

'Lee was the leader on our playground'

by DONALD JACKSON

Lee was the third boy born to Mrs. Marguerite Clavier Oswald. His father, Robert E. Lee Oswald, an agent for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company in New Orleans, died two months before Lee was born there on Oct. 18, 1939. Mrs. Oswald went to work as a saleswoman two years after the birth of her new son, holding a series of jobs.

His mother was at home with Lee during his first two years, and later, when she went to work, her sister Lillian or whoever else she could get to baby-sit cared for him. When Lee was 3, he was placed in a boarding school which accepted children either orphaned or with one parent. His brother Robert and half-brother John had been lodged at the boarding school a year earlier.

"I took the children home on weekends," Mrs. Oswald recalled. "But I couldn't look after them and work too."

In 1944 Mrs. Oswald met Edwin A. Eckdahl, an industrial engineer from Boston who was working in the South. They were married—she for the third time—in May 1945, and took an auto trip so she could meet his family in Massachusetts. Instead of returning to New Orleans, the family settled in a small house in Fort Worth. The two older boys were sent to a military school in Port Gibson, Mississippi. Lee lived at home with his mother and stepfather.

Records show that Lee did not

enter elementary school until January 1947, when he was 7. The family home at that time was on the South Side of Fort Worth and Lee entered the first grade at Lily B. Clayton School. His marks the first year were mostly Bs with a few As.

Lee left a strong impression on at least one member of his second grade class, Phil Vinson, now a Fort Worth reporter.

"No one in our class was a close friend of Lee's," Vinson said. "Yet all of the boys seemed to look up to him. During recess periods, the boys would form into what we called 'gangs' and engage in friendly wrestling matches or games of touch football. According to our code, being in Lee's gang was a high honor. Lee chose those to serve with him on the grade school playground. In class, he remained quiet."

In March 1948, Lee transferred from Clayton school to the George Clark Elementary School, in the same general neighborhood on Fort Worth's South Side. He finished the second grade there and was promoted to the third. In that year Edwin Eckdahl sued for divorce. In his complaint Eckdahl, represented by the Fort Worth firm of Korff and Wallace, said that his wife nagged him and argued about money. He testified that she once threw a bottle at his head and another time scratched and struck him. A jury upheld

Eckdahl and gave him a divorce. Mrs. Oswald was granted \$1,500.

Marguerite returned to her former name of Oswald—Lee had always gone by that name—and moved into a one-story frame house on Ewing Avenue, in the Ridglea district of Fort Worth. She and Lee—and occasionally the older two boys—lived there for the next four years.

Other families in the block remember Lee as a touchy, quick-to-anger boy.

"He seemed antisocial to me," said Hiram Conway, who lived three doors from the Oswalds. "I thought he was vicious with other children. He would become quite angry at very little provocation. I saw him chuck things at other kids several times." His wife added, "I didn't think he was anything but just a high-tempered kid. He was a cute little boy with curly hair and a good build. The family all called him 'Lee-Boy.'"

Cecil Simmons, an accountant, lived two doors in the other direction from the Oswalds. His memory of Lee is terse and sour. "I'll tell you the way I got acquainted with that little squirt," said Simmons. "I came home from work one day and picked up the phone. It was dead. I figured what the hell, so I asked into the receiver if anyone was on the phone. A kid's voice says, 'You're goddamn right there's someone on the line.' This stopped me for a minute, then I asked the kid if he'd mind releas-



WITH BROTHERS AT 5, Lee Oswald (center) laughs with brother Robert Oswald, 10 (left), and half-

brother John. So he says to me, 'I'll release it when I'm damn good and ready.' Well, naturally, I was a little burned. I asked my wife who was on our party line and she said it was the Oswalds. I knew them slightly—every single night she'd get off the bus at my corner and walk across my lawn. Well, this night I stopped her and told her what had happened. She asked me to quote exactly what was said and I did. She said, 'I don't believe Lee would say anything like that.' Then Lee walked up and said, 'What's the matter, Mother?' She told him that I had accused him of using profanity on the telephone. She asked him what about it and he denied it. So then she said, 'I guess you must be mistaken. Mr. Simmons, I know damn well it was him. There wasn't anyone else in the house at the time.'



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