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Interview
~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

009093

DATE 6/8/78 TIME 3:00

I. Identifying Information:

Name Cynthia Thomas Telephone _____Address 4420 50th St. NW., Washington D.C.Type of Contact: Telephone
 Person

II. Summary of Contact:

On 5/29/78 Ms. Thomas was interviewed at her home on 50th Street NW by Dan Hardway and Harold Leap. Ms. Thomas said that her husband, Charles W. Thomas had committed suicide in 1971.

Ms Thomas was questioned about Elena Garro de Paz. She said that she was familiar with the story and only wondered why we had not contacted her earlier. She said that Elena is now in hiding and has always been a little bit wild.

Ms. Thomas was adamant in denying that Elena was at all "crazy". Ms. Thomas believes very strongly that Elena had to have had some basis for her reporting.

Ms. Thomas said that she believed Elena's allegation about Duran being Oswald's lover because Elena was not the type of woman who took part in gossip, "women talk" or stories about other women. Ms. Thomas said that it was her husband, not Elena, who had figured out the correct dates of the party from Elena's datebook. Ms. Thomas does not know where this datebook is now. Ms. Thomas said that Elena was very bright and "knew too much".

III. Recommended Follow-up (if any):

more-----

Signature: Dan Hardway

When asked why she knew too much, Ms. Thomas hedged and did not divulge any specifics. Ms. Thomas said that their last contact with Elena was in 1968. At that time Elena called her husband from New York. She (Elena) said that she was being held at a hotel against her will and asked Charles Thomas for help. Thomas tried to help her. Cynthia does not remember all the things that her husband did to try to help, but does remember that he called Octavio Paz. She was sure that Thomas took other actions at the time but cannot remember them. She said that he always kept extensive notes and she would try to locate his notes from this incident. After contacting Octavio, Charles Thomas tried to locate Elena at the hotel she claimed to be at. When he called there he was told that she had checked out in a hurry, leaving her luggage behind.

Ms. Thomas said that Elena had trusted Charles Thomas and had taken him into her inner circle of friends. Most of Elena's friends were Mexican intellectuals and leftists, hence the value of this contact to the CIA. Ms. Thomas said that the CIA used Thomas to get information from these people and that Charles Thomas willingly cooperated in this effort.

Ms. Thomas offered two reasons why Charles Thomas' report of Elena's allegations received the type of response from the American officials that it did. The first reason was that Win Scott was very close to President Diaz Ordaz and that this, in some way, may have been the reason for suppressing Elena's story. The second reason that she offered was that Ferris, the Legal Attache at the time, resented someone from the political section poking around in his business.

Ms. Thomas said that her husband had always "bailed out" the CIA by providing them with the information that he obtained. She said, because of this the CIA was always trying to "pick up" their expenses but they

always declined the CIA's offers.

The Thomas' left Mexico City in 1967. At that time a CIA officer took over Charles Thomas' contacts. Ms. Thomas said that the officer was named Stanley Watson and that he was now retired and living in Cuenavaca, Mexico. Ms. Thomas termed Watson a "bungling manipulator". She said that Watson was involved in some way that she is not sure of in the Student riots in Mexico in 1968. She speculated that he may have been involved in inciting them. When asked specifically whether Watson had taken over the contact with Elena in 1967 Ms. Thomas responded affirmatively.

Not long after the last contact with Elena in 1968, Charles Thomas learned that he was being "selected out" of the Foreign Service. The reason for his selection out was that he had not received a promotion in the required manner. After his selection out Mr. Thomas applied for over 2000 jobs. He remained unemployed nevertheless until his suicide in 1971. It is Ms. Thomas' belief that he was blackballed. Ms. Thomas provided an article about her husband that appeared in the Washington Evening Star. (Copy attached.) She also showed us a copy of an article that appeared in Time magazine, p. 20, on 11/15/71.

After Charles' suicide, Cynthia took actions to get her husband reinstated in the Foreign Service. As a result of this she obtained a job in the Foreign Service. William Fulbright and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee held hearings on the case. Most of Charles' documents were turned over to the SFRC. Mrs. Thomas dealt with Robert Dockery (phon.) at the SFRC. After holding hearings the SFRC introduced a private bill which reinstated Charles Thomas. (Copies of report and bill attached.)

Ms. Thomas said that she took the matter to the Foreign Relations Committee only after she had tried to get relief through State Department channels. She said that her case was handled at the State Department by Wilmet Hastings, an assistant to Eliot Richardson, and John McCumber. Ms. Thomas said that it was McCumber who offered her the job with the Foreign Service, and that he is now associated with the Museum of Modern Art. She said that he has always had strong ties to the CIA.

Ms. Thomas suggested two other people who might know something about Charles Thomas and Elena Garro de Paz's allegations. Wally Stewart was the Political Consul in Mexico City at the time and all of Charles Thomas' reports went to him. He was Thomas' direct superior. Ms. Thomas said that he was also a very good friend of the Legal Attache. The other person Clare Boonstra was also a political officer and was aware of the discussions with Elena. Ms. Thomas thinks that Stewart is retired in Mexico and that Boonstra is retired somewhere in Florida.

