22 March 1977

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Comments on an Associated Press Article "Ex-CIA Aide Doubts Oswald Link to Cuba", Published in the Washington Post of 17 March 1977.

[a] "The man who headed covert CIA operations in Mexico City in 1963 says Lee Harvey Oswald neither asked for nor received any aid from the Cubans or Russians in assassinating President Kennedy.

[b] "In fact, David Atlee Philips writes in 'The Night Watch', none of the CIA personnel in Mexico City had ever heard of Oswald, and were unaware that he had defected to the Soviet Union, married a Russian, and then returned to the United States.

[c] "CIA surveillance, Philips wrote, showed that Oswald visited the Soviet Embassy in an attempt to return to Russia and wanted to go via Cuba.

[d] "He said a file check with Washington normally would have been instituted, but all the agents were so busy they did not get around to it until the wife of an agent took it upon herself to compose the cable.

[e] "Even then, he said, she mistook Oswald's middle name as 'Henry' and relayed a faulty physical description of him.

[f] "The reason for this, Phillips said, was that the wife had not read about Oswald but 'heard' about him - presumably from some clandestine source - and was working phonetically."

Overall comment: The above article is based upon Phillips' book, The Night Watch, and apparently not on public statements made by Phillips. The writer of the article has extracted certain details from the book and then put them together to fit his own fancy. Specific comments on each paragraph follow.

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Paragraph [a]: Phillips statement is somewhat strong. So far as we know Oswald did not seek any assistance from the Soviets or the Cubans in setting up an assassination operation against President Kennedy. Physical and technical surveillance of personnel of the Cuban and Soviet Embassies revealed no unusual contacts of operational interest; however, Oswald himself was not under surveillance and he was in Mexico City from the morning of 27 September until the morning of 2 October 1963.

An excerpt from a CI Staff study dated 2 May 1975 points up the fact that Oswald's activities in Mexico City were not covered completely. [It should be pointed out that Oswald was not under Agency investigation before the President's assassination.] What he did when not at the Cuban or Soviet Consulates or calling them on the telephone remains unknown to this day.

> "From all credible evidence known to this time (none, incidentally, added since the exhaustively unique work of the Warren Commission), Lee Harvey Oswald spent four (4) full days and two (2) partial days - about 116 hours in all - in Mexico City from about 10:00 a.m. 27 September 1963 to about 8:30 a.m. 2 October 1963. His place of residence was a small commercial traveler hotel, not frequented by 'gringos' - the Hotel Commercio - where he was registered under alias.* Exhaustive and detailed interviews and interrogation by the Mexican authorities and the FBI, after the assassination, established that in the recollection of all hotel personnel he left early and returned late each day of his stay.
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> [* Oswald's last name appears as "Lee" in three places in connection with his trip to Mexico City. His tourist card was typed by the Mexican Consulate in New Orleans, "Lee, Harvey Oswald." However, the comma seems to have been a clerical error, since Oswald signed both the application and the card itself, "Lee H. Oswald." Oswald himself signed the register at the hotel in Mexico City as "Lee, Harvey Oswald," but since the error is identical to that on the tourist card and since he revealed the remainder of his name, "Harvey Oswald," it is possible that Oswald inserted the comma to conform to the tourist card, or that the earlier mistake suggested a new pseudonym to Oswald which he decided to continue. Source: Warren Report, p. 314.]

"Assuming, and allowing for the fact of late arrival and early departure; that he slept one-third of the time of his stay (38 or 39 hours), there remain some 78 hours of activity to be accounted for. Overall, CIA's information can account solely for very brief periods during 27, 28 September and 1 October. All coverage by CIA during the entire period was technical. The Station had no live source (living agent) coverage either unilateral or from Mexican liaison."

[Memorandum for: Deputy Chief, Operations Staff, dated 2 May 1975, from Raymond G. Rocca; Subject: Review of Agency Holdings regarding photograph of Unidentified Individual in Mexico City published by the Warren Commission.]

Paragraph [b]: This statement is accurate. The station had known nothing about Oswald until his name appeared in the 1 October 1963 intercept of a telephone call to the Soviet Consulate in which the caller identified himself as "Lee Oswald."

Paragraph [c]: This paragraph is misleading. Having already said that "none of the CIA personnel in Mexico City had ever heard of Oswald," how is it that "CIA surveillance showed that Oswald visited (emphasis added) the Soviet Embassy in an attempt to return to Russia and wanted to go via Cuba?" This statement would appear to imply that the Station had set up a physical surveillance of Oswald during his stay in Mexico City. Instead of making reference to "CIA surveillance" Phillips would have served the Agency better by referring to Silvia Duran's testimony as given in the Warren Report. The Agency is left with trying to explain how we could have a surveillance on Oswald when the Station did not know who Oswald was until it received a cable from Headquarters giving them the information [DIR 74830, 10 October 1963.]

