

3

DELGADO

Page 1 of 16

HE

This is an interview with Nelson Delgado on May 12, 1966. Mr. Delgado was a friend of Lee Harvey Oswald's in the Marine Corps during part of Oswald's and Mr. Delgado's enlistment.

Source: Wisconsin Historical Society, USMss, 117AN
"Rush to Judgment" Box 60,
Folder 1

Q. Mr. Delgado, what do you do now, where are you, and what are your immediate plans?

A. Presently I'm a Mess Sergeant down at one of the Missile sites ⁱⁿ at South Jersey. Have been there since prior to the assassination of Kennedy. I've been here now for three years and this month, the 20th, to be exact, I'm leaving for Viet Nam.

Q. What did you do before you were in the Army, Mr. Delgado?

A. I quit school and started workin' in private life, and then I went into the Marine Corps in May of '55.

Q. You went into the Marine Corps in May of 1955?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. And, at one point in your Marine Corps career, you were transferred to California, is that correct?

A. That's right. About 1957 - '58 I was transferred, after completing my - uh - uh - electronics course at - uh Kiesler, Mississippi.

Q. Did you meet Lee Harvey Oswald, and when did you meet him, and where, and tell us about your

association with him in the Marine Corps.

A. Well, just prior to Christmas of 1958, Lee Oswald reported in to our unit. From that time I got a chance to meet him and talk to him, we had-uh-a little basic interests together. We both enjoyed Spanish, and we both thought that - uh - the situation in Cuba was - uh - the best thing that happened to the Cuban people. And, about the 28th of December, when I went on leave, uh - I left for New York from California, and - uh - about the 5th of June, of January, pardon, me, -uh - 19

the first thing that Lee said to me when I came back to the unit was - uh - "Well I see you - uh - helped Castro out just - all they needed was your going on leave to do it!" As you recall, the first of January was when Castro walked into Havana. And we thought it was a big joke and we all laughed about it. Uh - Oswald and I got along very good together. We were, like I say, working on the same jobs, and - uh-

Q. What was the nature of that job, Mr. Delgado?

A. Well it was involving air crafts and radar. We controlled them from the ground and we ran intercepts. We were about forty enlisted men that really participated in this job. All of us knew Lee, and

he knew all of us. He was, at one time, -uh - billeted in a different quonset hut than I was. But he had some trouble there with one of the sergeants and he requested that he be transferred out. So we took him into my quonset hut. 'T that time I was a corporal and him and I became roommates. We got along fine - as I said, we had discussions. I'm not too well up on the topics he used to cover. He could tear down anybody^{in the-} in the outfit as far as that goes. He was a atheist but as - uh - also he said he was, but as far as his being -uh - leaning to Communist or anything like that-uh- it's hard for me to say that he was. He - uh - there's been said that he's been a terrific - uh - marksman. I recall one instance that - uh - we went to the range. And it's been a tradition: just prior to going to the rifle range we get together, each man that's going to fire that particular day would chip in so much money. And - uh - the ones that won, say within first and fifth place, they would divide this money.

Q. How many people were firing, Mr. Delgado?

A. That day I'd say between forty - I can't recall offhand the exact number. I'd say between forty and seventy people-almost the whole company went down there.

Q. Right.

A. And - uh - we - at the end of the day-uh- I was just barely qualified, maybe by one or two points, which takes 170 out of a possible 200 - 250 I believe it is - to qualify. Uh - for myself, I won a prize. I came in third. I can't right now say what score I came up with. And - uh-

Q. What was Oswald's qualification? Was he "expert", "sharpshooter"?

A. Just "marksman". That's - uh - one or two points below and he would -uh - disqualified altogether.

Q. If you could tell us in your own words how the - how they're graded in the Marine Corps. Which is the highest; and which is the lowest?

A. Right. "Expert" is the highest you can achieve. That's what - uh (xxx) 200 score . It would take -uh - 190 or both to qualify for that. 180 to 190 is "sharpshooter". 170 to 180 is "marksman". Anything below 170 and you disqualified: you have to come again another time. Well Oswald just barely made "marksman". They say he was a gun enthusiast but I recall many instances where we stood inspections and he was constantly bein' gigged - uh - for having a dirty weapon and 'en takin' improper

care of his weapon. He was always reminded of when he had to clean the weapon - never took it upon himself to do so.

