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HSCA INTERVIEW OF JOSEPH PICCOLO, JR., 11 AUGUST 1978:

On 11 August 1978 at 2:00 P.M. Dan Hardway and Charles Berk of the House Select Committee on Assassinations conducted a two hour interview with Joseph Piccolo, Jr. Mr. Piccolo, age 43, is presently an employee of the CIA working as an operations officer in the Deputy Directorate of Operations. He joined the CIA in 1957 and, with the exception of one year of duty with the Air Force, has continued until the present time in his employment with the Central Intelligence Agency.

Prior to the beginning of the interview Mr. Piccolo was asked to read the CIA's omnibus release letter of 23 March 1978. After his examination of the letter, Mr. Piccolo indicated that he fully understood the letter's meaning. Mr. Berk then explained to Mr. Piccolo the mandate and purposes of the Select Committee.

Mr. Piccolo stated that at the time of President Kennedy's assassination he was a support assistance analyst in the DDO. His responsibilities included maintenance of records, running of traces, and Spanish language analysis for purposes of operational support. Subsequent to this position Mr. Piccolo undertook training during the spring of 1964 to become an operations officer. Mr. Piccolo further stated that his professional areas of interest were mainly concerned with Latin America. He also indicated that he served in the [CIA's Mexico City Station from December 1957 to January 1960 and from August 1965 to January 1968.] It was further ascertained that Mr. Piccolo was involved in some Agency operations directed against Cuba during the time periods 1962 to January 1968, January 1969 to January 1970, and a three month period during 1975.

Mr. Piccolo was asked if he was familiar with the cryptonym AMMUG/1. He responded affirmatively and stated that A/1 was the first Cuban Intelligence Service (CUIS) defector from the then newly formed DGI, the CIA's

Piccolo Interview, Page 2.

Cuban counterpart for external security and counter-intelligence operations.

Mr. Piccolo stated that he did not participate in the initial handling and debriefing of A/1 but became involved in this case during the summer of 1964 when he first met A/1. At that time, Mr. Piccolo was assigned to "handhold" A/1; i.e., to ensure that A/1 was properly accommodated and escorted and to provide companionship for A/1.

Mr. Piccolo recalled that A/1 had been debriefed [in Canada] after his defection. He stated that the objectives of the initial debriefings would have been to gain biographic data on persons associated with the Cuban Intelligence Service and information on persons who might collaborate with the CIA. He indicated that he ceased contact with A/1 prior to 1966 and the last information he had was that A/1 was residing in [Miami,] Florida and was adjusting well to life in this country.

As for the filing of the debriefing reports, Mr. Piccolo said the filing procedure would have been dictated by the manner in which the case was handled; i.e., by subject or cryptonym or personality. He did state that debriefing reports would have initially been held in the office handling the case. These reports would have been "held tight" to allow time for operations to be developed while security risks ^{were} ~~are~~ at a minimum. However, ^{not} ~~Mr.~~ Mr. Piccolo said he did ^{not} know where such debriefing reports would now be located.

Mr. Piccolo later became responsible for debriefing A/1. Mr. Piccolo was not able to recall the exact time period during which he debriefed A/1 ^{which continued for} ~~for~~ approximately a four to six month period. Mr. Piccolo stated that [Harold Swenson, Barney Hidalgo and Dan Flores] also debriefed A/1.

Mr. Piccolo was queried as to the responsibilities of WH/SAS/CI, the

Piccolo Interview, Page 3.

CIA component responsible for the A/1 case. He indicated that this component, whose chief was [Harold Swenson] worked against the CUIS. He further indicated that WH/SAS/CI, to carry out its function, probably ran double agent operations.

Mr. Piccolo was next queried whether he recalled a CIA component referred to as the "domestic exploitation section". Mr. Piccolo stated that this terminology was not familiar to him but that domestic exploitation would most likely have been located in a positive intelligence section of the Agency such as the Domestic Contacts Division. He did state, however, that recruitment or contact of persons in this country for utilization in foreign operations would have been the responsibility of every operations officer. He doubted that the Western Hemisphere Division would have run such an office but that operational recruitment would have been handled as part of a specific project or program.

Mr. Piccolo was queried whether A/1 provided any information to the CIA on Lee Harvey Oswald and his possible contacts with the DGI. He responded that he recalls no A/1 debriefing reports providing such information nor did A/1 provide such information to him. Mr. Piccolo further declared that [Messrs. Swenson, Hidalgo, and Flores] never indicated to him that A/1 had ever provided any information on Lee Harvey Oswald.

