names, making clear that he did not trust the Agency to make that kind of determination for him. I pointed out to Mr. Garbler that there were several names of CIA officers at the Moscow station in *Molehunt*, and that he had clearly cooperated with author David Wise in that book's writing. He acknowledged that there were names of CIA officers in the book, but that David Wise had not gotten those names from him.<sup>13</sup> Mr. Garbler stated that it wasn't always easy to predict the consequences of releasing a CIA officer's name, and that as a matter of personal policy he preferred not to take any chances. He recounted having contributed a photograph (from his time in Berlin in the 1950's) to a book authored by his wife Florence (*CIA Wife*). He stated that he was subsequently criticized for this action, and cited the episode as an example of how sensitive disclosure issues can be.

Finally, Mr. Garbler volunteered the information that, at the very end of his time at CIA, he had been assigned liaison duties with the House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA). This was news to me, and we subsequently chatted for a few minutes about the HSCA and its work. Mr. Garbler's retirement date is listed as December 31, 1977 in *Molehunt*, which is consistent with his statement that he had retired before the Committee finished its investigation.

Also toward the close of the interview, I asked Mr. Garbler whether the issue of the assassination of

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<sup>13</sup> Garbler stated that David Wise had stayed for a week in a guest room at the Garbler residence during the author's research for *Molehunt*. Garbler indicated that Wise had repeatedly tried to get Garbler to identify specific names of CIA officers, and that Garbler had just as repeatedly refused. Notwithstanding, Garbler expressed a high opinion of Wise and his writings on intelligence issues.

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President Kennedy had been raised at all at the time of his testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee, re: the so-called "Mole Relief Act" (Intelligence Authorization Act of 1981). Mr. Garbler stated that it had not.

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