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Donald E. Wilkes Jr.

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

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The Many Mysteries of Lee Harvey Oswald

By [Donald E. Wilkes, Jr.](#)

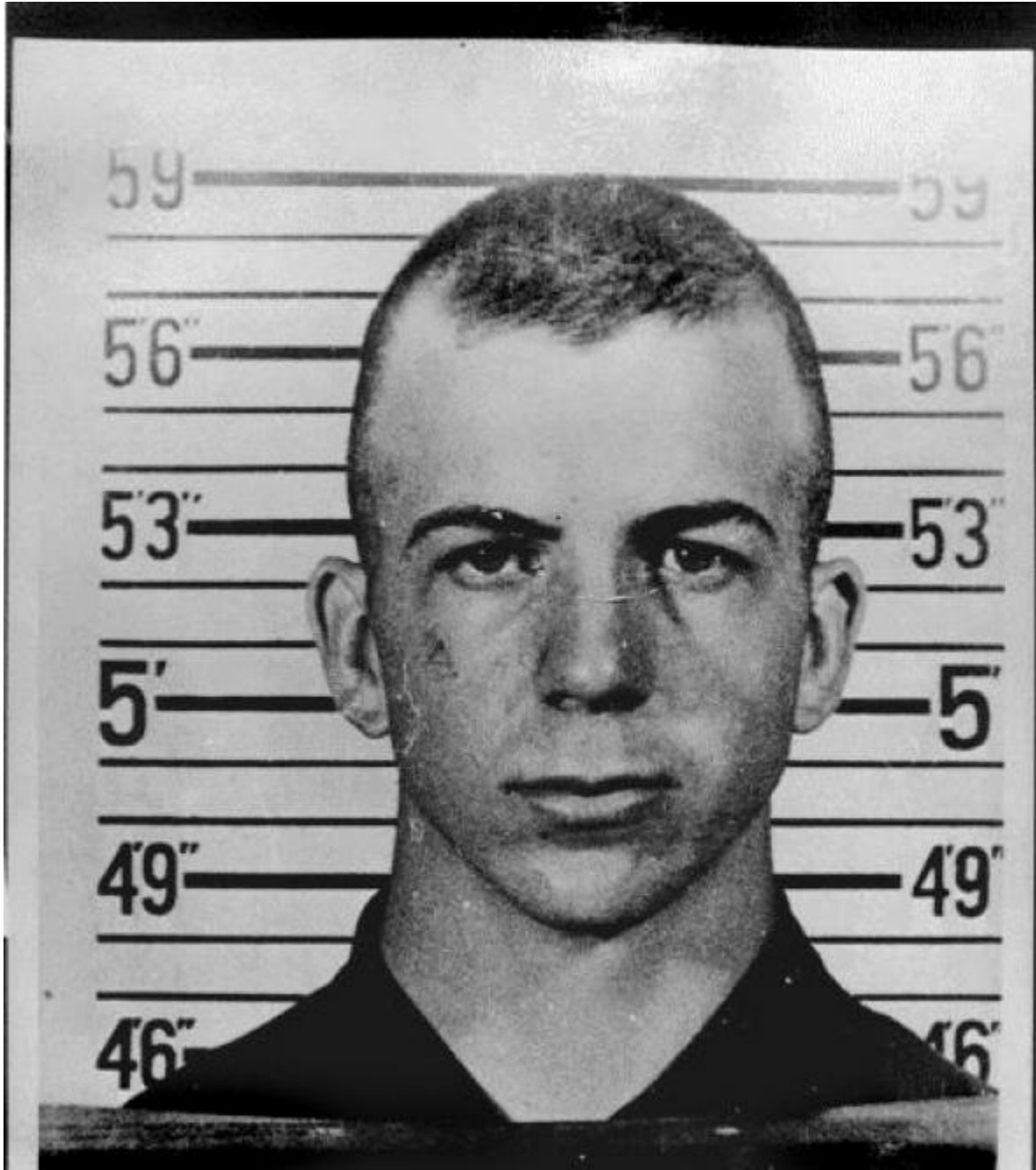


Photo Credit: [U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on Assassinations](#)

Lee Harvey Oswald as a Marine.

Oswald is the most complicated individual ever to be charged in a major political assassination case in the United States.—Philip H. Melanson, *Spy Saga: Lee Harvey Oswald and U.S. Intelligence* (1990).

