

OLTMANS

A MOMENT IN HISTORY

TOMMY WILKENS &
HILDE WILKENS VANRENTERGHEM

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OLTMANS
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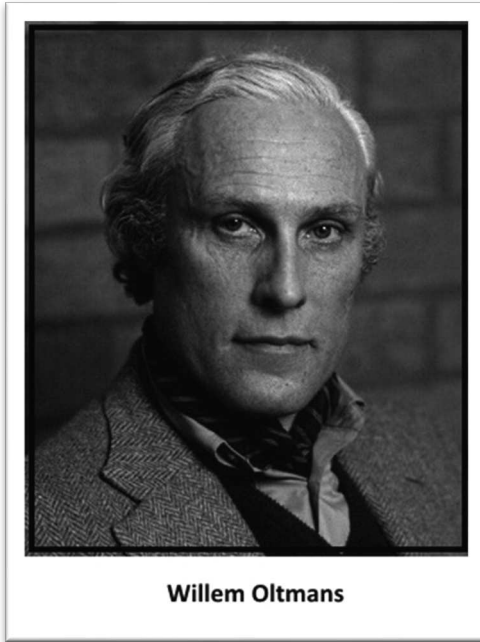
Tommy Wilkens & Hilde Wilkens Vanrenterghem

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DEDICATION

We dedicate our book to the late Willem Oltmans, in honor of his body of work. Without his tenacity and drive to become a first-class journalist and his lifelong commitment to recording the details of his life in his personal diaries, we could not have brought this intriguing story to light.



~ Tommy Wilkens & Hilde Wilkens Vanrenterghem

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PREFACE

We would like to express our greatest appreciation for the guidance and encouragement provided by our late friend and fellow researcher/author/poet Paul Foreman of Austin, Texas. It helped to make this work possible.

We also want to thank Dr. Ad Leerinvelt, the Curator of Modern Day Manuscripts of The Dutch Royal Library in Den Haag, The Netherlands.

We thank Steven Martin for sharing with us his memories of the real Marguerite Oswald and allowing us to include them here. And we appreciate the efforts of our editor, Ken Dixon.

Finally, we would like to thank you for choosing to read our book and take a closer second look at the late Willem Oltmans' life, his investigation into President John F. Kennedy's assassination and his close friendship with George de Mohrenschildt.

INTRODUCTION

In this book, we'll tell the fascinating true story of Dutch journalist Willem Oltmans and his ten-year intimate friendship with Baron George de Mohrenschildt, who was - by all known accounts - the closest friend of Lee Harvey Oswald in the months leading up to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

Oltmans published his own book on this subject years ago, but it was largely ignored. Now, upon completion of our in-depth study of the Willem Oltmans archive in Den Haag, The Netherlands, we're able to offer the reader a very well-researched second look at his findings.

OLTMANS: *A Moment In History* won't reveal who fired the shots that killed President Kennedy. But it does shed new light on the connection between Oswald and one of the most mysterious individuals known to have been associated with him.

The Oltmans archive contains literally thousands of pages in bound, diary-type binders. It includes hand-written letters, notes and pictures related to both his journalistic work and his personal life. It is through his eyes and his investigative prowess that this story comes alive.

The records have been stored and preserved under the watchful eye of Dr. Ad Leerinvelt, Curator of Modern Day Manuscripts at the Dutch Royal Library in Den Haag. Among them, we discovered a wealth of startling information regarding the private lives of George and Jeanne de Mohrenschildt – details that until now have not been made public.

What Willem Oltman's ten-year-long investigation uncovered concerning George de Mohrenschildt and his self-confessed involvement with Lee Harvey Oswald led to the journalist being conspired against and

discredited by representatives of the Dutch Government. Both his character and his findings were called into question. And certain elements of the American mainstream media followed suit. But a careful analysis of the facts confirms that, as an investigative journalist, Oltmans was both diligent and honest in his pursuit of the truth.

We begin on June 6, 1925, in Huizen, The Netherlands, with the birth of Willem Leonard Oltmans to Antonie Cornelis Oltmans and Alexandrine van der Woude. His father had been born on June 24, 1894, in Central Java, Indonesia, and became a respected and admired chemical engineer. Later, he achieved further success as an attorney-at-law.