Q. Now, Mr. Delgado, what happened - uh - after President Kennedy was killed - almost immediately after President Kennedy was killed, the FBI came to see you. Is that correct?

A. Yes, they came to my home in South Jersey to interview me.

Q. And what was the - what was the major part of their questioning concerned with?

A. The first two visits - they came just to get my story - what I knew about Oswald, how close we were, and things like that. After that then they started - uh - the questions were tending to break my story down.

Q. What was your story?

A. My story was that I had taught Oswald Spanish; that we had gone out together on one occasion in South Caroli - uh - Southern California, to a border town. They tried to disprove this; they tried to disprove that I couldn't speak Spanish as well as I said I could. Well, I can speak Spanish good 'cause the Army saw fit to give me a linguist digit and my - and my job title (xxxxxx) I have taught fellows in our office to speak Spanish, and

at the time that Oswald was discharged, he knew enough to get in any conversation. But, on one of the instances ~~that~~ I recall that they came down with a FBI - I believe it was a FBI agent - and - uh - while I was being interviewed by - uh - one of the agents, he was sittin' to the side of me takin' notes and watchin' - watching the way I spoke. Upon the conclusion of the interview, then he gave me a hand-written test and - uh - it was some questions he had made up himself during the course of the interview. I - before I took the test, I told the- the man this is I cannot speak - pardon me, I cannot write - Spanish, 'cause I don't know how to spell it that good. I could write it out, but it would be mis-spelled. He said "It's quite all right." So I took the test. Then he comes up and tells me that - uh - th' Spanish I know is insufficient for me to say that I could teach anyone to speak. So I told him, I says "Don't take my word for it-

Q. Mr. Delgado, will you say something to me in Spanish right now, anything you want.

Q. Right.

A. Now this is the Spanish ~~that~~ I was brought up with. This is the Spanish that we speak here, or in - in America. And I told them: I says "There's a couple of guards on the outside there that could verify my story. They have learned." They say: "Well, why do they need to speak Spanish?" I says: "Because they're going down to Texas, and they're going to take it with them." He says, "Well," says, "according to my test you don't show no qualifications to be able to teach Spanish." Uh - then, at this point, I got mad and I told him, "Sir," I says, "I'll take your Spanish that you got strictly out of El Camino Real," I says, "and we'll go down to Harlem," and I says, "you and I go down walk on the streets and let's see which one of us gets understood." And I said, "This is where we go wrong, by sending people like you down to South American countries to (xxxxx) up, or show up, these peasants, down there."

Q/ What do you mean by people like him, Mr. Delgado?

A. People that are supposedly these - uh - high-bred uh - clean-cut "dapper dans". This - this is all right, ^{got} give a good image, but don't go over there to the people that can't afford to even wear a wh - white shirt. This is what - uh

Q. What was - uh - do you - you told me that you - uh - do you feel there's something wrong with the Spanish that he speaks?

A. Yes - his Spanish is correct. This is what you are going to learn in any high school or college. But what good - it's just like speaking English -. If the true man was to speak English, he'll go down to England where they speak "thee" and "thou" Well, you won't find no Spanish person in New York sayin' "thee" and "thou". It's just not done. It's Spanish, it's tru..it's correct, but it's not the Spanish that's speakin' now, right here in the State.

Q. Right. Now the FBI then attacked part of ^{the - uh - of} your story about being able to speak Spanish. But was there another element, too, that they -uh - which they attempted to make you change your story.

Q. Well- uh - they tried to disprove that Oswald and I went down to - uh - like I say, ^{to} /this ~~border~~ town. At the time that we went down there was no - there was no reason for me to remember the exact day, 'cause it was just a normal trip down there. But, as I recall, we went down to the Flamingo Bar in Bahai, California. And - uh - I recall the bar, the bar-tenders, and in that particular night I had lost my wallet which was some-

thing that could be proven by just goin' down to the MP gate at the Border and check...because they write all those reports out.

