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By: ~~Main~~ NARS, Date: 3/25/76

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

April 22, 1964

FROM: W. David Slawson
SUBJECT: Trip to Mexico City

On Wednesday, April 8, 1964 Mr. Howard P. Willens, Mr. William T. Coleman, Jr., and Mr. W. David Slawson, all on the staff of the Commission, flew from Washington, D. C. to Mexico City. Mr. Coleman returned on Sunday, April 12 and Mr. Slawson and Mr. Willens returned on an airplane leaving Mexico City at about 3:20, Monday afternoon, April 13. This memorandum will briefly summarize this trip plus some of the meetings held in preparation for it.

TUESDAY - APRIL 7

10:20 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Willens, Coleman and Slawson met with Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs Thomas Mann, Mr. Thomas Ehrlich of the Office of the Legal Adviser for the State Department, and two aides to Mr. Mann in Mr. Mann's office at about 10:20 a.m. Assistant Secretary Mann was Ambassador to Mexico at the time of the assassination and personally directed the investigatory effort and our relations with the Mexican law enforcement authorities immediately after the news of the President's death reached Mexico City. A copy

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Name: W. D. Slawson Agency: CSA Date: 7/29/75
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of the file created by his efforts, consisting of telegrams between Mexico City and the State Department in Washington, had previously been forwarded to the Commission. The purpose of our meeting with Ambassador Mann was first, to inform him of our intent to go to Mexico and discuss with him our proposed actions there and second, to raise certain questions with him about his thoughts and actions in Mexico immediately after the assassination.

The file turned over to the Commission by Ambassador Mann contains statements of opinion by him that Oswald was probably involved in a sinister fashion, especially by way of taking a bribe, with the Cuban Embassy in Mexico City or with some other Castro agency. These suspicions were reinforced by the allegations of a certain "Alvarado" who at the time was being interrogated intensively by the Mexican authorities and by representatives of the American Embassy in Mexico City because he claimed to have seen Lee Harvey Oswald take \$6500 in American bills from an individual in the Cuban Embassy. We asked Ambassador Mann what particular evidence aside from the Alvarado assertions he had for these suspicions. He replied that he had none except the general feeling "in his guts" that Castro was the kind of dictator who might have carried out this

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kind of ruthless action, either through some hope of gaining from it or simply as revenge. The Ambassador added that not even the allegations of Alvarado or other rumors which may have been current in Mexico City to the effect that money had been given to Oswald were really the cause of his suspicions, since the Alvarado allegations were not made until a day or so later, but that the fact that Oswald had visited the Cuban and Russian Embassies in Mexico City shortly before the assassination, which he had learned from his security officers at the Embassy, plus what he believed about Castro's character, seemed sufficient to him to raise the gravest suspicions. Later, he pointed out, when he had a chance to listen to the Dorticos-Armas intercepts, his suspicions were strengthened.

Ambassador Mann knew of no contacts by Oswald with anyone in Mexico City other than his visits to the Cuban and Soviet Embassies and his staying at the Hotel del Comercio. Ambassador Mann said that our intelligence took and was still taking photographs of both the Cuban and Soviet Embassies whenever anyone left or entered their main entrances, at least during the normal visiting hours on Monday through Friday, during the daytime when pictures could be taken without artificial light.

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The Ambassador said that he had been kept informed of the Silvia Duran interrogation through his aides, Clarke Anderson and Winston Scott. He learned of it informally, that is, Anderson and Scott reported orally to him as soon as they received from the Mexican authorities at "Gobernacion" any news about how the interrogation was progressing.

In response to our questions, the Ambassador recommended that when we got to Mexico City we should work through the representatives of the FBI and the CIA at the American Embassy and, through them, with the Mexican officials they recommended, but that we should do all of this as quietly as possible, without any newspaper publicity. We also asked Ambassador Mann to what extent it was known in Mexico City that the Hotel del Comercio was a headquarters for pro-Castro activities. The Ambassador replied that it was not known generally at all, that this information was current only in intelligence circles.

Ambassador Mann said that the file from his Embassy which had previously been forwarded to the Commission constituted the entire file which was in existence on this particular subject, with the one exception that it may not have included

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the report from the FBI referred to therein. We confirmed that it had not included that report. He said that he was sure that this report could be obtained from Clarke Anderson in Mexico City, if we thought it was necessary. In response to a similar question about the "Alvarado" file, he replied that any additional papers in the possession of American authorities that might be in existence on Alvarado could probably be obtained through the CIA and that we could speak to Mr. Scott about this. He said that he had never seen any papers or formal statements by Silvia Duran; all his information about what she is supposed to have told the Mexican police was received by word of mouth through his aides, Scott and Anderson.