Alexandrine van der Woude was born on June 21, 1896, in Maarsen, The Netherlands. She was educated in both classic languages and science and received violin training in Liege, Belgium.

The Oltmans family had amassed considerable wealth through investments in the production of quinine in the Dutch West Indies. Records show that Willem Oltmans was schooled at some of The Netherlands' most prestigious educational institutions in his early years. Growing up in Huis ter Heide at "De Horst", the family villa, he enjoyed a carefree lifestyle available to only the wealthiest and most elite.

But, even with these advantages, Oltmans told of struggling in childhood with loneliness and the belief that no one ever understood his feelings or accepted him as he was. He was devastated by the thought that he had not lived up to the expectations of his parents, and he would spend the rest of his life estranged from them.

It was at age nine that Willem Oltmans began keeping a diary. Having no meaningful relationship with others, he was driven to record his deepest and most private thoughts. It was the start of a discipline of daily note-taking that would continue throughout his life. His motive was to establish a work that showed how a human develops over time. He viewed

writing as an accomplishment in and of itself, and his diaries and later publications became, as it were, his *raison d'être*.

It's in his observations that we're able to see not only the inner thoughts of the man himself but the process by which he gathers and analyzes information. And it's this meticulous approach that lends credence to his recounting of the de Mohrenschildt/Oswald relationship.

Formal education would prove to be difficult and frustrating for young Oltmans. After failing at one school after another, in 1946 he was accepted at the Dutch Education Institute for Foreign Countries in Castle "Nijenrode" in Beukelen. But feeling overwhelmed once again by his studies, he dropped out and returned home defeated.

By 1948, however, Oltmans had regrouped and made a life-changing decision. He ventured to America and enrolled at prestigious Yale University to study Political Science. That bold move, unfortunately, ended in failure. And having to drop out of Yale sent him into a deep depression.

He returned home to The Netherlands feeling more alone and misunderstood than ever. At this same time, his diary entries indicate, Oltmans was in the throes of a personal identity crisis that was closely tied to his innermost secret: his strong homosexual tendencies and the fear that they might be revealed. It was a battle he would fight within himself throughout his life.

In denial regarding his true feelings, he met and fell in love with Josephine Anna Frederick Westerman in 1950. And five years later, they were engaged to be married. She was the daughter of an Esso Oil and Gas Company executive and worked as a ground stewardess for KLM Airlines. Their wedding took place on December 19, 1957, in New York City. But the marriage was short-lived and ended with a divorce trial, where

evidence was presented that his wife had caught Oltmans in bed with a male companion.

A move to Rome after the divorce proved to be the catalyst for what would become a very successful career in journalism. Beginning in the earliest weeks of his work as a freelance correspondent for several of the city's newspapers, Oltmans established his credo that a search for the facts must guide anything that he covered. He soon earned his reputation as a reporter who would never compromise the truth, and it was his unyielding professional standards that led him to uncover some of the biggest stories around the world.

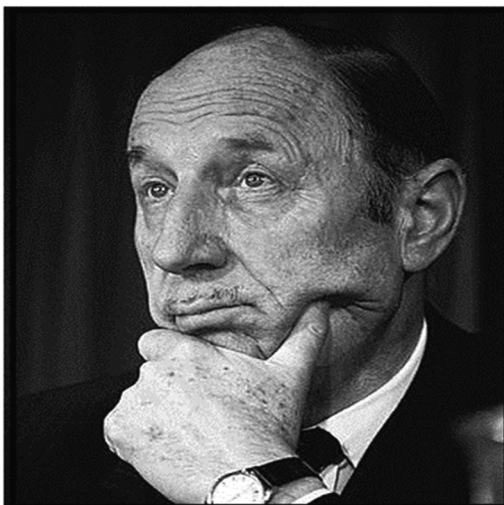
The life of a globetrotting reporter suited Oltmans well. Traveling from one big story to the next soon earned him the nickname “The Flying Dutchman”. Having finally discovered his niche in life, he found that his competence and charisma led him to almost instant success. He never shied away from danger and found his way to information in places where his contemporaries were afraid to go.