Mr. Piccolo was next queried as to the meaning of the term "Special Intelligence." He indicated that the term usually applies to the interception of communications, e.g., signal intelligence which would include radio waves and radar but would not have included electronic surveillance. Mr. Piccolo further stated that special intelligence would have been handled by ["Division D",] a special unit segregated from other agency

components.

Mr. Piccolo was next asked if he had ever seen any photographs of Lee Harvey Oswald resulting from the photographic surveillance operations conducted by the CIA Mexico City Station. He responded in the affirmative stating that he had seen two photographs ^{which} ~~that~~ the person who showed ^{photographs,} ~~them~~ to him said were taken in Mexico City. ^{Mr. Piccolo-} ~~He~~ said that the person, whose identity he was unable to recall, had shown him the pictures saying: (paraphrase) "These are the pictures of Oswald that we got in Mexico." He stated that he was led to understand that these two pictures had been taken of Lee Harvey Oswald either entering or leaving the Cuban Embassy/Consulate in Mexico City. The first picture was a 3/4 full shot of Oswald exposing his left profile as Oswald looked downward. The second photograph which Mr. Piccolo recollected seeing was a back of the head view of Oswald. At this point in the interview Mr. Piccolo was shown CE 237, the famous photograph of the Mexico Mystery Man. All printed identification bordering the photograph was covered prior to Mr. Piccolo's examination. Mr. Piccolo was then asked who the man in CE 237 was. Mr. Piccolo responded that he did not know but that the person was not Oswald. Mr. Piccolo was asked if this was one of the photographs he had seen and he responded in the ^enegative. Mr. Piccolo was next shown a full frontal photograph of Lee Harvey Oswald. This photograph also had all printed material bordering its surface covered. When asked who the person in the photograph was, after a moment's pause, Mr. Piccolo correctly identified the photograph as one of Lee Harvey Oswald. Mr. Piccolo stated that he could not recall where or when he had seen the surveillance photographs of Lee Harvey Oswald but was certain of their presentation to him as such.

Mr. Piccolo was questioned about ^{his knowledge concerning} what he knew about the finding of the surveillance photographs of Oswald. He stated that he did not have first hand knowledge of that but that it was the type of thing, 'a coup,' that would have traveled through the Agency "grapevine". Mr. Piccolo stated that he had heard stories about a surveillance photograph of Oswald being found both in Mexico City and at CIA Headquarters in Langley. He said that Ann Goodpasture may have been the person who found a photograph of Oswald in Mexico City. He stated that he has heard several times that

[Charlotte Bustos] found a photograph of Oswald at CIA Headquarters. He was not certain ~~when~~ ^{as to} when he first heard the latter story ^{that Charlotte had found the photo} but stated that

he was certain that he had heard it prior to the last time that he heard

it. He stated that that last time he heard the story was during a discussion with a man with whom he shares an office. ^{hearing it from Mr. Niescuir.} [NIESCUIR.]

He stated that this man, [Mr. Dan Niescuir,] had worked on the Oswald case during an "in house" investigation a couple of years ago. He said that they were talking about the case because of the HSCA's release of several photographs to the press with a request that anyone able to identify those photos contact the Committee. Mr. Piccolo stated that during the course of this discussion [Mr. Niescuir] stated that [Charlotte Bustos,] "the gal at the Mexico desk", had found the surveillance photographs of Oswald. Mr. Piccolo stated that he assumed that [Mr. Niescuir] had become aware of [Ms. Bustos'] coup through his research into the Oswald case.

Finally, Mr. Piccolo speculated that any photographs of an American from Mexico City surveillance operations would have been sent to Headquarters and that he presumed someone would have found the photo of Oswald in a file made up of these photos.

~~Mr. Piccolo was next asked whether~~

Mr. Piccolo was next asked whether he is acquainted with the following people:

- 1) George Witner-no.
- 2) Douglas Gupton-no.
- 3) David Phillips-yes.
- 4) E. Howard Hunt-yes, but not well.
- 5) Maurice Bishop-no.
- 6) Ross Crozier-no.
- 7) Antonio Veciana-no.
- 8) [Stanley Watson-yes.]
- 9) Clare Boonstra-yes.
- 10) Silvia Duran-no recollection.
- 11) Manuel Calvillo-no.
- 12) Ann Goodpasture-yes.
- 13) [LIRING/3] yes, but can recall nothing.

