

Lee Harvey Oswald in Mexico City

Copyright © 1994 by Michael Swanson
219 Westridge Dr
Danville, VA 24541

Probably the most controversial event in the life of Lee Harvey Oswald preceding the assassination of President Kennedy is his trip to Mexico City during late September and early October of 1963.

Officially, we are told Oswald traveled to Mexico City and visited the Soviet and Cuban consulates so that he could travel to Cuba and then on to the Soviet Union. However, there is much evidence that Oswald did not visit these consulates, but someone else impersonating him did. One proponent of this theory is Philip Melanson who writes, "Whatever he did in Mexico City, whatever he thought his mission was, he was being impersonated while he was there: someone flitted between the Cuban and Soviet consulates posing as a desperate Oswald. If Oswald was directed to Mexico by his handlers so that he could be set up, then someone was working to create for him an image of motive and madness for the impending assassination of the President." [1] However, other authors such as Gerald Posner, who promote the idea that there was no conspiracy in the assassination of President Kennedy, claim that it was indeed Oswald who visited these consulates.

Oswald's trip to Mexico City starts out strange at its preliminary stages. When Oswald applied for a visa to travel to Mexico the man who stood in line in front of him was William Gaudet, an agent of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). In his own words Gaudet claims that he ran "errands" for the CIA. Gaudet testified to the House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA) that the fact that Oswald got his visa right after him was simply a "coincidence". [2] Gaudet worked in New Orleans and in interviews he has claimed that he saw Oswald hand out Fair Play for Cuba Committee leaflets in front of the New Orleans Trade Mart. Gaudet also has claimed that he knew that Oswald worked for Guy Banister and David Ferrie. [3] Both men were important figures in the Jim Garrison investigation. It is not surprising that Gaudet would know this information because he worked in an office at 544 Camp Street. [4] Guy Banister held his office at 544 Camp Street and it is the same address that Oswald stamped on his pro-Castro pamphlets.

After obtaining his visa, Oswald boarded a bus and traveled to Mexico City. His fellow passengers remembered that he was quite talkative, in contrast to the mad loner portrayed by such people as Gerald Posner. He struck up a conversation with two Australian girls who later remembered that he sat next to an Englishman who told them that he was a retired school teacher who had taught in India and Arabia. [5]

The Warren Commission located this man who identified himself as John Howard Bowen. They found that he was lying and that his actual name was Albert Osborne. Osborne denied having sat next to Oswald, but the Warren Commission found his answers to their questions "inconsistent and untrue." [6]

Osborne is one of the many bizarre characters to enter the life of Lee Harvey Oswald. Osborne traveled around the United States selling rugs and then settled down in Mexico in 1939 after claiming to be an ordained Baptist minister. During WWII Osborne was found by the FBI to be a fanatical supporter of Adolf Hitler. [7]

It also seems that Osborne was not the only person to use the alias Bowen. A co-worker of Oswald, John Grossi, who was an assistant art director at the Jaggars-Chiles-Stovall company, used the alias Jack Bowen.

Another possible person who used the Bowen alias was David Ferrie. After the assassination Ferrie learned that the FBI was looking for him because his name was on Oswald's library card. Ferrie turned himself in and was let go after he denied knowing anything about the card. This is puzzling because on the only known library card that the FBI had Oswald used the name Bowen as a reference and not Ferrie. It's possible that Ferrie used the name Bowen as an alias on the card and someone in the FBI knew this. [8]

Also, Lee Harvey Oswald used the name Osborne when he ordered his Fair Play Cuba Committee literature. The real Albert Osborne left from Mexico City to Texas a day after Oswald did. He also left the United States for Spain and Italy nine days after the assassination. [9]

When he reached Mexico City, Oswald allegedly visited the Cuban and Soviet embassies where he attempted to

once again defect to the Soviet Union. As mentioned before, this matter has been a bone of contention between Warren Commission defenders and critics who believe it was not Oswald, but an imposter who visited the two embassies. The Warren Commission did very little to investigate the matter itself. According to the HSCA "The Warren Report limited its discussion of Oswald's contacts with the Soviet and Cuban diplomatic missions to information obtained from Sylvia Duran and the Cuban Government." [10]

Duran was an employee of the Cuban Consulate. The Warren Report also claimed that her information was confirmed by "confidential sources of extremely high reliability." [11] But the HSCA found that the Warren Commission "did not print anything in the twenty-six volumes of evidence to support its statement that Sylvia Duran's testimony was confirmed by "confidential sources of extremely high reliability." [12] Despite the claims of Warren Commission defenders, such as Gerald Posner, the information from Sylvia Duran goes far from proving that Oswald was the one who visited the embassies.