Despair Among Diplomats

By **GEORGE SHERMAN**

Star Staff Writer

"Selection out", "involuntary separation", "too long in class"—obscure terms, perhaps, but they spell despair to Foreign Service officers of the United States.

These are the polite words for telling a career diplomat he is fired.

They are part of a system that is coming under attack both inside and outside the State Department.

Even officers who have survived the tough competition for promotion say morale is sagging

and revolt simmering. A determined move is afoot to strip the "O" (for organization) office of its grip on the promotion system.

In Congress, Sen. Birch Bayh, D-Ind., and Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott, R-Pa., plan to introduce this week legislation to force a grievance system on the State Department. It would operate directly under the secretary of State, outside the O office.

The shock which produced this momentum came April 12 when "retired" Foreign Service

officer Charles W. Thomas, 48, unemployed lawyer and linguist, put a gun to his head at his Potomac Avenue NW home.

Almost two years earlier, July 31, 1969, Thomas had been forced out of the State Department without a pension. No one claimed he was incompetent or a security risk. He was simply a victim of competition, having failed to gain promotion out of Class 4 Foreign Service officer in the required eight years.

Today the department establishment acknowledges that "unfortunate mistakes" were made

in the Thomas case. They include the misfiling of an excellent performance report and alleged falsification of another—both errors unknown to the promotion boards.

For two years Thomas and his wife, Cynthia, tried to appeal the verdict. They went through the system they had served for the past 18 years. They failed. At 46, Thomas was irrevocably "selected out," only to discover that he was an over-qualified and middle-aged misfit in civilian life.

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FSO: Despair Among 'Retired' Diplomats

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He collected nearly 2,000 job rejection letters. He went heavily into debt against his \$10,000 Foreign Service annuity which would begin at age 60. He was considering a job as a night waiter to save his family from destitution. Now that he is dead, his widow gets \$5,500 a year from a government pension to support her two children.

Mrs. Thomas also has been given a job in the State Department. She intends to continue her campaign to have her husband reinstated posthumously.

Today a "Mr. X" in the department (he prefers to remain anonymous) is facing the same dilemma—being selected out for "too long in class," eight years in Class 4 without promotion. He too is under 50, therefore legally ineligible for a pension; he is a trained linguist and economist with no contacts outside the diplomatic world.

At 45, he too is worried about support for his wife and two children. The best he has been offered so far is two-year extension of his time in Class 4, making him—by his own admission—"non-person" ineligible for promotion.

Mr. X has refused. He charges the department with inequity and injustice and is demanding his "day in court." That means a grievance committee to hear his complaints—a committee which the regulations say should be formed within five working days after the request is received.

He has gone right up the ladder in protest—from Director of Personnel Howard P. Mace, to Deputy Undersecretary of State for Administration William B. Macomber Jr., to Secretary of State William P. Rogers himself. He claims that his whole career in the Foreign Service has been organized to insure his ultimate "selection out."

For instance, in the early '60s just after being promoted to Class 4, he accepted several special assignments. They were considered a tribute to his excellence—a year at Harvard University in graduate economics at government expense, another year in a tough East European language course in Washington.

Out of Channels

Mr. X did not go to East Europe. He ended up in Geneva working in the American mission on international economics. He liked the job enormously. But he soon discovered that those special assignments, taking him out of the "normal" State Department channels for efficiency reports by superiors, had hurt his promotion chances.

Promotion boards meet every fall, one each for the 8 classes of the Foreign Service. They assess some 15,000 people in the State Department, Agency for International Development, and United States Information Agency—including the 3,000 career diplomats. Each board has seven members—some ranking Foreign Service officers, some drawn from other government departments, some from the public at large.

These boards are allowed to recommend a certain percentage of the hundreds in each class for promotion each year—a percentage based largely on the money available from Congress. They also rate the lowest 5 or 10 percent in each class, who automatically become candidates for selection out. Recommendations go to Deputy Undersecretary



CHARLES W. THOMAS

Macomber, who can narrow down the promotion lists, and then to Rogers for final approval.

The O office—a group of about 135 personnel professionals—is enormously important in organizing this procedure. Macomber is in over-all charge, but day-to-day operations—and decisions—are controlled by Mace.

The Staff Work

"O" Office does the staff work for the promotion boards. "O" Office files and channels the efficiency reports which the promotion boards receive each year on every officer—reports written by an officer's superior and reviewed at the next higher level. Insiders insist that the boards, inundated with thousands of reports, rely heavily on the advice of Mace's subordinate—the chief of the Performance Evaluation Division.

Each year the process is repeated. A candidate is rated, promoted, or passed over. If he is not in either the highest or lowest percentage one year, he must start over in new competition the next year.

Here is where time in class takes a toll. As the years build up in any one class, officers become desperate for promotion. Mr. X believes that he was penalized in this competition, because for at least two years of the eight he was allowed, no standard efficiency reports were there for the promotion boards to assess.

Nor does the loss of time end there. By specific order of the office, boards are ordered to give lower priority to those officers remaining longest in their class. An analysis in the May 1969 Foreign Service Journal pointed out the stark results—officers are allowed to remain 10 years in Class 3, but 93 percent of all those promoted that year to Class 2 had been in their grade six years or less.