President Lyndon B. Johnson famously remarked that Lee Harvey Oswald, the 24-year-old ex-Marine accused of assassinating Johnson's predecessor, John F. Kennedy, in Dallas, TX, on Nov. 22, 1963, "was quite a mysterious fellow."

Johnson was right. Even now, over 50 years since Oswald was murdered under suspicious circumstances while in Dallas police custody on live, nationwide television, mysteries continue to abound with respect to the full truth about his political beliefs and activities, his military service, his defection to the USSR, his stays in Ft. Worth and Dallas, his sojourn in New Orleans in the spring and summer of 1963, his alleged visit to Mexico City in September 1963, and the friendly working relationships he had with, and the helpful assistance he received from, various persons with law enforcement or intelligence agency backgrounds or Mafia ties.

Oswald an Undercover U.S. Operative?

The best explanation for the continued existence of these mysteries is that Oswald was some sort of undercover intelligence operative or a secret informant for a law enforcement agency, or both. If Oswald was an intelligence or law enforcement asset, it would be no surprise that his actions are clothed in mystery. Undercover government operatives, especially intelligence ones, operate in a smoke-and-mirrors world of disinformation, mystification and secrecy, "where," in the words of the late Prof. Philip H. Melanson, who did extensive research on Oswald's connections to the U.S. intelligence community, "deception is more the norm than the exception, [and] where valid data is difficult to unearth."

Was Lee Harvey Oswald a U.S. clandestine operative?

The answer, according to Prof. Melanson, is yes. "Lee Harvey Oswald spent nearly all of his adult life working for U.S. intelligence—most likely for the CIA—as an agent-provocateur. He did so in both the domestic and international arenas, right up to his [alleged] involvement in the assassination... To conclude... that... Oswald was not an intelligence agent of any kind is to believe that his life was structured by endless coincidences and heavy doses of good and bad luck, that the pattern of mysteries and anomalies that dominated his adult existence were random and innocent... It forces the conclusion that his frequent and unusual interactions with government agencies lacked any overarching significance."

Melanson also noted that to maintain that Oswald was a foreign (as opposed to an American) intelligence agent, "one must posit that virtually all of the agencies of U.S. intelligence were so completely ineffective when it came to Oswald that they must be imagined to be not just incompetent but comatose."

Melanson's assessment is widely accepted today, except among the Oswald-was-the-sole-assassin diehards (also known as Lone-Nutters). Many if not most responsible JFK assassination

scholars now believe it is a near-certainty that Oswald was some sort of undercover operative for American intelligence agencies (as well as an FBI informant).

The view that Lee Harvey Oswald was a U.S. intelligence agency asset is not new. The first reputable researcher to write about Oswald's possible links to the CIA was the late Harold Weisberg, one of the best of the first generation of JFK assassination scholars, and author of the landmark *Oswald in New Orleans: A Case for Conspiracy with the CIA* (1967).

The CIA and other U.S. intelligence agencies lied when they told first the Warren Commission and later the U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on Assassinations that prior to the assassination they had no relationships or contacts of any kind with Oswald. Indeed, ex-CIA agent John Newman who, like Melanson, has carefully investigated Oswald's connections to U.S. intelligence organizations, says in his book *Oswald and the CIA* (1995), that "[i]t is safe to state now... that American intelligence agencies were far more interested in Oswald than the public has been led to believe," that "the CIA had a keen operational interest in Lee Harvey Oswald from the day he defected to the Soviet Union in 1959 until the day he was murdered in the basement of the Dallas city jail," and that "we can say with some authority that the CIA was spawning a web of deception about Oswald weeks before the president's murder..." Unlike Melanson, however, Newman doubts that Oswald actually worked for the CIA, believing instead that the CIA "appears to have had serious operational interest in Oswald and there probably was a relationship, though not that of 'agent' or 'informant.'"

The FBI also lied when it denied Oswald had been one of their informants.

It is worth noting that if Oswald was an intelligence asset, it would follow that, as a low-level operative who had pretended to be pro-communist and pro-Castro and whose public image was that of a radical Marxist leftist, he would be an ideal target for a frame-up by his handlers if they were so disposed. Stated differently, Oswald would, in the words of John Newman, "have been a tempting target" for a frame-up if conspirators with connections to the intelligence community were plotting to kill JFK and looking for a false sponsor on whom to pin the blame.

Did Oswald Go Out of His Way to Incriminate Himself?

One of the mysteries that still surrounds Oswald is why, assuming he was the presidential assassin, he appears to have left behind him, in the words of Melanson, "a trail that any correspondence school gum-shoe could follow... a trail of self-implicating evidence..."

