INVESTIGATION OF THE ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 1978

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SELECT COMMITTEE ON ASSASSINATIONS,
Washington, D.C.

The select committee met, pursuant to adjournment, at 9:10 a.m., in room 345, Cannon House Office Building, Hon. Richardson Preyer (acting chairman) presiding.

Present: Representatives Stokes, Preyer, Dodd, Ford, Fithian, Edgar, Devine, and Sawyer.

Staff present: G. Robert Blakey, chief counsel and staff director; Michael Goldsmith, senior staff counsel; Charles Berk, research attorney; and Elizabeth L. Berning, chief clerk.

Mr. PREYER. The committee will come to order.

The Chair recognizes Mr. Blakey.

NARRATION BY MR. G. ROBERT BLAKEY, CHIEF COUNSEL

Mr. BLAKEY. I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Over the years, the Central Intelligence Agency has conducted a massive investigation of Lee Harvey Oswald, the proof of which is a 142-volume file at the Agency headquarters in Langley, Va. Nevertheless, despite an impressive effort to probe the periods of Oswald's life during which there had been foreign encounters, some questions about the CIA persist. Several principal questions remain:

Was the CIA's post-assassination investigation of Lee Harvey Oswald thorough and reliable, and did the Agency share with others the relevant information it had or learned?

Was there a preassassination relationship between the CIA and Oswald? If so, could that relationship have extended to complicity in the assassination, or short of that, might it have led the Agency to seek to hide the relationship out of fear of being accused of complicity.

Much of the mystery is, of course, the result of the secretive nature of the CIA and its understandable unwillingness to reveal operational information. A brief review of the history of the CIA might afford a better grasp of the problem.

Created by the National Security Act of 1947, the CIA was, in fact, a postwar outgrowth of the Office of Strategic Services. The head of OSS, though never a CIA official, was William J. Donovan who, adapting the British approach, combined the intelligence activities of various agencies into one office.

Toward the end of World War II, President Roosevelt sought Donovan's advice on a permanent intelligence apparatus. Donovan's classified reply, leaked to the press 3 months later, described an "all-powerful intelligence service * * * which would supercede all existing Federal police and intelligence units." The reaction among the heads of existing intelligence and investigative agencies was predictable panic. Few wanted to see the OSS become more powerful.

President Roosevelt's death turned out to be a serious blow to OSS—very nearly a crippling one—for President Truman abolished the wartime OSS without even consulting Donovan or the Joint Chiefs of Staff. As a result, the United States was handicapped by a serious intelligence gap in the postwar international struggles.

Unification of the Armed Forces was the main objective of the 1947 act. But it also created the National Security Council, of which the CIA was to be the intelligence coordinating unit. Under the act, the CIA was charged with four responsibilities:

One, to advise the NSC on intelligence matters relating to national security.

Two, to make recommendations on the coordination of intelligence activities.

Three, to correlate, evaluate, and disseminate intelligence.

Four, to perform additional intelligence activities and national security functions at the direction of the NSC.

In its early years,the CIA was hampered by internal organization difficulties and bad relationships with other agencies. The turnover of directors was rather rapid—Adm. Roscoe H. Hillenkoetter in 1947, Lt. Gen. Walter Bedell Smith in 1950, Allen W. Dulles in 1952.

Dulles, who had been a wartime master spy, had strong opinions as to the type of men who should be named to top posts in the Agency. At Senate Armed Services Committee hearings on the National Security Act, he testified that the CIA:

> * * * should be directed by a relatively small but elite corps of men with a passion for anonymity and a willingness to stick to that particular job. They must find their reward in the work itself, and in the service they render their Government, rather than in public acclaim.

In addition, in its formative period, the CIA was subjected to the tirades of Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, who demanded a purge of Agency personnel. The upshot was a severe tightening of employment standards, as well as a restriction within the Agency of the expression of political viewpoints.

Although the CIA is not required to make public its organizational structure, it is publicly known to consist of five main entities—the Office of the Director and four Directorates. The Director and Deputy Director, one of whom must be a military officer, are appointed by the President.

The four Directorates are as follows:

Operations: The clandestine services unit, with 45 percent of its personnel stationed overseas, most of them in cover positions. Subdivisions of operations are foreign intelligence, counterintelligence, and covert action.

Intelligence: Its responsibility is to turn out finished intelligence products.

Science and Technology: It's responsibility for basic research and development, and it operates reconnaissance satellites and analyzes highly technical information.

Management and Services: This is the Agency's housekeeping department.