Paragraphs [d] and [e]: The following information is taken from the CI Study of 2 May 1975 (cited above):

". . .the voice intercept and photographic coverage was not (and normally is not) processed in 'real time'. The means of acquisition and the volume of information precludes anything but the spot reporting of items judged by the monitor to be more than ordinary interest and, therefore, noted in summary logs. Full texts of selected items require consultation of the tape and either a full transcription or full translation or both. . . One of the 'triggers' that normally

operates to focus and accelerate more speedy review and reporting of this kind of raw intelligence is the mention of a name. This was precisely what occurred in the second of two conversations on 1 October with the Soviet Embassy, during which the speaker said he was 'Lee Oswald.' It was this information reported by the Station to Headquarters in its first indication on Oswald on 8 October 1963.

"The Mexico Station did one more thing in its 8 October voice intercepts: it coupled the data with descriptive information it had acquired from a sensitive collateral source - a photograph of a male individual, apparently an American (emphasis added), who was observed entering the Soviet Embassy on 1 October. The Station reported this detail on the 8th as a matter of coincident fact. The Station did not assert or suggest that the data deduced from the photograph was in fact Oswald, or indeed, was in any way related to Oswald."

Mexico Station reported to Headquarters on 8 October (received in Headquarters at 0043Z 9 October) the following initial information on Oswald.

(1) On 1 October 1963, an American male who spoke Russian and said his name Lee Oswald (phonetic), stated he was at SovEmb on 28 September when he spoke with a consul whom he believed to be Valeriy Vladimirovich Kostikov. Subject asked the Soviet guard [Ivan] Obyedkov, who answered, if there was anything new regarding a telegram to Washington. Obyedkov upon checking said nothing had been received yet, but the request had been sent.

(2) Mexico Station said it had photos of a male who appeared (emphasis added) to be an American entering the Soviet Embassy at 1216 hours, leaving 1222 on 1 October. Apparent age 35, athletic build, circa 6 feet, receding hairline, balding top. Wore khakis and sport shirt.

(3) No local dissemination was being made by the Station.

[Cablese has been rendered here into readable English, without substantive changes or omissions.]

[MEXI-6453 (IN 36017), 9 October 1963. This cable was originated in the field by [redacted] (whose pseudonym appears on the copy of the cable in the Mexico Station's file on Lee Harvey Oswald), the wife of [redacted], a staff employee, and, in October 1963, was chief of Soviet operations in Mexico City. [redacted] tour of duty in Mexico was from about May 1959 until early 1964.) His wife, at the time, was a contract employee of the Station; before that she had been a desk officer in the Soviet Division.

The use of the term "agent" is inappropriate in this article; however, since Phillips does not use such a term to describe an Agency employee in his book, it must be assumed that the writer of the article is responsible for using it.]

On 10 October 1963 at 2012Z time the WH Division responsible for action disseminated this report to the Department of State, the FBI, and the Navy Department by routine electrical transmission, adding some collateral details drawn from a preliminary file review:

> (1) On 1 October 1963 a reliable sensitive source in Mexico reported that an American male, who identified himself as Lee Oswald, contacted the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City inquiring whether the Embassy had received any news concerning a telegram which had been sent to Washington. The American was described as approximately 35 years old, with an athletic build, about 6 feet tall, with a "receding" hairline.
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> (2) It is believed that Oswald may be identical to Lee Henry [sic] Oswald, born on 18 October 1939 in New Orleans, Louisiana, a former U.S. Marine who defected to the Soviet Union in October 1959 and later made arrangements through the United States Embassy in Moscow to return to the United States with his Russian-born wife, Marina Nikolaevna Pusakova [sic] and their child.
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> (3) The information in paragraph (1) is being disseminated to your representatives in Mexico City. Any further information received on this subject will be furnished you. This information is being made available to the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

Although the reaction of the Headquarters desk was "by the book" and in good time, there were a number of errors in this advisory to the departments which, on the record, were concerned with the Oswald case:

a. Oswald's middle name was misgiven: "Henry" for Harvey. The reason for this mistake is simplicity itself. The sheet opening the file on Oswald on 9 December 1960 had been erroneously inscribed "Oswald, Lee Henry." That sheet - unchanged except for the notation of the error - is still the first sheet in the Oswald file.

[Comment: It is evident from this information that "the wife of an agent". . .mistook Oswald's middle name as 'Henry', as Phillips explains it, is inaccurate. The mistake was made in Headquarters in 1960.]

b. His wife's maiden name was mispelled: "Pusahova" for P r u s a k o v a.

Neither of these errors are significant (though they persist in the Headquarters communications throughout the month). [Comment: It should also be pointed out that for some unexplained reason, the desk did not disseminate the information that Oswald had indicated in his telephone call to the Soviet Embassy that he had been to the Embassy on 28 September. The Mexico City Station, however, did pass this information locally to the Legal Attache, et al.]

