

JFK ASSASSINATION SYSTEM  
IDENTIFICATION FORM

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AGENCY INFORMATION

AGENCY : CIA  
RECORD NUMBER : 104-10320-10157  
RECORD SERIES : JFK CIA HRG  
AGENCY FILE NUMBER : CIA-OGC-FILES

Released under the John  
F. Kennedy  
Assassination Records  
Collection Act of 1992  
(44 USC 2107 Note).  
Case#:NW 53320 Date:  
06-24-2017

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DOCUMENT INFORMATION

ORIGINATOR : HOUSE  
FROM :  
TO :  
TITLE : SELECT COMMITTEE ON ASSASSINATIONS - AGENDA  
DATE : 09/15/78  
PAGES : 52  
SUBJECTS : RUSSIA  
NOSENKO

**CLASSIFIED  
ATTACHMENT**

DOCUMENT TYPE : PAPER, TEXTUAL DOCUMENT  
CLASSIFICATION : UNCLASSIFIED  
RESTRICTIONS : 1B  
CURRENT STATUS : RELEASED WITH DELETIONS  
DATE OF LAST REVIEW : 07/10/00  
OPENING CRITERIA :  
COMMENTS : JFK-M-12:F7 2000.07.10.13:37:19:513054: 1-PG AGENDA  
W/ATTS

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[R] - ITEM IS RESTRICTED

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September 15, 1973 - No Exhibits

ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED  
HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED  
DATE 10-10-2008 BY 60322 UCBAW

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SELECT COMMITTEE ON ASSASSINATIONS

AGENDA

Friday, September 15, 1979

RUSSIA

1. Narration on "Russia" by Chief Counsel G. Robert Blakey
2. Reading of Committee Staff Report, "Oswald in the Soviet Union: Investigation of Yuri Nosenko", by Chief Counsel G. Robert Blakey.
3. Continuation of narration by Chief Counsel G. Robert Blakey.
4. Today's witness: John Hart - CIA (Counsel: Kenneth Klein)

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BLANEY NARRATION: RUSSIA

Friday, September 15, 1979

Within hours of the arrest of Lee Harvey Oswald for the assassination of President Kennedy, officials began to speculate about the significance of Oswald's defection to the Soviet Union in the fall of 1959 and his activities in that country until returning to the United States in June 1962. Specifically, the troubling question was asked whether Oswald had been enlisted by the Soviet secret police, or KGB.

U. S. - Soviet relations had been turbulent during the Kennedy presidency. There had been major confrontations - over Berlin, where the wall had come to symbolize the barrier between the two super powers; and over Cuba, where the emplacement of Soviet missiles had nearly triggered World War III.

A nuclear test-ban treaty in August 1963 had seemed to signal detente, but in November, tension was building again, as the communists harassed American troop movements to and from West Berlin. And Cuba was as much an issue as ever. In Miami, on November 13, Kennedy vowed the U. S. would not countenance the establishment of another Cuba in the western hemisphere.

The Warren Commission considered Soviet complicity in the assassination and concluded there was no evidence of it. In

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In its report, the Commission noted that the same conclusion had been reached by Secretary of State Rusk and Secretary of Defense McNamara, among others. Rusk testified before the Commission on June 10, 1964:

I have seen no evidence that would indicate to me that the Soviet Union considered that it had any interest in the removal of President Kennedy... I can't see how it could be to the interest of the Soviet Union to make any such effort.

Then, in February 1964, a Russian saying that he was a KGB agent sought asylum in the U. S. and seemed to answer the question by categorically denying Oswald had been connected with the KGB. According to Yuri Nosenko, the self-proclaimed former KGB officer, he had been assigned in 1959 and 1963 to the KGB's American Tourist Section. This assignment, he said, had afforded him an opportunity to review Oswald's KGB file in those years.

But Nosenko's assertion did not end the mystery. In fact, it only tended to complicate it, because some officials of the Central Intelligence Agency doubted Nosenko was a bona fide defector. Some went so far as to suspect his defection was a KGB disinformation mission, an effort to mislead the American government.

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Beginning in April 1964, hostile interrogations of Nosenko were approved and initiated. He was cut off from the world and confined to a single room. Every movement he made was monitored.

The hostile interrogations continued for over three years. Eventually, Nosenko was released from confinement, and a senior official was assigned to interview him anew. This time, interviews were conducted in a more friendly atmosphere. The official ultimately wrote a report detailing his conclusions. At the termination of this year-long process, it was decided that Nosenko was bona fide after all. He was given a substantial sum of money and hired as a CIA consultant, a position he holds to this day.

In its investigation of the Kennedy assassination, the Warren Commission was aware of the Nosenko issue, but it was able to make little of it and opted not to refer to it in its report. News accounts of the Nosenko matter have not been particularly informative, owing to the limited nature of the generally classified information that they were reporting. A book by Edward J. Epstein, Legend, the Secret World of Lee Harvey Oswald, published in early 1978 did raise some questions about

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