Here are just three examples of Oswald unnecessarily engaging in conduct that either strongly suggested he was guilty of assassinating JFK or made it extremely easy for others to identify him on the day of the assassination. Each example raises the same question: For what possible reason would a presidential assassin act so indescribably doltishly?

First, although it is a little-known fact, Warren Commission documents prove beyond doubt that at the time of his arrest less than two hours after the assassination Oswald was wearing on his left wrist a shiny sterling silver identification bracelet with his name on it! A taxi driver who drove Oswald after the assassination and who happened to make and collect identification bracelets,

was deposed by Warren Commission staff and testified about seeing the bracelet when Oswald sat next to him in the cab, and in his deposition a Dallas policeman testified that at the police station he removed from Oswald's wrist a bracelet with Oswald's name on it. Therefore, if the Warren Commission was right in proclaiming Oswald to be the single assassin, then this means that when Oswald set out to murder an American president he opted to wear an easy-to-spot bracelet with his name on it and that after the assassination he opted to continue wearing it. This is not only mysterious but unfathomable. Why in the world would a presidential assassin behave in such an astonishingly foolish manner?

Second, the Warren Report says that when Lee Harvey Oswald was arrested he had in his left hip pocket a wallet, which Dallas police seized while he was a prisoner in a police car transporting him to headquarters. In this wallet were valid identification documents in his name as well as two phony identification documents in the name of Alek James Hidell, a fictional person made up by Oswald. The Hidell name was allegedly an alias sometimes used by Oswald. The Report also says that an Italian carbine used to shoot JFK had been ordered by mail by a person who gave his name as "A. Hidell."

If, therefore, the Warren Commission was right in proclaiming Oswald to be the sole assassin, then this means that Oswald set out to murder the President of the United States while carrying a wallet bearing false identification in the name of the fictional person he had invented and utilized to procure the murder weapon. Once again, a presidential assassin is acting mysteriously and unfathomably.

"[I]f Oswald had ordered the rifle he allegedly used to assassinate the President under the name Hidell," JFK assassination researcher Hasan Yusuf sensibly asks, "why would he be carrying in his wallet a fake card with a photograph of him (and with the name Hidell on it) on the day of the assassination, when the only purpose it served was to incriminate him?"

Third, the Warren Report says that Lee Harvey Oswald used the Hidell alias to order both a carbine with which he assassinated JFK and a pistol with which he murdered Dallas police officer J. D. Tippit (who was shot after stepping out of his patrol car on a Dallas street around 45 minutes after the presidential assassination), and that when he purchased them Oswald had both weapons delivered to a post office box that he had rented in his own name. Once again, a presidential assassin is behaving mysteriously and unfathomably.

As JFK assassination blogger Bert J. Paulson comments: "The idea that Oswald would order the rifle and the revolver under the Hidell name, but have them delivered to his Post Office box under his real name, is truly absurd and bizarre. Now, obviously, the purpose of using an alias is to conceal the fact that he had purchased the weapons. So why in God's name would he have them delivered to his P.O. box?"

The most likely answer to questions about why it appears that for no apparent reason Oswald left behind him a swath of incriminating evidence is that he was not the presidential assassin and did not kill police officer Tippit; that instead he was an innocent person being framed by conspirators who intended to make him to be the patsy for both crimes; and that his apparently incriminating behavior was actually an indication of a frame-up. The conspirators, or corrupt

police in league with them, could, for example, have planted the false Hidell identification documents Dallas police said they found in Oswald's arrest wallet.

Oswald's Many Wallets

Then there are the mysteries involving the unusual number of wallets belonging to Oswald.

Unlike most adult males, Lee Harvey Oswald had four wallets. (In this article, as in the Warren Report and published Warren Commission exhibits, the terms "wallet" and "billfold" are used interchangeably.)

Let's list and discuss the four wallets.

First, there was the arrest wallet, FBI Exhibit B-1, which Dallas police said Oswald had in his pants pocket when they arrested him. This wallet contained valid identification papers in the name of Oswald as well as two forged identification documents in the name of the fictional Alek James Hidell. One of the Hidell documents was a Selective Service Notice of Classification Card, with Oswald's photo unnecessarily but conveniently attached to it. The other was a U.S. Marine Corps Certificate of Service Card.

