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Soviet Visa
HELSINKI ~~Visa~~

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Robert S. Anson, author of "They've Killed the President! The Search for the Murderers of John F. Kennedy," offered a critical appraisal of Lee Harvey Oswald's travel through Western Europe prior to his appearance in Moscow on October 16, 1959. Anson expressed particular concern over the issuance of a Soviet tourist visa in Helsinki, Finland to Oswald prior to his entry into the Soviet Union. Anson wrote that "[O.]n Monday, October 12, Oswald went to the Soviet Consulate and applied for a visa. It was granted two days later." (Anson, p. 159) ✓ Anson concluded:

Oswald also managed to secure a Soviet visa in record time. The CIA told the Commission that under ordinary circumstances obtaining a visa in Finland took one or two weeks; Oswald got his in two days. (Ibid., p. 160)* ✓

* Anson was referring to the Warren Commission Report where it is stated:

The Department of State has advised the Commission that it has some information that in 1959 it usually took an American tourist in Helsinki 1 to 2 weeks to obtain a visa, and that it has other information that the normal waiting period during the past 5 years has been a week or less. According to the Department's information, the waiting period has always varied frequently and widely, with one confirmed instance in 1963 of a visa routinely issued in less than 24 hours. The Central Intelligence Agency has indicated (continued)

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Thus, the issue has arisen whether Oswald's receipt of a Soviet visa prior to his entry into the Soviet Union was an "odd happening" as Anson characterized it; circumstantial evidence tending to show that Oswald had received special assistance in order to enter the Soviet Union.

During the course of its investigation the Warren Commission shared Anson's concerns. In a letter to the CIA dated May 25, 1964 J. Lee Rankin inquired about the apparent speed with which Oswald's Soviet visa was issued. Rankin noted that he had recently spoken with Abraham Chayes of the State Department who contended^{that} at the time Oswald received his visa to enter Russia from the Soviet Embassy ⁱⁿ at Helsinki, at least one week ordinarily transpired between the time of a tourist's application for a visa and the issuance of

* (continued from previous page)
that visas during the 1964 tourist season were being granted in about 5 to 7 days.

This information from the Department of State and the Central Intelligence Agency thus suggests that Oswald's wait for a visa may have been shorter than usual but not beyond the range of possible variation. The prompt issuance of Oswald's visa may have been merely the result of normal procedures, due in part to the fact that the summer rush had ended. It might also mean that Oswald was unusually urgent in his demands that his visa be issued promptly. Oswald himself told officials at the American Embassy in Moscow on October 31, when he appeared to renounce his citizenship, that he had said nothing to the Soviets about defecting until he arrived in Moscow. In any event, the Commission has found nothing in the circumstances of Oswald's entry into the Soviet Union
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which indicates that he was at the time an agent for the U.S.S.R. (WCR, p. 258) ~~← Inserted~~

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the visa. Rankin contended that if Chayes' assessment was accurate, then Oswald's obtaining his tourist visa in from two to four days might have been very significant.

J. Lee Rankin
letter to
CIA, May 25, 1963
DDP4-2676

Rankin also stated that from CIA material supplied to the Warren Commission, the Commission had concluded that Oswald arrived in Helsinki by plane from London on Saturday, October 10, 1959, and that Oswald had received his Soviet tourist visa on Wednesday, October 14, 1959, departing by train for the Soviet Union on October 15.*

SIbid. ✓

Rankin noted that the Commission was interested in learning whether Oswald did in fact obtain his ^{Soviet} tourist visa more quickly than was ^{usual} ~~normal~~ at that time. ~~for the Soviet Embassy in Helsinki. (WC letter by J. Lee Rankin to Richard Helms, DDP4-2676, 25 May 1964)~~

SIbid.