The HSCA placed two of its best investigators, Edwin Lopez and Dan Hardway, in charge of investigating the adventures of Oswald in Mexico City. They penned a report for the HSCA titled Lee Harvey Oswald, The CIA, & Mexico City (referred to in the footnotes as The Lopez Report), which for many years was classified for reasons of "national security." The report was so super-secret that it had to be written in a super-secure security room. Even though it has been declassified a great deal of the report is still blanked out by CIA censors. Despite the censorship it still helps to provide a better picture than has ever been provided before of what actually happened in Mexico City.

A man claiming to be Oswald visited the Cuban embassy and requested an "in-transit" visa to allow him to travel through Cuba and on to the Soviet Union. He was informed by Sylvia Duran that he would have to obtain a visa to enter the USSR before such a visa would be granted. Then this man also contacted the Soviet Embassy by phone and in person.

This individual, during these encounters with embassy personal, put on a vivid display of leftism. He frantically talked about returning to the Soviet Union. He also displayed Communist material to prove his commitment to Castro's Cuba. He became so arrogant and persistent in getting visas that Cuban consul Eusebio Azcue got in a shouting match with him. [13]

Sylvia Duran, remarried as Ms. Tirado, testified that:

Lee Harvey Oswald visited the Cuban Consulate three times on September 27, 1963, not twice as the Warren Commission previously reported. Oswald first visited the Cuban Consulate at approximately 11:00 a.m., requesting an intransit visa to Cuba with Russia as the final destination. He showed her some documents, then left to obtain photographs needed for his application.

Oswald returned at approximately 1:00 p.m. with four photographs. Ms. Tirado typed the application in duplicate, stapled a picture on top of each and had Oswald sign each in her presence. As identification, Oswald showed her documents he had brought: his Russian labor card, marriage certificate with the name of his Russian wife, his American Communist Party membership card and his Fair Play for Cuba membership card.

Ms. Tirado found Lee Harvey Oswald's behavior suspicious because normally a Communist traveled only with his passport as belonging to the Communist Party was illegal in Mexico, and Oswald flashed his Communist Party card to her.

There was a procedure whereby the American Communist Party would arrange matters for their members with the Cuban Communist Party. The American would then come to Mexico, visit the Cuban Consulate, and receive his visa immediately. When Tirado asked Oswald why he did not have the American Communist Party arrange his trip to Cuba, he stated that he had not had the time.

After explaining to Oswald that he had to acquire a Russian visa before he could receive a Cuban visa, Tirado jotted her name and business number on a piece of paper and gave it to Oswald who had left to get his Russian visa.

Oswald returned to the Cuban Consulate between 5:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m., which was after normal working hours.

The guard called Tirado, stating that someone who did not speak Spanish was at the gate inquiring about a visa. As routine procedure, she asked the guard to escort the individual to her office. Oswald told her that he had acquired a Russian visa. Since he did not produce it when asked, she called the Russian Consulate. The Consul told Duran that Oswald had been to the Consulate requesting a visa and had been told that the reply would take approximately four months. When she relayed the message to Oswald, he got very upset, insisting that as a person who had been in jail because of the Cuban Revolution he should receive a visa. Oswald stated that he could not wait that long because his Mexican visa expired in three days. At this point, Ms. Tirado informed Consul Eusebio Azcue of the situation. Azcue had been in his private office which he shared with the man who would soon replace him, Alfredo Mirabal Diaz. Azcue politely explained the requisites for an intransit visa to Oswald. When he realized that Oswald was a stubborn man he told Oswald that he was obviously not a friend of the Cuban revolution because he would otherwise understand that Cuba had to be extremely careful with the people it allowed in the country. Azcue and Oswald yelled at each other. Then Azcue went to the door, opened it and asked Oswald to leave. Oswald did not revisit or telephone the Consulate. Ms. Tirado described the man identifying himself as Lee Harvey Oswald as approximately five feet six, with sparse blond hair, weighing about 125 pounds.[14]