(How much film do we have there because I want to.... Another 25 feet. OK... I think we better start another roll then)

Q. Mr. Delgado, when Lee Harvey Oswald defected to the Soviet Union in 1959 CUT (phone ring)

Q. Mr. Delgado, in 1959 when Lee Harvey Oswald defected to the Soviet Union - uh - what was the response at the Base at which you still were, and will you tell me what happened?

A. Right. (clears throat). Shortly after the news broke in the papers, we had - uh - two or three men that came down. We - uh - think them to be CIA or FBI men. But - uh - each man in the unit had to make a statement as to what-uh-Oswald's job was, what information, if any, he had, and what access to classified information he could possibly have with him, like - uh - frequencies that we frequently used with air-crafts and - uh - uh - radar, limitations and short-comings. And we filled out statements, like I said. And very shortly after the investigation was over, our commanding officer which was a light - lieutenant colonel, was - uh - transferred along with our ser-

geant-major. And - uh - this is somethin' that - uh has been brought up before but there has been a statement made that Oswald's company commander which make my company commander was a light - wh - was a lieutenant. And, I'd rather not use his name, but this is wrong because - uh - in our particular company, our commanding officer was a lieutenant-colonel.

Q. Well, Mr. Delgado, where did the story gain currency that Oswald's lieutenant - that Oswald's commanding officer was a lieutenant?

A. Can you .hov,how's that again?

Q. Yes. ^{Who} ~~how~~ said that Oswald's commanding officer was a lieutenant?

A. This lieutenant.

Q. Well, where did he say it?

A. Uh - he said it to the Warren Commission, and it was published as such, as bein' uh - uh - "I was Lee Harvey Oswald's commanding officer during the time he was stationed on Santa Ana, California."

Q. Where was it published?

A. Er - in the Warren Commission Report.

Q. All right

A. Right.

Q. Uh - now, may I ask you : did the Warren Commission itself interview you about the response of the Marine Corps to Oswald's defection?

A. Yes, but when I went into detail the man that ~~was~~ was interviewing me told the stenographer, who or ~~whatever~~ he was - he was a stenographer - to cut, that - uh - this conversation we were having was off the record if it was all right with me. Well, I didn't know what was going on. So I told him "~~It~~ Right. Fine." And then I went into detail a little bit more than I've gone here, and told them what took place during this period of time. And then, after this conversation was -uh - over, then he, ~~xxxx~~ we assumed our interview all over again

Q. Uh - can you tell me now, in as much detail as you can recall, uh - the nature of the interview between you and the FBI in relationship to Lee Harvey Oswald's ability with a rifle.

A. Yes. They ... did not like the idea when I came the- up with/the statement that Oswald, as far as I knew, was- Oswald/was a very poor shot.

Q. Who did not like the idea?

A. The FBI people that investiga - that were interviewing me. And they brought two men down, two strangers - uh - to disprove this part of my testimony. And -uh - I told them that, as far as I knew, any man that took any interest in anything, say gun enthusiast, like Oswald supposedly was, this man would not have to be

reminded to take care of his weapon, to clean it, ^{this} to maintain it. He would do ~~it~~ on his own. Well, for a man that was such a devo - enthusiast as he was, this is was - uh - our sergeant's and lieutenants was steadily on him for. They had to remind him. They were inspected his weapon and it was always dirty. Well, not always, but the majority of times, it was dirty. He had to be reminded when to clean his weapon, and told when to clean his weapon. He never went out of his way to take care of it on his own, like a good gun enthusiast should.

Q. Right.

A. And - uh - I re - like ^I say, at the range, he didn't - he couldn't prove by me that he was a good shot.

Q. How many people in your company were inferior to Oswald in marksmanship - ~~xxxxxx~~ ^{how many} would you guess?

A. Oh, I would say, out of 110 men that - that would fire in our company - let's say there was that many - maybe 30 of them wouldn't have qualified at all. I'd say ~~that~~, on the average of any outfit that goes, you get about 60% of the people who qualify.

