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Donald E. Wilkes Jr.

University of Georgia School of Law, wilkes@uga.edu

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LEE HARVEY OSWALD AT

AGE 62

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Author: Donald E. Wilkes, Jr., Professor of Law, University of Georgia School of Law.

On Nov. 22, 1963, at precisely 12:30.47 p.m., the target car, an open presidential limousine, entered the Elm Street kill zone in Dealey Plaza and came under murderous rifle fire from hidden snipers.

In 1964, however, the Warren Commission issued its Report on the JFK assassination, claiming that there had been a single assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, a left-wing lone nut, acting entirely on his own.

If he had not been murdered by Jack Ruby while a handcuffed prisoner inside a police station in the presence of numerous police, Oswald might have been celebrating his 62nd birthday last October 18.

Today, 38 years after his death, there is a large amount of new information on Oswald that was unavailable to the Warren Commission; and supplementing this new information is additional factual data on Oswald that is not new but was overlooked or dismissed by the Commission.

As a result, we can now see that the Warren Report's assessment of Oswald was erroneous. Oswald was neither a mental case nor a loner; he was not a left-leaning Marxist; and if he was an assassin, he was not acting alone.

Some of the new information comes from official government investigations. In 1976 the U. S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence issued a report criticizing the performance of American intelligence agencies in their investigation of the JFK assassination. In 1979 the U. S. House of Representatives Select Committee on Assassinations issued staff reports, including "Conspiracy Witnesses in Dealey Plaza," "Oswald-Tippit Connections," and "Anti-Castro Activities and Organizations and Lee Harvey Oswald in New Orleans." It also issued a final report which concluded that JFK was probably assassinated as a result of a conspiracy and that the

Warren Commission, the FBI, and the CIA had failed to adequately investigate the possibility of conspiracy.

Three early books provide an arsenal of facts on Oswald: Leo Sauvage, The Oswald Affair (1966); Harold Weisberg, Oswald in New Orleans (1967); and Jim Garrison, A Heritage of Stone (1970).

Other authoritative books on Oswald include: Edward Epstein, Legend: The Secret World of Lee Harvey Oswald (1978); Jim Garrison, On the Trail of the Assassins (1988); Philip Melanson, Spy Saga: Lee Harvey Oswald and U. S. Intelligence (1990); John Newman, Oswald and the CIA (1995); and Robert Groden, The Search for Lee Harvey Oswald (1995). Seth Kantor's book, Who Was Jack Ruby? (1978), furnishes the best account of Oswald's murder.

Based on the information now available, we now know that there never were good reasons for thinking Oswald mentally deranged. An updated, more realistic evaluation is given by Melanson: Oswald was "a poised, rather resourceful political manipulator who surely lived one of the most eventful, intrigue-filled lives imaginable--albeit a very short one."

We also now know that Oswald was no loner; he was often in the company of other persons, including numerous persons with intelligence connections. Indeed, it is almost certain that Oswald was an intelligence agent. As Melanson observes, to deny that Oswald was a spy "is to believe that his life was structured by endless coincidences" and that "his frequent and unusual interactions with government agencies lacked any overarching significance." Furthermore, to believe that Oswald was a spy for Russia or Cuba, rather than an American intelligence agent, requires us, as Melanson notes, to "posit that virtually all the agencies of U. S. intelligence and law enforcement were so completely ineffective when it came to Oswald that they must be imagined not just to be incompetent but comatose."

We also can now see that Oswald's supposed affiliations with the political left were part of what is known in the world of spies as a "legend"--a cover story used to conceal clandestine activities. Oswald's pro-Communist, pro-Castro activities in the months preceding the assassination were a hollow facade; they were the result of what in the lingo of spooks is called "sheepdipping"--manipulated behavior intended to create a desired image. The men Oswald actually associated with on a daily basis were far-rightists with intelligence and law enforcement backgrounds, including the mysterious George DeMohrenschildt (CIA), the violence-prone Guy Banister (FBI), and the sinister David Ferrie (CIA), described by someone who knew him as "a dangerous individual capable of almost anything."

(Banister died of a heart attack a year after the assassination; Ferrie, leaving two typed suicide notes, died of natural causes in 1967 when he was about to be arrested for conspiring to kill JFK; DeMohrenschildt killed himself with a shotgun in 1977, shortly before a scheduled interview with House Assassinations Committee investigators.)

Finally, from current information it is obvious that, even assuming Oswald was an assassin, he was not a solitary assassin. There is overwhelming evidence that shots were fired at JFK from more than one direction. The House Assassinations Committee, using a forgotten Dallas police tape recording, concluded that scientific acoustical evidence established a high probability that two gunmen fired at the motorcade; witnesses to the assassination saw puffs of smoke emitted on the grassy knoll, where the acoustical evidence indicated a shot was fired; and the Zapruder film reveals that JFK's fatal head shot came not from behind (where Oswald was in the School Book Depository), but from the front right (where the grassy knoll is).

There are other important facts about Oswald which are now well-established:

1. While he was in the Marines, Oswald was stationed for a time in Japan at the Atsugi Air Force Base where he had a top secret clearance and from which CIA U-2 spy planes flew missions over Russia and China; see Philip Melanson, Spy Saga: Lee Harvey Oswald and U. S. Intelligence, pp. 7-10.
2. A curious entry in Oswald's Marine medical records for Sept. 16, 1958 states that he was being treated for gonorrhea and that the ailment originated "[i]n the line of duty, not due to his own misconduct;" see Robert Groden, The Search for Lee Harvey Oswald, p. 33.
3. In 1973 Oswald's military intelligence file was secretly destroyed by the Department of Defense; see House Assassinations Committee Final Report, pp. 223-24.
4. In 1978 James Wilcott, a former CIA finance officer, testified before the House Assassinations Committee that he had handled the funding for a CIA project in which Oswald had been recruited as a CIA spy; see Jim Garrison, On the Trail of the Assassins, p. 49.
5. On Sept. 17, 1963, when Oswald went to the Mexican consulate in New Orleans to apply for and receive a tourist permit no. 24085, the person in line immediately in front of him, the person who received permit no. 24084, was William Gaudet, a longtime CIA contact agent; see John Newman, Oswald and the CIA, pp. 346-47.
6. Oswald's "Historic Diary," which covers a period exceeding two years and on which the Warren Commission relied in finding that Oswald was a misfit, was examined by handwriting experts retained by the House Assassinations

Committee, who found that the diary had been written within a short period of time--either all at one time or during a few consecutive writing sessions; see Philip Melanson, Spy Saga: Lee Harvey Oswald and U. S. Intelligence, pp. 7-10.

7. Oswald's murder was almost certainly a mob hit; see Seth Kantor, Who Was Jack Ruby?, but that's a topic for another article on another day.