The real Oswald had brown hair and was not a member of the Communist party and thus had no Communist Party membership card. In 1979 Ms. Duran spent several hours with Anthony Summers viewing footage of the real Lee Harvey Oswald. She concluded that the real Oswald was "not like the man I saw here in Mexico City." [15]

However, Alfredo Mirabal Diaz testified that the man was actually Oswald, although he said that he "caught only glimpses of the man" and that he felt his visit "was a case of provocation." [16]

Eusebio Azcue, who argued with Oswald, claimed that Oswald "was not the same individual who had visited the Cuban Consulate in 1963." He described the man as "a white male, between 5'6" and 5'7", over 30 years of age, very thin long face, with straight eyebrows and a cold look in his eyes. He also said the man had blond hair.[17] Azcue alleged that he would never have identified Lee Harvey Oswald as the man who visited the Cuban Consulate in 1963." [18]

So two out of three of the Cuban Consulate personnel claim that the man who visited the embassy was not Oswald. The one man who says it was only got a few fleeting glimpses of him.

After the assassination, the CIA Mexico City Station requested the Mexican government to arrest Sylvia Duran. [19]

They did and released her on November 24. On November 27 they arrested her again. The next day the CIA Headquarters sent a cable to the Mexico City Station ordering them "to insure that neither Sylvia Duran nor the Cubans would have any basis for believing that the Americans were behind her rearrest." The cable stated, "We want the Mexican authorities to take responsibility for the whole affair." [20]

While she was arrested the Mexican authorities beat her "until she admitted that she had an affair with Lee Harvey Oswald." [21] They also got her to sign a statement which they forwarded on to the CIA Mexico City Station. According to the Lopez Report,

Upon learning about the assassination she and her husband speculated that President Kennedy might have been assassinated for racial reasons. Then she became aware that the assassin was Lee Harvey Oswald, she ascertained that it was the same man who approximately two months prior had been to the Cuban Consulate to solicit an intransit visa to Russia...She checked the data in the Consulate archives and became certain that it was the same individual who was blonde, short, dressed inelegantly, and whose face turned red when angry. [22]

When the Warren Commission convened, the CIA provided this statement to prove that Oswald visited the Cuban embassy, but "had deleted Duran's description of Oswald as blonde and short." [23] The Warren Commission relied on this statement and used it as the sole evidence that Oswald visited the Cuban embassy. The HSCA found that "Sylvia Duran's description of Oswald did not resemble Oswald's true physical appearance. This description, which appeared early in the reporting of information obtained from Ms. Duran was deleted from subsequent reports and

was not at all mentioned in the Warren Report." [24] The Warren Commission based the fact that Oswald visited the Cuban embassy on a lie. Gerald Posner, because of either naivety or knavery, also used this statement to claim that Ms. Duran "positively identified the visitor as Oswald" in his book *Case Closed*. [25]

Although most of the Cuban embassy personnel claim that they did not meet Oswald, two other witnesses did. One such person is Elena Garro de Paz. She claimed to have seen Oswald at a party with "two-other beatnik-looking boys." [26] The HSCA was unable to prove or disprove her story.

A more serious claim was that of a reporter named Oscar Contreras. In 1967, he told the American Consul in Tampico a story of meeting a man who called himself Lee Harvey Oswald. "The reporter alleged that he and some fellow students had met Lee Harvey Oswald as they exited the Cineclub at the Escuela de Filosofia at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. Oswald told the group that he had gone to the National Autonomous University of Mexico looking for pro-Castro students who might help him persuade the Cuban Embassy to grant him a visa. Oswald claimed that he was from California and was a member of a pro-Castro group in New Orleans." [27] Contreras was very suspicious of this man and wondered how he was able to pick him and the students out as leftists. Contreras was five-foot nine and remembered that this Oswald was short enough that he could look down on him. Contreras also recalled that this man was over thirty years old. The real Oswald was five-foot nine and in his twenties. [28] The real Oswald was five-foot-nine, too.