Q. And then Oswald, as a marksman, would be in which part of the - of the group that qualified?

A. He would be in the 60% of the people that qualified, but just barely. In other words, uh - he just

luck - one-one extra bulls-eye would have given him the score that he needed. If he had shot a four, let's say, or a three, he would never have qualified.

Q. Why do you think the - both the Warren Commission and the FBI placed such an emphasis on that trip to Tijuana - the trip that you and Oswald took from Santa Ana to Tijuana in Mexico?

A. Well, there was - uh - well, like any soldier or G.I. will go down to Bahai, California will be to have a good time. And they couldn't see why Oswald, supposedly a homosexual, have any reasons to go down to Tijuana. And, for the period of time when I knew him, he didn't show any tendencies like that to me or any of the guys in our outfit. And, as far as I knew, he enjoyed a woman's company just like any other person.

Q. Did he go out with women when you were in the Marine Corps?

A. No, he did not, no. I didn't know of him having a girl friend, or anything like that, but - uh - he did keep girl magazines and - uh - things like that.

Q. Do you feel that the FBI tried to actually get you to change your testimony?

A. Yes, sir, I definitely do.

Q. Do you remember any ~~stix~~ of the details of how that

was done?

A. Outside of them calling me - uh - something short of a liar, and - uh - it was just the way they were throwing the questions at me. They were trying to twist my testimony around.

Q. What is your - this will be the last question - if you could tell me what you thought of Lee Harvey Oswald as a Marine and as a friend and as a man - uh - what sort of a person was he?

A. He was a quiet person - a person that would - you would see walking down the street and not pay no attention to. He was well-bred; he had good manners; he disliked anybody with authority - that's what I have to say - anyone that was a sergeant or above to him was no good. He knew - he knew more than any of the other people there. But - uh - he didn't go out of his way to prove this, like has been said. He won't go out of his way to engage in an argument or a conversation just to prove that he was right, no. When he was dragged into it, or was around a conversation that was taking place, then he would - he would - uh - and asked to join the conversation, then he would prove himself. But - uh - I, personally, liked him. I didn't think - I don't think that he was - uh - responsible, or the only person if he was

respon.. - I don't believe he was alone in this -
er - this is strictly my own theory but it's
just that he was the fall guy; he was the - they
had to tie up all the loose ends to meet cer -
tain people's story. And it just so happen-
ed that Oswald was the one that - uh - was - uh
- elected, so to speak.

(background conversation)

Q. Mr. Delgado, will you tell us about Lee Har-
vey Oswald's performance on the rifle range,
please.

A. Oh, yes, sir. As any person that has ever
served in the armed forces could tell you,
there's a part in the qualification that calls
for rapid firing. This is done with ten shots:
eight in ^a ~~the~~ clip and two that you load by hand.
They give you ^{maybe} thirty-or forty-five seconds to
be exact- to fire these ten rounds. Well, when
you fire these, then you stand away from your -
from your firing position till everyone has
finished firing. Then the targets are brought
down and scored. The targets are run back up
and they're disked for the number that you have
hit - fives, fours, threes, or misses. Well,
Oswald's particular case it was quite funny to -
to look at 'cause he would get a couple of discs,

Maybe, out of a possible ten, he'd get two or three "Maggie's drawers". Now these are - a red flag that's on a long pole, and this is run from left to right on the target itself. And you don't see this on the firing line too often - not on a Marine firing line. And it's ^{you-you-} ~~you~~ you can't help but noticing when you're seeing discs - round cylinder - uh - ~~number~~ things coming up and down, and farther on down the line you see a flag waving. Well that was gonna catch your eye anyway. And we thought it was funny that Oswald's was gettin' these "Maggie's Drawers" so rapidly, one after the other. And this is why I can't say - uh - think that he could be a good shot, because a good shot doesn't pull this. He'll pull a three, but he won't pull a "Maggie's Drawers" - 's a complete miss.

(All right, now we'll just be quiet and get more room tone and look at me and pretend you're listening.)