Ambassador Mann was then called out to another conference, for which he was already a half-hour late. As the meeting was breaking up he asked Mr. Slawson whether, with the benefit of hindsight, the members of the Commission staff felt that his recommendations and actions shortly after the assassination had been justified or whether we thought they were unduly rash. Mr. Slawson replied that although the investigation of the specific allegations of Alvarado had shown that they were in all probability a fabrication, he found nothing in what the Ambassador had done to have been unjustified, in

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view of the facts known to him and his assistants at the time and in view of the extreme seriousness of the occurrence.

3:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.

At 3:30 in the afternoon Mr. Jack Witten of the CIA came to the Commission offices and conferred there with Slawson, Willens and Coleman. This conference grew out of a suggestion made by Mr. Richard Helms of the CIA about two weeks previous, in which he had mentioned that it would be a good idea if a representative of his agency met with those persons from the Commission who planned to go to Mexico just before they left, in order to insure that the CIA could properly advise us of any last-minute arrangements and properly alert its people in Mexico of our arrival.

We discussed whether we would journey to Mexico officially and openly or completely incognito, and Mr. Witten offered to make arrangements to get us into Mexico completely unnoticed if we desired to do so. We told him that we did not want to try to keep the trip entirely secret. We would do our best to avoid any kind of newspaper publicity or public announcements. We intended to introduce ourselves at the

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9:00. However, weather and technical difficulties held up the plane in Philadelphia and we did not get off the ground in Washington until almost 2:00 o'clock in the afternoon.

After a short stop in New Orleans we arrived in Mexico City at about 6:00 p.m., Mexico City time. We were met as we came off the airplane by a representative of Eastern Airlines, Mr. Jorge Villagomez, who addressed each of us by name, gave us his business card and eased our way through Mexican customs. An unidentified man approached Mr. Willens and asked if we were from the Embassy. Willens replied that we were not. The individual asked if it was true that people were coming to investigate the assassination. Willens refused to confirm this report. Mr. Coleman had some minor difficulties with the Mexican Immigration officials over whether or not he had been vaccinated recently, and in the course of discussions on this the Eastern Airlines representative mentioned to the Immigration official something to the effect that Mr. Coleman was a representative of the Warren Commission. This comment could have been overheard by the person who had approached Mr. Willens, who in the meantime had walked back towards Mr. Coleman. If all this occurred as we suspect it may have, it could explain why there was an announcement in two

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of the Mexico City newspapers the following morning naming us and stating that we had come to Mexico on business for the Commission.

Just inside the airport terminal we were met by Mr. Clarke Anderson and Mr. Rolfe Larson from the American Embassy. These men were later identified, respectively, as Chief of the FBI in Mexico City and an FBI agent temporarily assigned for duty in Mexico City. Anderson and Larson took the three of us to our hotel, the Continental Hilton.

THURSDAY - APRIL 9

9:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.

At 9:00 a.m. the three of us met in the FBI offices at the Embassy with Mr. Larson and discussed generally with him the progress of the assassination investigation while we were waiting to meet Ambassador Freeman. Clarke Anderson and Winston Scott, the CIA Chief in Mexico City, were conferring with the Ambassador and briefing him on the Mexican aspects of the assassination investigation. Ambassador Freeman had been at this post only two days, having just presented his credentials to the President of Mexico on Monday, April 6.

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9:30 a.m. to 9:55 a.m.

We met with the Ambassador at about 9:30 in the morning. Present besides the three of us and the Ambassador were Minister Boonstra, Winston Scott and Clarke Anderson.

Mr. Coleman explained in general terms the purpose of our trip. He said that we wanted to learn as much as possible about what investigations were currently being carried out, with special emphasis on the Hotel del Comercio and on Oswald's northbound journey out of Mexico City, and that we wanted to decide upon and initiate whatever new lines of investigation we felt were called for. In connection with looking into these investigations, we wished to satisfy ourselves that everything reasonably possible was being done and, in addition, we wanted to become as current as possible on evidence being produced. Also, we hoped to make contact with one or more Mexican officials so as to learn directly from them what part they had played in the assassination investigation and what they had learned that might be of value to us. In particular, we wanted to find out as much as possible about what Mrs. Silvia Duran, the clerk at the Cuban Embassy who dealt frequently with Oswald, knew. Finally, we hoped to make arrangements for, and

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and perhaps accomplish, the authentication of our evidence obtained in Mexico, by the taking of depositions or by inviting witnesses to appear before the Commission to testify.