The CIA decided to investigate the Contreras story when the Garrison investigation broke out. But according to a CIA dispatch its motive was to "confirm that several of Garrison's allegations about involvement of anti-Castro Cubans, the CIA, etc. are false." [29]

Oswald also visited the Soviet embassies and in contrast to the personnel at the Cuban Consulate, KGB officials there have recently claimed that it was indeed Oswald who visited them.

One of these KGB officers, Oleg Nechiporenko, has written a book titled *Passport to Assassination*, in which he claims that it was indeed Oswald who visited the embassy. However, several statements by KGB officers at the Soviet Embassy came out right at the perfect time close to the anniversary of the assassination and the US media fixation of Gerald Posner and the Warren Report. It is difficult to take the statements of these KGB officers at face value, especially when there is much contradictory evidence, and because of recent KGB propaganda ploys to curry favor with the United States. A recent such ploy was the KGB report that American MIA's from Vietnam were used by a North Vietnamese official in slave labor camps. The document was exposed as a forgery by the CIA, ironically. Also Nechiporenko's story has been duplicated by Nikolai Leonnov, except Leonnov claims that the visit was one day later and that he was the only person to receive Oswald. Nechiporenko also described the Oswald he met as wearing shabby clothes. [30] The Cuban embassy photograph depicts him as wearing a tie and sweater in a clean-cut fashion. In the final analysis KGB officers, and intelligence officers of other nations, have been known to lie or spread what they call disinformation. To take their statements at face value is naive. However, such statements can be used if it backs hard evidence to come to a conclusion. These statements do not.

Tape recordings were made by the CIA Mexico City station of conversations between the man who called himself Oswald and Soviet embassy personnel. Transcripts of these conversations were also made. On the 9/28 transcript is the notation that the individual spoke in "hardly recognizable Russian." [31] The real Lee Harvey Oswald spoke Russian quite well. Unfortunately these tapes have vanished. David Phillips, who was in charge of photo surveillance at Mexico City CIA Station, stated that the tapes were "routinely destroyed" before the assassination. [32] However, the HSCA concluded that based on cable traffic from Mexico City to Langley CIA headquarters "after the assassination raised a possibility that at least one tape of Oswald's voice existed as late as 16 October 1963." Warren Commission staff lawyer W. David Slawson has claimed to have listened to these very tapes. [33] His belief that the tapes existed after the assassination is shared by the CIA Chief of Branch responsible for Mexico City who testified that he "believed the tapes did exist after the time of the assassination." [34] Also, David Belin, another Warren Commission staffer and longtime defender of its conclusions, said in an interview with Ted Koppel on *Nightline*, "The Warren Commission had access to the tape." [35] Then why was the tape said to be destroyed before the assassination by the CIA?

The CIA forwarded photographs from surveillance cameras of the individual calling himself Oswald to the Warren Commission. When it was discovered that the man in the pictures was not Oswald, the CIA claimed that it was a mistake and that they did not have a picture of the man at all. David Phillips testified that the cameras were not in

operation at the time Oswald visited. However, based on CIA cables HMMA-22307, HMMA-2433, and MEXT 9940 the HSCA was forced to conclude "that it is probable that the pulse camera was in operation on the days that Lee Harvey Oswald visited the Cuban Consulate." [36] The Cuban government also lent to doubt of the CIA's claims by supplying pictures taken by their spies showing the cameras in operation during the time in question. [37] Again, David Phillips testified to something that was not true.