Oswald's second wallet was a brown billfold, FBI Exhibit 114, found in a search of the house of Ruth Paine, a woman with whom Oswald's wife Marina was staying at the time of the assassination.

Oswald's third wallet, a red billfold, FBI Exhibit 382, was also found in the house of Ruth Paine.

Oswald's fourth wallet, a black plastic billfold, was found in the dresser drawer of Marina Oswald's bedroom at the Paine house. It contained \$170 in cash, allegedly left there by Lee Harvey Oswald when he departed for his workplace at the School Book Depository on the morning of Nov. 22, 1963. The Warren Report twice refers to this wallet as "his [Lee Harvey Oswald's] wallet." Oswald used it to store cash at home. The Secret Service catalogued the wallet as part of Marina Oswald's property, but this wallet was originally given to Lee Harvey Oswald by his mother and actually belonged to him.

Most men have one or perhaps two wallets. Oswald had four. Why? Once again, Oswald's behavior is enigmatic. But the mysteries about Oswald's wallets do not end here, for it may be that he had a *fifth* wallet, found at the scene of the murder of policeman Tippit.

The Tippit Murder Scene Wallet

In 1996, retired Dallas FBI agent James P. Hosty, Jr. published his book *Assignment: Oswald*, in which he asserted that a wallet belonging to Lee Harvey Oswald had been found at the scene of the murder of officer Tippit. This wallet, Hosty said, contained identification documents in the name of Lee Harvey Oswald, as well as identification documents in the name of the fictional Hidell. Hosty, who was not at the Tippit murder site, based his disclosure on what he had been told by another Dallas FBI agent, Bob Barrett, who had arrived at the Tippit murder scene soon

after the murder. According to Barrett, Dallas police did not find a wallet on Oswald when he was arrested and lied when they said they had. In fact, there never was an Oswald arrest wallet. The only Oswald wallet police seized on Nov. 22 (excluding the wallets found in the Paine home), according to Barrett, was the one at the site of the Tippit murder. In a 1996 interview, Barrett confirmed the version of events in Hosty's book, but added details. Neither Barrett nor Hosty, however, said anything in their sworn testimony to the Warren Commission about a wallet being found at the Tippit murder site.

There is in fact no mention of the discovery of the Tippit murder scene wallet in any of the testimony or reports made by the FBI or Dallas police, or in the records of the Warren Commission or the House Assassinations Committee. Barrett, however, never changed his story, even repeating it in a 2013 TV news segment (as explained below); and (as also explained below) at least one of the Dallas police officers who was at the Tippit murder site confirmed discovery of the wallet.

There can be no doubt that in fact a man's leather wallet was found by police at the scene of Tippit's murder. On the afternoon of Nov. 22, with police still there, Ron Reiland, a photographer employed by WFAA, the local ABC Dallas-Ft. Worth TV affiliate, took the only known motion picture film of the scene. His footage was broadcast on a WFAA news program that same afternoon. The footage shows that FBI agent Barrett was present. More importantly, the footage shows a Dallas police captain holding a wallet as he and another police officer inspect it. The wallet they were handling definitely was not Tippit's, because Tippit's billfold, along with Tippit's other effects, was retrieved by police at the hospital where the officer was pronounced dead, and taken to police headquarters and inventoried at the police identification bureau at 3:25 p.m. on Nov. 22. A photograph of the inventory sheet listing the billfold may be found in Dale K. Myers' 1998 book, *With Malice: Lee Harvey Oswald and the Murder of Officer J.D. Tippit*. Furthermore, photographs of the two wallets prove they are different wallets.

There is no indication that the wallet found at the Tippit murder scene belonged to any of the witnesses or bystanders there. The question, therefore, is whether the wallet depicted in Reiland's film was Oswald's.

Assuming that it was and that it was a different wallet from Oswald's arrest wallet, two possibilities arise. The first is that Oswald murdered officer Tippit and somehow left the wallet at the scene of the crime, which would mean that the wallet was circumstantial evidence that Oswald was the murderer. It would equally mean, however, that (1) Oswald had five wallets; (2) on the day he murdered a president and a policeman Oswald was carrying around two wallets, each of which contained false identity cards in the name of the fictitious person who ordered the weapons allegedly used to shoot the victims; and (3) Oswald, who was clever enough to murder a president and escape the assassination site undetected, was stupid enough to commit the colossal blunder of leaving one of those wallets behind after killing Tippit. The other possibility is that unknown persons murdered Tippit and that the wallet is a mock-up wallet planted at the scene in order to falsely incriminate Oswald.