Supporters of X argue that the two years he lost, early during his time in Class 4, were of crucial importance. He had won a quick promotion out of Class 5 only to become a victim of too-long-in-class-4.

'General' Grievance

His plea for a hearing has gotten nowhere. No outside grievance committee has been set up. Mace has informed him that his grievance about promotion is too "general," and specifically exempted from the grievance system in the regulations for more than 20 years.

"If I give in on X," said Mace in an interview, "everyone else will want his case reviewed. It would undermine discipline and get away with the selection board system." This attitude only infuriates

the critics. They do not take a position on the substance of X's complaint. They simply support his right to "due process of law."

They point out that the State Department, alone in the huge federal bureaucracy, does not have an operational grievance system. Despite the regulations, only one hearing has been held in 20 years—and that has been dragging on for 18 months without result.

"I am the first to admit that we need a grievance system," said Mace. "But we are all babes in the wood on this thing, it is all so new. Up until two years ago I never heard a thing about grievances over promotion. It all seems the outgrowth of the unrest of youth in this country. Organizations of Foreign Service officers have become outspoken advocates of employ rights."

The largest of those organizations—the American Foreign Service Association—is demanding immediate action. It happens to be in hot negotiations with Macomber on an executive order President Nixon is to issue this summer on the whole range of management-employee relations in the State Department.

Basis For Legislation

The association wants that order to include an elaborate grievance system. It has produced a draft—in fact, it is the basis for the Bayh-Scott legislation. Sources in both Macomber's office and in the association say that "something like" this grievance system probably will go into the President's executive order.

Meanwhile Macomber and company in the "O" Office are clearly trying to avoid revolt in the ranks. The charges of injustice, coercion, arbitrary decisions are clearly embarrassing to a secretary of state who took office in January 1969 promising the Foreign Service "a receptive and open establishment" allowing "divergent views."

Macomber has given Mrs. Cynthia Thomas a job in the office of the science adviser in the department at the \$12,500-\$14,000 salary of Foreign Service Class 5—just one rank below that of her dead husband.

Ms. Thomas is a highly trained woman. But even those close to Macomber agree that Mrs. Thomas was given the job—hard to come by these days in the State Department—as an "act of conscience." The fact that Bayh has been investigating the Thomas case and refusing to accept the official explanations may be another reason, critics say.

In another move, the director general of the Foreign Service, John H. Burns—who stands between Mace and Macomber in the "O" hierarchy—has proposed relaxation of the promotion rules.

In essence the proposed changes would end the "psychological insecurity" in the middle grades of 3, 4 and 5. Instead of the short time now allowed in each class, the officer would now be given 20 years to get through all three classes into higher ranking Class 2.

Would Keep Tenure

Those who failed would still have 20-year tenure. The department intends to ask Congress to allow pensions for Class 4 officers below age 50. Younger officers more able to find a civilian job if forced to leave the service, would face tougher competition and screening in getting across "the threshold" to Class 4.

These proposals are the re-

sults of departmental task forces set up by Macomber in 1969. Mace and others claim that now the "O" Office is being made the scapegoat for an inhuman promotion system previously forced on the department by demands of money and long-time overstaffing of middle and upper ranks.

They point to the forced reductions in personnel ordered by the Johnson administration—the so-called Balpa 1 and Balpa 2 cutbacks, those ordered due to "balance-of-payments" difficulties. Under Nixon came a third alphabetical exercise in manpower—the so-called Opred, Operations Reductions of the State Department.

Mace estimates that since 1968 these cutbacks have cost the department 1500 foreign service officers, all through executive order from the White House. Only coincidentally the Nixon administration has set out to "rationalize" Foreign Service employment by getting new balance between young and old, specialists and "generalists."

The critics answer that Macomber's tactics in carrying out admittedly difficult operations have only demoralized the service more. In the name of greater efficiency and despite universal suspicion of his "O" office, he has just moved to centralize and control all personnel programs still more tightly from that of-

fice. This action is based on a recommendation of one of his task forces, which, in turn—the critics say—was controlled by the personnel bureaucrats.

"O" Office has also attempted to drown out demands for an independent grievance system by setting up "unofficial" hearing panels through its own jurisdiction. These are in the hands of Robert C. F. Gordon, an old-hand career officer. Macomber commissioned him a year ago as departmental ombudsman to hear complaints from the service on everything from travel allowances to promotion.

More disenchanted critics charge that the result has become a network of informal "kangaroo courts," three-mem-

ber panels set up by Gordon and "O" to hear grievances. They are not called for in Foreign Service regulations. They do not keep stenographic records, they do not allow the complaining officer to examine evidence, to appoint an outside representative, or to question witnesses. In a word they are not independent or open.

The result is one more step in deteriorating confidence in the Foreign Service system. Younger officers feel helpless, older officers confused and uncertain about surviving the cruel competition. The more cynical of all ages wonder if they are living through the "house-cleaning" promised by the presidential candidate Richard Nixon in 1968.

The Evening Star
 Washington, D.C. June 7, 1971
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