Mr. Coleman added that we hoped in all this to be guided by the counsel of the Ambassador and his staff, because we did not want to do anything that would disturb the good relations of the American and Mexican governments.

Ambassador Freeman replied that he and his staff would cooperate completely. He said that he saw no objection whatever to our talking directly to Mexicans who had some information to contribute, but he felt that this should be done only in the Embassy and only on the clearly stated basis that all appearances and testimony were totally voluntary on the part of the Mexicans. As to speaking to Mexican officials, the Ambassador again said that this would be fine and he asked only that we work through his staff in setting up appointments, etc. The Ambassador pointed out that the taking of formal depositions in a foreign country could be a very difficult and technical matter. He referred us to the Consulate section of the Embassy for information on how to go about doing this.

The Ambassador, Clarke, Boonstra and Anderson felt

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Embassy and to Mexican officials as what we in fact were, representatives of the Commission.

Witten said that in dealing with Mr. Winston Scott, the CIA Chief for Mexico, we would be working with one of the top foreign operatives in their entire organization. He said that the CIA would give us complete cooperation.

We outlined to Mr. Witten our entire proposed plan once we arrived in Mexico, in general terms, and asked for his comments on how best to achieve our goals. His reply in every instance was that we should deal on the spot with Mr. Scott. Witten thought that our proposed journey was a very good idea. He repeated what Mr. Helms of the CIA had said a while ago, that there is no substitute for the "case officer" being "on the spot."

WEDNESDAY - APRIL 8

8:15 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Our plane was scheduled to leave Washington from Dulles Airport at 9:30 in the morning and accordingly all three of us met at the Washington Air Terminal in the Albert Pick Motel at about 8:15 and later arrived at the Airport at about

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that our seeing Silvia Duran would be a highly sensitive matter and that it should be discussed fully with the Mexican officials, but they agreed that it did not differ in principle from our seeing other Mexican witnesses, i.e., the Ambassador approved so long as we saw her in the American Embassy, and made clear to her that her appearance was entirely voluntary.

There then followed an exchange of views on how best to approach Mexican officials, what Mexican officials would be most valuable for our purposes, and the general substance of our work. At about five minutes to ten the Ambassador had to excuse himself for his first staff meeting, which he had called for 10:00 a.m.

10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Willens, Coleman and Slawson retired to the office that had been assigned to them at the Embassy, room 510, to discuss the conference with the Ambassador and generally to draw up outlines for our coming conference with the FBI, the CIA and Mr. Boonstra.

11:00 a.m. to 1:45 p.m.

Mr. Anderson and Mr. Scott came to room 510 after

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the staff meeting had adjourned. We agreed that we would confer with Mr. Anderson immediately and meet Mr. Scott later in the day, at about 3:30. Mr. Anderson was welcome to come with us at our meeting with Mr. Scott, if he desired to do so, and he said that he would make up his mind on this after he had conferred with us, because he of course had other work to do and would not want to attend the meeting with Scott if it would simply involve him in a repetition of ground he had already covered.

Accordingly, we met immediately with Clarke Anderson in his offices. He invited Rolfe Larson and a Mr. Trent to take part in the conference. Mr. Trent was also an agent of the FBI temporarily on duty in Mexico.

One of the topics of conversation was Reverend Albert Alexander Osborne, also known as John Howard Bowen. Mr. Trent had been the agent primarily engaged in tracking down and talking with Bowen, although Larson too had been somewhat involved. Briefly, the agents described Bowen as an elderly white haired gentleman who was probably engaged in some kind of violation of the law in his fund raising, because it was not clear that he actually used the money he received for religious

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purposes, at least of the kind he represented that he would use the money for, and they both regarded Bowen as somewhat unstable mentally. Trent described how when he first approached Bowen he referred to him as "Mr. Osborne," and the reply was that he, Trent, must be mistaken, because he, Osborne, was Bowen. Osborne then went on to say that he was often mistaken for Osborne but that he had not seen that other gentleman in some time, and believed he was in some other section of Mexico, etc. Trent said that Osborne carried this off very well. It was not until later that Osborne admitted that he was really Osborne but that he often used the name Bowen. When asked directly how they thought Osborne would react to being asked or compelled to appear to testify before the Commission or a staff member, Trent and Larson were inconclusive. They thought that there might be trouble but they were not sure. Trent and the other FBI representatives then described the procedures the Mexican Immigration Authorities were using in dealing with Osborne. In sum, the authorities had not acted as yet to deport Osborne but they believe that they had sufficient grounds to do so at any time. In the meantime they were keeping an eye on him and were questioning him occasionally. The FBI representatives felt that if we

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wanted to push it, the Mexican authorities would deport Osborne quickly.