"A retired CIA employee who was Deputy Chief of Mexico City Station from 1967 to 1969, told the HSCA staff that he had seen a file on Oswald in Mexico City that contained only one or two transcripts and surveillance photographs of Oswald." He "also told HSCA staff investigators that Win Scott [Chief of CIA Mexico City Station] had a private personal safe in which he maintained especially sensitive materials....these materials were removed from the safe by James Angleton at the time of Scott's death." [38]

In this safe was an unpublished manuscript by Win Scott titled It Came to Little. In it Scott wrote about Lee Harvey Oswald in Mexico City: "These visits and conversations were not hearsay; for persons watching these embassies photographed Oswald as he entered and left each one; and clocked the time he spent on each visit." [39] Officially this did not happen.

As already mentioned, James Angleton took these alleged photographs from Mr. Scott's desk after he died. He also took this manuscript. In order to do so, he visited Mr. Scott's family before his funeral and threatened that he wanted the manuscript or else "we have ways of getting it from you." [40] The photographs and audio tapes of the man calling himself Oswald were shanghaied by James Angleton. Since Angleton is now dead their current location is unknown.

They could prove conclusively whether or not the person who visited the Soviet and Cuban embassies in Mexico City or if an imposter did. A released FBI memo signed by J. Edgar Hoover on November 23, 1963 states:

The Central Intelligence Agency advised that on October 1, 1963, an extremely sensitive source reported that an individual identified himself as Lee Harvey Oswald, who contacted the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City inquiring as to any messages. Special Agents of this bureau who have conversed with Oswald in Dallas, Texas have observed to above and have listened to a recording of his voice. These Special Agents are of the opinion that the above referenced- to individual was not Lee Harvey Oswald. [41]

If the man was not Oswald, then who was he? An analysis of the evidence seems to support the theory that someone was impersonating Oswald in order to paint Oswald as a dangerous Communist fanatic. It does seem that CIA agents David Phillips and James Angleton had a role in these events because of their need to repeatedly intervene in order to protect the myth that Oswald visited the embassies.

[1] Melanson, Philip, *Spy Saga*. (New York: Praeger, 1990), p.92

[2] HSCA Report pp. 218-219.

[3] Taped interview of William Gaudet

[4] HSCA Report 218-219.

[5] Russell, Dick, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1992), p.483.

[6] Warren Report p. 733.

[7] Russell pp. 484-486.

[8] Davis, John. *Mafia Kingfish*. (New York: Signet, 1989), pp.213-214.

- [9] Russell p.486 & Melanson p. 95.
- [10] The Lopez Report, p.4.
- [11] Warren Report p.305.
- [12] The Lopez Report p. 4.
- [13] The Warren Report p. 301.
- [14] The Lopez Report pp.192-194.
- [15] Melanson p.97.
- [16] The Lopez Report p.205.
- [17] HSCA vol 3. p.136.
- [18] The Lopez Report pp.202,205.
- [19] *ibid*, p.185.
- [20] *ibid*, p.187.
- [21] *ibid*, p.195.
- 22 *ibid*, p. 186.
- [23] *ibid*, p. 190
- [24] *ibid*, pp.245-246.
- [25] Posner, Gerald. *Case Closed*. (New York: Random House, 1993) p.189.
- [26] The Lopez Report p. 206.
- [27] *ibid*, p.236.
- [28] Melanson p.98.
- [29] The Lopez Report p. 237.
- [30] Scott, Peter Dale. "The Lopez Report and the CIA's Oswald Counterintelligence Secrets." *Oswald in Mexico*. (Illinois: Rogra Research Dept., 1993) p.17.
- [31] The Lopez Report p.136.
- [32] Rowell, G.J. "The Mysterious Mexico City CIA Tapes, *The Investigator*. January, 1993, p.17.
- [33] Rowell, G.J. "The Mysterious Mexico City CIA Tapes II", *The Investigator*. February-March, 1993, p.7.
- [34] The Lopez Report p.168.
- [35] Rowell, G.J. "The Mysterious Mexico City CIA Tapes", *The Investigator*. January 1993, p.19.
- [36] The Lopez Report p.22.

[37] *ibid*, p.295.

[38] *ibid*, pp.87-88.

[39] *ibid*, p. 23.

[40] Russell p.462.

[41] Melanson p.91.