14) Win Scott-yes; Mr. Piccolo was queried whether Mr. Scott maintained a personal safe in Mexico City while he was Chief of Station ~~there~~^{in Mexico City}. Mr. Piccolo responded that restricted materials would have been kept in a safe in Mr. Scott's office. Mr. Piccolo defined restricted materials as being very sensitive; i.e., not finding its way into the routine files and indexes. Mr. Piccolo stated that he does not know who would have had access to the safe other than Mr. Scott and, further, he has no idea about what happened to it when Mr. Scott retired.

- 15) [LITAM/L/9] in true name-no.
- 16) [LITAM/L/9] Mr. Piccolo responded that we (meaning interviewers) knew who that was. He was asked how he knew that we knew. He stated that we ~~had read the files. He was asked how he k-~~

Piccolo Interview, Page 7.

had read the files. He was asked how he knew that we had read the files. He stated that some of the cable traffic passed across his desk.

Mr. Piccolo was next asked if he could identify the function of the CIA component known as CI/SIG. He responded that it was his belief that CI/SIG/dealt with ciphers because the designation seemed to imply that it was a Special Intelligence Group or a Signal Intelligence Group.

At this point in the interview Mr. Piccolo was asked to examine a 5 May 1964 CIA debriefing report of A/1 reporting A/1's knowledge of Oswald's possible contacts with the DGI. Mr. Piccolo stated that he does not recall ever seeing this report or the information contained in it. He had no recollection of Rogelio Rodriguez, Luisa Calderon, and his recollection of Manuel Vega was poor. Mr. Piccolo was next asked to examine a 7 May 1964 CIA memorandum prepared by [Harold Swenson] which elaborates on A/1's knowledge of Oswald and the JFK assassination. Mr. Piccolo stated that he had never seen this memorandum and that it did not refresh his recollection regarding Luisa Calderon. Mr. Piccolo was then asked if A/1 had been questioned during his polygraph session in 1964 about his knowledge of Oswald. Mr. Piccolo stated he did not know, that he did not see the polygraph results but does recall that two persons were present during the polygraph session.

Mr. Piccolo was then asked if he could define a Black Tape 201. He stated that such a file has been retired and is black taped to hide either an operational relationship or other sensitive matters. This file is enveloped and sealed with black tape. He indicated that a name trace should indicate if a file has been black taped. Moreover, he stated that it would be a very rare occurrence for an agent file to be maintained on

a soft file basis.

Mr. Piccolo was next asked to examine CIA debriefing No. 65 of A/1 pertaining to the duties of DGI officers in the field regarding visa applicants. Mr. Piccolo did not recall ever reviewing this report. He indicated that the debriefing report appeared accurate. He further stated the DGI used extensive consulate cover in its operations. Mr. Piccolo stated that he believed Eusebio Azcue, form Cuban Consul in Mexico City, to have been a DGI officer.

Mr. Piccolo was queried concerning his knowledge of the diagraph ["ZR".] Specifically, he was asked what significance the notation [ZR] had when placed next to the names of DGI officers Mirabal and Vega as occurs in a 30 April 1964 excerpt from a CIA debriefing report of A/1. Mr. Piccolo stated that the [ZR] probably stood for [ZRNICK,] a project designed to identify the clandestine Cuban intelligence network.

Mr. Piccolo next examined a 17 July 1964 CIA contact report ~~that he~~ ~~authored~~. Mr. Piccolo verified his authorship of the contact report and further stated that the Cuban defector [AMNIP/1] identified in the report had been a Cuban G-2 agent who had defected in 1962 or 1963. Mr. Piccolo further indicated that the photographs examined by A/1 and [AMNIP/1] as reported in the contact report, probably originated with the [LIONION surveillance] operations.

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Mr. Piccolo next/asked to detail his knowledge of Teresa Proenza Proenza. He stated that she was related to the manager of Cubana Airlines in Mexico. He further declared that he had no knowledge that Proenza had ever been associated with the CIA [but did admit that she had been of operational interest to the Agency.] He did not know if she had been a

Piccolo Interview, Page 9.

target for recruitment by the CIA. However, Mr. Piccolo declined to discuss further Ms. Proenza's relationship with the CIA unless HSCA could demonstrate the relevancy of the questioning.

Lastly, Mr. Piccolo was asked to examine CIA dispatch HMMW-11935, 1 September 1963, regarding Luisa Calderon. Mr. Piccolo indicated that the designation therein of SAS/EOB represented Cuban Task Force/ External Operations Branch. EOB, he stated operated outside of Cuba. Furthermore, Mr. Piccolo stated that he knew the author of the dispatch, Dave Ronis, whom he stated had retired from the CIA.