There are also a number of proprietry organizations, front groups and social or political institutions that are run by the CIA or in its behalf. The best known proprietaries are Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, both established in the early 1950's. Among the front organizations are airlines and holding companies to support clandestine operations. In early 1967, it was, for example, learned that the CIA had for years been subsidizing the country's largest student organization, the National Student Association. Eventually, it became known that the Agency had channeled money to a number of business, labor, religious, charitable, and educational organizations.

In 1974 and 1975, a commission headed by then Vice President Rockefeller investigated CIA activities in the United States, specifically whether domestic CIA activities exceeded the Agency's statutory authority. The investigation was in response to charges that the Agency had engaged in large-scale spying on American citizens and had compiled dossiers on many citizens. Mail intercepts, infiltration of dissident groups, illegal wiretaps and break-ins were among other charges delved into in the investigation.

The Rockefeller Commission concluded that the "great majority of the CIA's domestic activities comply with its stautory authority * * * nevertheless, over the 28 years of its history, the CIA has engaged in some activities that should be criticized and not permitted to happen again—both in light of the limits imposed on the Agency by law and as a matter of public policy.

It was hardly worth noting at the time, but an event on October 31, 1959, would ultimately become part of the history of the CIA. A 20-year-old ex-Marine radar operator named Lee Harvey Oswald appeared at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow and handed consular official Richard Snyder a note demanding that his American citizenship be revoked. He also intimated to Snyder that he intended to pass radar secrets to the Soviet Union.

This information was sent via the State Department to CIA Headquarters, and the CIA opened a file on Oswald.

Oswald's citizenship was not revoked. He was also permitted to remain in Russia until June of 1962. He then returned to the United States with a Russian wife, Marina, and an infant daughter. As a returning defector, Oswald was of interest to U.S. intelligence agencies. His tracks were picked up once more when, in September 1963, Oswald turned up in Mexico City where he visited the Soviet Embassy and the Cuban Embassy and Consulate. The information that was added to Oswald's CIA dossier in Washington on October 11, 1963, was imprecise—it identified him as being 35 years old—he was 23 at the time—and as Lee Henry Oswald.

It is, of course, now public knowledge that the CIA continued overt operations against Cuba after the Bay of Pigs defeat in 1961. They included plots to murder Fidel Castro by the Agency and American gangsters, who had been operating lucrative gambling casinos in Havana until Castro threw them out of the country.

They also included CIA contact with a high-level associate of Premier Castro, code named "AMLASH," who had expressed a desire to murder Castro. While Castro himself was apparently aware of the American plots on his life, there is no evidence that the Warren Commission knew of the Castro plots.

In 1964, when the Warren Commission determined that Oswald was the lone assassin, it also concluded he had never been associated with, nor employed by, the CIA. Critics of the Warren Commission were quick to challenge the assertion, raising questions about the thoroughness of the Warren Commission's investigation and raising the sinister possibility that intelligence agencies may have been responsible for the assassination itself.

Mark Lane, in "Rush to Judgment," implies, for example, Oswald had ties to the CIA, and in his more recently published code name "Zorro," a book on the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., he writes:

> The evidence now available discloses that Oswald worked for the FBI and with the CIA * * *.

The Rockefeller Commission examined the allegation of Oswald's CIA ties and found no credible evidence to support it.

In accord with its mandate, the select committee undertook to assess the quality of the CIA's performance in its investigation of Oswald and its working relationship with the Warren Commission. The investigation covered all periods of Oswald's life when he came in contact with an official entity overseas, either United States or foreign. It included Oswald's hitch in the Marine Corps, his trip through Europe and defection to the Soviet Union, his stay in Russia, his return to the United States, his political activities in the United States as they pertain to foreign affairs; for example, the fair play for Cuba campaign, and finally of course his trip to Mexico in 1963.

Second in the sequence, but by no means subsidiary in importance, the committee considered the charge that Oswald had ties to the CIA. Resolution of this issue was uppermost in the minds of committee investigators, as they poured over CIA reports—not only the 142 volumes on Oswald himself, but hundreds of other volumes as well. Again, the committee was aware that if a relationship was discovered, it did not necessarily mean that the Agency was guilty of complicity in the assassination. Nevertheless the committee reasoned that the CIA might have covered up links to Oswald out of concern for their implications. On the other hand, if the committee found no signs of coverup, it felt it could reach some reasonable judgment on the issue.

Ambassador Helms was serving as the CIA Deputy Director for Plans at the time of the Kennedy assassination. As such, he was responsible for the Directorate of Plans which was the office engaged in covert operations.

In 1964, Ambassador Helms was the senior CIA official who worked with the Warren Commission on a day-to-day basis, and he testified before the Commission on May 14, 1964.

Ambassador Helms was appointed Director of Central Intelligence in 1966, serving in that capacity until 1973. In 1973, he was named Ambassador to Iran.