More important was:

c. Paragraph (2) of the Mexico Station's report, which dealt with a concurrent, but separate, phenomenon, the description of an individual observed going into and out of the Soviet Embassy, had been locked on to Lee Oswald as an alleged descriptive fact. The Station's qualification, "appeared to be an American," was transformed in the flat designation of the unidentified individual as "The American."

There can be no question that this misreading of the Mexico Station report was an analyst's error which escaped detection in the coordination before release: the descriptive details attributed to Oswald were so far off the mark as to be immediately recognizable as such by the recipients in

Headquarters, among whom both the Navy and FBI had photographs of Oswald. (In partial explanation, if not exculpation, be it recalled that as of that moment CIA had no photograph of Oswald in Headquarters or in Mexico City to refer to.)

Confirmation of this judgment is provided by the contents of the cable composed by the same analyst and sent as of 2209Z time (two hours later) to Mexico Station, referencing its 8 October cable:

> (1) Lee Oswald who called SovEmb 1 October probably identical Lee Henry [sic] Oswald born 18 October 1939, New Orleans, Louisiana, former radar operator in United States Marines who defected to USSR in October 1959. Oswald is five feet ten inches, one hundred sixty-five pounds, light brown wavy hair, blue eyes.
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> (2) On 31 October 1959 he attempted to renounce his United States citizenship to the United States Embassy in Moscow, indicating he had applied for Soviet citizenship. On 13 February the US Embassy Moscow received an undated letter from Oswald postmarked Minsk on 5 February 1961 in which subject indicated he desired the return of his US passport as he wished to return to USA if "we could come to some agreement concerning the dropping of any legal proceedings against me." On 8 July on his own initiative he appeared at the Embassy with his wife to see about his return to States. Subject stated that he actually had never applied for Soviet citizenship and that his application at that time had been to remain in USSR and for a temporary extension of his tourist visa pending outcome of his request. This application, according to Oswald, contained no reference to Soviet citizenship. Oswald stated that he had been employed since 13 January 1960 in Belorussian radio and TV factory in Minsk where he worked as a metal worker in research shop. Oswald was married on 30 April 1961 to Marina Nikolaevna Pusakova [sic], a dental technician born 17 July 1941, USSR. No Headquarters traces. He attempted to arrange for his wife to join him in Moscow so she could appear at Embassy for visa interview. His American passport was returned to him. US Embassy Moscow stated twenty months of realities of life in Soviet Union had clearly had a maturing effect on Oswald.

(3) Latest Headquarters information was an FBI report dated May 1962 saying the FBI had determined Oswald is still a US citizen and both he and his Soviet wife have exit permits and Department of State had given approval for their travel with their infant child to USA.

(4) The Station should pass the information of reference [its 8 October cable] and paragraph (1) above to the Embassy, the FBI, the Navy, and I&NS locally. The information given above as paragraphs (2) and (3) originated with the FBI.

(5) Reference and possible identification being disseminated to Headquarters of FBI, State, Navy, and I&NS. Please keep Headquarters advised on any further contacts or positive identification of Oswald.

Headquarters feedback to Mexico City of Oswald's correct description should have been sufficient, in view of the incongruities with the details deduced from the photograph of the unidentified male, to keep these two matters apart as investigative facts. But things did not work out that way.

Mexico Station on 15 October 1963 asked Headquarters to "please pouch a photo of Oswald." Headquarters electrically delivered to the Department of the Navy the following message on 24 October 1963:

"Lee Henry [sic] Oswald. . .

"It is requested that you forward to this office as soon as possible two copies of the most recent photograph you have of subject. We will forward them to our representative in Mexico, who will attempt to determine if the Lee Oswald in Mexico City and subject are the same individual."

No photograph had been received by CIA by 22 November 1963.

Paragraph [f]: "The wife of an agent" had not made a mistake when she prepared the 8 October cable to Headquarters. She was working from a transcript of the 1 October telephone call or from a resume of the telephone conversation. In both instances, the caller to the Soviet Embassy identified himself only as "Lee Oswald" without, apparently, giving his middle name. The transcribers spelled out the name noting, in parentheses, that the spelling was phonetic.

Conclusion: The article as well as that portion of The Night Watch dealing with Oswald in Mexico is misleading and inaccurate. Phillips, for reasons known only to himself, is trying to reconstruct from memory an event which happened almost fourteen years ago without benefit of documentary evidence held in Agency files. I am told that Phillips' book was reviewed here in the Agency before it was published; if so, whoever reviewed the section on Oswald knew less than Phillips.

R. B. Holmes
Russell B. Holmes

cc: Inspector General
Mr. Friedlander