The discussion then continued on to other investigations. Larson gave a detailed summary of recent results of the investigation of Oswald's northbound travel on the Transportes del Norte bus. I will not go into what he said here because it is now reflected in an FBI report in the possession of the Commission. We advised him to include as much detail as possible in the reports which he sent through channels in Washington to our Commission because the detail which he had told us orally seemed to fit what we knew about Oswald's background and was therefore valuable as confirmatory material in the overall picture, even though it perhaps seemed important to Larson. We then supplied various details about Oswald's background and character which might assist Larson in interrogating witnesses in Mexico. Larson, Trent and Anderson agreed to include all possible detail in their future reports from Mexico.

Larson and Anderson then went into a discussion of the Hotel del Comercio investigation. Here, it appears that the conclusion of the Mexican investigators that no one at the hotel

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remembered Oswald and that the only evidence of his stay there was his name on the register was incorrect. Larson, after several interrogations, had found that the maid at the hotel did remember Oswald and was able to give some bits of information about him. For one thing, she, as did other witnesses, confirmed that he was always alone when she saw him. Further, she said that he invariably had left the hotel before she cleaned his room at about 9:00 in the morning. Larson had also found out that the proprietress of the little restaurant next door to the hotel was able to identify Oswald, although Larson was not completely certain on how much she really remembered and how much she may have picked up by suggestion from newspaper reporters. Anyway, she has stated that Oswald frequently ate lunches and dinners at her restaurant, that he invariably ordered very cheap meals, that he always ate alone, and that he was not able to converse sufficiently in Spanish so that he really knew what he was ordering when he ordered a meal. For example, he often refused soup and dessert, apparently believing that he was thereby saving money, although both items were included in the cost of the full meal.

Various other investigations of Oswald and of places where Oswald may have been in Mexico City were also touched upon,

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such as the bull fight arena, the jai alai games, and the places where he may have purchased tourist items. For example, Larson and Anderson said that another one of their agents had questioned more than three hundred silver shops in an attempt to locate the place where Oswald may have purchased a silver bracelet inscribed "Marina." The response had been negative at each shop and subsequent investigation has shown that such bracelets are probably not sold in Mexico at all because they are made in Japan and the duty on importing them into Mexico would make their price non-competitive with local products.

We then asked what was the status of the Gutierrez investigation. Trend and Larson and Anderson all agreed that Gutierrez was sincere and was doing all he could to cooperate with the investigation of what he claims to have seen. In fact, Gutierrez has spend a considerable amount of time trying to get more valuable information and he has never tried to receive any compensation for this work. The weakness in Gutierrez' story, according to the FBI representatives, is the identification of Oswald. For example, Gutierrez has failed to identify Oswald as the man he saw at the Cuban Embassy receiving money when shown a picture of Oswald passing out

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Fair Play for Cuba pamphlets in New Orleans during the summer of 1963. Gutierrez says that he never saw his man in profile, only from the rear and, very fleetingly, from a direct forward view. His best piece of identification is to the automobile he saw "Oswald" and the Cuban enter just outside of the Embassy. Even here, however, assuming that his description of the automobile is completely accurate, there are probably dozens of such automobiles in and around Mexico City. Renault is a popular make of car in Mexico, and the color described by Gutierrez is a popular color. One automobile answering this description and frequently seen around the Cuban Embassy has been located, but it is still registered under the name of the man who owned and sold it several years ago. This situation is apparently common in Mexico. Mexicans often register a car under the name of its former owner in order to avoid paying a sales tax on the transfer. However, investigation is continuing to see if the present owner of this particular automobile can be located. In addition, a constant surveillance of the Cuban Embassy and its vicinity is being kept, to spot this or similar car, and if one is spotted, further investigation will be carried out.

Slawson then mentioned that we had brought with us from Washington all the items of physical evidence which might

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