Under either possibility, both Dallas police and the FBI must have engaged in a massive coverup conspiracy to conceal the fact that Oswald's wallet or what was purported to be Oswald's wallet

had been discovered at the Tippit murder site. Why would they do this? Why would they hide the fact that they had found at the location of the crime a key piece of evidence incriminating Oswald in the murder of a fellow police officer (and of a president)? Probably because, as researchers have concluded, law enforcement authorities would have realized that the existence of two Oswald wallets, one on Oswald's person and the other where Tippit was killed, both of which contained Hidell documents, would plainly suggest that Oswald was being framed.

Assuming, on the other hand, that Oswald was not carrying two wallets and that the wallet depicted on the news footage was not a mock-up, then the Dallas police claim that they seized his wallet from him shortly after his arrest must be false. Which means Dallas police perjured themselves when they testified before the Warren Commission and that they lied to the public. This is in effect what agent Barrett has alleged and cannot by any means be regarded as beyond the realm of possibility. There is, after all, photographic proof that police were in possession of a wallet at the Tippit murder scene, while there are no photographs showing that police conveying arrestee Oswald to the police station possessed a wallet they had taken from him. The only evidence that a wallet was seized from Oswald on his arrest is the testimony of Dallas police. It is, therefore, impossible to deny the existence of a wallet at the site of the Tippit murders, but perfectly possible that there was no Oswald arrest wallet because police lied about its existence.

New Proof that the Tippit Murder-Scene Wallet Was Oswald's?

In November 2013 there was an interesting development in regard to the Tippit murder-scene wallet. WFFA, the Dallas-Ft. Worth TV station, broadcast a news segment which claims to prove that there never was an Oswald arrest wallet; that the wallet found at the Tippit murder scene was Oswald's; and that the Tippit murder wallet contained both Oswald and Hidell identification documents. Therefore, according to the newscast's narrator, the Tippit murder scene wallet "is perhaps the strongest evidence yet that Lee Harvey Oswald murdered Dallas policeman J. D. Tippit." The [video](#) of that four-and-a-half minute news segment is on YouTube. The newscast was titled *Lee Harvey Oswald's or J. D. Tippit's Wallet? It's No Mystery*. Despite its title, however, it fails to resolve any lingering mysteries.

The claim of the 2013 news segment's narrator that a wallet found at the Tippit murder site "is the first hard evidence placing Oswald there that day" is based on the following.

First, FBI agent Barrett, now retired and described by the narrator as "the only man alive who saw Oswald's wallet at Tippit's murder [site]," is interviewed and repeats his story that, because it contained both Oswald and Hidell identification documents, he knows the wallet belonged to Oswald. Barrett repeats his previous assertions that no wallet was taken from Oswald when he was arrested. The Dallas police claim that a wallet was seized from Oswald upon his arrest is "hogwash," Barrett says. The newscast does not mention the fact that Barrett withheld these assertions from the Warren Commission. Nor does it mention the fact that, according to his own statements, Barrett knew Dallas police claims about seizing a wallet from Oswald's pocket were false but did nothing about it. Nor does it mention the fact that there is nothing new in Barrett's account.

Second, a written statement by Kenneth Croy, a former Dallas police reserve officer (now deceased) and the first policeman to arrive at the site of the Tippit murder, in which Croy asserts that he found Oswald's wallet there, is shown. "First on the scene[,] recovered Oswald's wallet there too," the Croy statement says. The newscast does not reveal that in his testimony before the Warren Commission Croy said nothing about finding a wallet and that Croy never filed any police reports saying he had found a wallet.

Third, the news segment features an interview with Farris Rookstool, a former FBI analyst who, like Barrett, thinks that it is not true that police seized a wallet from Oswald on his arrest. Rookstool has compared an FBI photograph of the alleged arrest wallet with the image of the wallet in the Reiland news footage and says the wallets are one and the same. "There is absolutely no doubt in my mind," Rookstool says, "that it [the wallet depicted in the Reiland film] is Oswald's wallet [i.e., the wallet in the FBI photograph]," and this, he claims, "puts him [Oswald] definitively at the scene of the crime" and therefore "proves that Oswald was at the scene of the policeman's murder."