The CIA ~~responded to Rankin's request for information about~~ ^{provided} ~~on July 31, 1964~~ ^{Soviet VISA Procedures}

Richard Helms wrote to Rankin that the Soviet Consulate in Helsinki was able to issue a transit visa (valid for 24 hours) to U.S. businessmen within five minutes but if a longer stay were intended at least one week was needed to process a visa application and arrange lodging through

* Assuming Oswald arrived in Helsinki on October 10, under normal conditions the earliest he would have been able to apply for a Soviet tourist visa would have been the first working day after October 12, i.e. October 12.

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Soviet ✓ INTOURIST. ✓ (Richard Helms to J. Lee Rankin, DDP4-3916, 31 July 1964) A second communication from Helms to Rankin dated September 14, 1964 added that during the 1964 tourist season, Soviet Consulates in at least some Western European cities issued Soviet tourist visas in from five to seven days. (~~Letters~~ *letter* of Richard Helms to J. Lee Rankin, DDP4-4775, ✓ 14 September 1964)

In an effort to resolve this issue, the Committee has reviewed ~~additional~~ ^a files maintained by the CIA which sheds further light on the circumstances surrounding issuance of Oswald's Soviet tourist visa. ~~The~~ CIA file concerns Gregory Golub, Soviet Consul in Helsinki at the time Oswald was issued his tourist visa. (CIA Docs. [?] OFHA-3939, 2 July 1959, OCOA-3745, 21 April 1959, OFHA-4132, 9 October 59) Golub's file reveals that in addition to his Consular activities, he was ^{suspected of being} ~~believed to be an~~ officer of the Soviet KGB. ✓ (OCOW-2907, 26 June 1959, OFHW-2937, 21 September 1959)

Two CIA dispatches from Helsinki concerning Golub are of particular significance with regard to the time necessary for issuance of visas to Americans for travel into the Soviet Union.

The first dispatch records that Golub disclosed during a luncheon conversation that:

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"Moscow had given him the authority to give Americans visas without prior approval from Moscow. He (Golub) stated that this would make his job much easier, and as long as he was convinced the American was "all right" he could give him a visa in a matter of minutes...."*
emphasis added ✓

(OFHA-3962, 17 July 1959)

The second CIA Dispatch dated October 9, 1959, one day prior to Oswald's arrival in Helsinki, illustrates that Golub did have the authority to issue visas without delay. The Dispatch discusses telephone contact between Golub and his Consular counterpart at the American Embassy in Helsinki. In part the Dispatch discloses:

"...Since that evening (September 4, 1959) Golub has only phoned (the US consul) once and this was on a business matter. Two Americans were in the Soviet Consulate at the time and were applying for Soviet visas thru (sic.) Golub. They had previously been in the American consulate inquiring about the possibility of obtaining a Soviet visa in one or two days. (The U.S. Consul) advised them to go directly to Golub and make their request, which they did. Golub phoned (the U.S. Consul) to state that he would give them their visas as soon as they made advance Intourist reservations. When they did this, Golub immediately gave them their visas...." (OFHA-4132, 9 Oct. 1959)** ✓
emphasis added

* The Dispatch does not define the meaning given by Golub to the term "all right."

** Evidently, Oswald had made arrangements with Intourist because upon his arrival at ^{his} Moscow railroad station on October 16, he was met by an Intourist representative and taken to the Hotel

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Berlin where he registered as a student. (WC p. 691)

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Thus, based upon these additional two factors: 1)

Golub's authority to issue visas to Americans without prior approval from Moscow, and 2) a demonstration of ^{this} ~~the~~ authority, ^{as reported in a CIA dispatch,} approximately one month prior to Oswald's appearance at the Soviet Embassy, the Committee has found that the available evidence tends to support the conclusion that ^{issuance of} Oswald's tourist visa within two to four days after his appearance at the Soviet Consulate, ^{while} were somewhat suspect, does not warrant the belief that Oswald's travel into the Soviet Union was assisted by others, particularly the Soviets. However, the possibility of assistance cannot be dismissed due to Golub's probable connection with the KGB and the lack of ~~other~~ substantive information ^{necessary} ~~available~~ to definitely confirm that Oswald's visa was handled in a manner similar to that of the two American students who had entered the Soviet Union with Golub's assistance via Finland.

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