There are three insurmountable problems with Rookstool's claims. First, even if it was conclusively established that the Tippit murder scene wallet was Oswald's, it would be only circumstantial evidence, and not definitive evidence, of Oswald's guilt. The wallet could have been planted. Second, without actually physically examining the Reiland film wallet itself, it is impossible to say that it is the alleged arrest wallet (which is now in the National Archives). Positively identifying the two wallets as being the same wallet, based on photographic evidence alone, is impossible, even if the two wallets look identical and were the same brand and the same style. Third, Rookstool's claim, based on comparison of photographs of the wallets, that the two wallets are the same is simply flat wrong. Comparing the photographs actually shows that the two wallets are different. The wallet in the FBI photograph, for example, appears wider than the wallet in the Reiland film. Dale K. Myers has thoroughly investigated this issue, even arranging for the wallet in the National Archives to be taken out of storage and re-photographed from angles matching the wallet in the Reiland film. Myers concludes that "the Oswald arrest wallet is *not* the same billfold seen in the WFAA newscast."

After informing us that the Tippit murder site wallet was Oswald's and that no wallet was seized from Oswald on his arrest, how does the 2013 WFAA newscast deal with the startling reality that, if the version of the facts set forth in the newscast is true, then numerous Dallas police officers (1) were dishonest and deceptive when they said nothing in their reports or to the Warren Commission about finding Oswald's wallet where Tippit was murdered, and (2) committed perjury and repeatedly lied when they said they seized a wallet from Oswald when he was arrested? The newscast begins its approach to this embarrassing matter by downplaying the enormous magnitude of the police misconduct it says occurred. The narrator informs us that when Dallas police "said they got it [the wallet] from Oswald himself after his arrest," they merely were "officially [telling] a different story" than the truth! The narrator then attempts to provide an excuse for this flagrant and dishonest misconduct. "Why [did this police misbehavior occur]? Barrett and Rookstool believe [Dallas] police made that up [i.e., made up the claim that there was an Oswald arrest wallet] because too many officers handled a crucial piece of evidence." To describe this excuse as pathetic is an understatement. Police perjury or lying is indefensible. Period. Of equal importance, there is no evidentiary rule that would prevent a court

from receiving into evidence an item found at the scene of a crime merely because it was handled by multiple police officers. All that is required is that the policeman who found it bring the piece of evidence into court and testify that he found it at the crime scene. How many police touched or handled it is immaterial as to either the admissibility or the reliability of the evidence. Therefore, as both Barrett and Rookstool must have known, their so-called explanation for why police prevaricated is bogus.

Despite, therefore, its narrator's contention that the 2013 news broadcast "is significant in tying off an historical loose end and perfecting the record 50 years later," that newscast does no such thing. It does prove that a wallet was found at the location of the Tippit murder. But it does not prove that the wallet belonged to Lee Harvey Oswald. It does not prove that Lee Harvey Oswald was ever at the location of officer Tippit's murder. And it certainly does not prove that Oswald murdered Tippit. Instead, it raises additional questions about Oswald and deepens the mysteries about this young man whose cryptic life and violent death continue to puzzle researchers.

Concluding Observations

Based on the information now available, it is unlikely that the mysteries enveloping Lee Harvey Oswald that have been examined here can be finally resolved. The following observations, however, are warranted.

First, whatever else he was, Oswald definitely was not a loner.

Second, the baffling self-incriminatory conduct that Oswald supposedly engaged in, and that the Warren Commission deemed indicative of his guilt, must viewed with robust skepticism.

Third, the weight of the evidence is that the wallet found at the Tippit murder scene contained Oswald as well as Hidell identity documents, although it is unclear whether the wallet was truly Oswald's or was a mock-up.

Fourth, it is uncertain whether police seized a wallet from Oswald upon his arrest.

Fifth and lastly, because both Dallas police and FBI agents prevaricated by either acts of commission or acts of omission, and because proven law enforcement corruption against a criminal suspect cannot be presumed to be limited to the corruption that has been exposed, the entire case that Dallas police and the FBI built for Oswald's guilt of assassinating a president and murdering a police officer cannot, as perhaps it once was, be regarded as altogether trustworthy.

Half a century after he was accused of murdering a president and a police officer on a Friday and was then shot dead two days later while in handcuffs in a police station surrounded by 70 police officers and in front of millions of shocked people watching on television, Lee Harvey Oswald—who, it must be kept in mind, denied killing anybody and who never had an opportunity to explain or defend his actions—remains, in the words of Winston Churchill, "a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma." *Donald E. Wilkes, Jr. is a professor emeritus at the University of Georgia, where he taught in the law school for 40 years. This is his 40th published article on the JFK assassination.*