Oltmans' strong drive and commitment to becoming a world-class investigative reporter would afford him opportunities that others could only envy. It was perhaps inevitable that his methods created a stir on many fronts, and he soon had the reputation of being The Netherlands' most controversial and radical journalist.

In 1956, he was doing correspondence work for De Telegraaf, a morning newspaper located in Amsterdam, The Netherlands, with a circulation of nearly half a million readers per day. At that time, the government and Indonesia were engaged in a contentious dispute over the rightful ownership of Dutch New Guinea. Instructions were passed down to Oltmans from the publishers of De Telegraaf not to interview Indonesian President Kusno Achmed Sukarno or in any other way involve himself in the situation.

But Oltmans openly expressed his belief that Indonesia did in fact have rights to the territory. Furthermore, he defied the publishers' orders by not only meeting with Sukarno but soon becoming the President's close friend and confidant. Entries in his diaries reveal that the relationship was physically intimate as well – and that Sukarno's wife was aware of it, although she didn't approve and hated to see Oltmans arrive for a visit.

The meeting with President Sukarno was reported by the Elseviers Weekblad (Elseviers Weekly Paper) and made headlines all over The Netherlands and around Europe. Understandably, De Telegraaf not only fired Oltmans but refused to publish any story he might write in the future. The newspaper's far-reaching influence on the Continent would affect him for many years. And the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, Joseph Luns, organized a covert smear campaign to cast doubt upon and discredit and ruin Willem Oltmans.



Joseph Luns

What had he done to generate such animosity at the highest levels of government? President Sukarno believed deeply that Dutch New Guinea belonged rightfully to Indonesia and was ready to mobilize his country's army and take back the territory by force if needed. With tempers boiling on both sides, it was Oltmans who had stepped into the controversy and sent then-President John F. Kennedy a private message through his closest international advisers – one that is widely believed to have averted war. It's thought that Oltmans asked President Kennedy to apply pressure to the Dutch Government to turn over the territory to a temporary United Nations Administration (UNTEA).

He then aligned himself with an informal group of business leaders who circumvented the authorities and worked to convince the Dutch public that the Government should relinquish Dutch New Guinea to Indonesia. Luns was so infuriated by Oltmans' actions that he gave direct instructions to avoid the journalist and never to publish anything with his byline from that moment on (calling him “one motorized mosquito”). This boycott and blacklisting of Willem Oltmans would remain in place for several decades.

On May 1, 1963, Indonesia took control of Dutch New Guinea. And Oltmans' involvement in the efforts leading to this momentous event had earned him some very dangerous enemies inside the Dutch Government. Soon, his phone stopped ringing. The once shining star of Dutch journalism was now being shunned and ridiculed and - worst of all for a reporter - his honesty and integrity were called into question at every turn. It was an attack on the very qualities that had defined his career and upon which he had built his reputation.

Oltmans' notes reveal his certainty that someone within the Dutch government was behind the move to ruin him both personally and professionally. However, it would take many years for him to unearth the facts that proved his case. And during that time, he lived in near poverty and was even forced to collect welfare in order to support a somewhat

normal existence. Oltmans worked as a freelance journalist who reported on and sold small stories to whatever publications would pay him the most. It was a hard life, and the paydays were small and far-between. But his vindication was to come.

By 1991, Oltmans had filed a lawsuit against the Dutch State Government, which included the Royal Family. There was a long, drawn-out legal battle, and a settlement was reached nine years later. The defendants were found liable, and through binding arbitration the Dutch State was ordered to pay Willem Oltmans eight million guilders (\$4,469,273.76 in 2000). About a quarter of that amount was required to cover his legal fees.

Despite those many years of struggle, he never lost his determination to work at what he knew he did best: reporting stories and being a journalist. It was a long and difficult climb, but he struggled back up the ladder and ultimately reached a level of success.

For income in the 1960s, Oltmans turned to the lecture circuits in Europe and as far away as the United States. He worked for the Keedick Lecture Bureau at one point and earned \$100 to \$125 per lecture. His talks were mainly given to women's groups and civic organizations. In addition to the pay, the cost of airfare, transportation to and from the airport and a guaranteed meal were included. It was work on a small scale, but he was glad to have it and it paid the bills. And it's how he became involved in investigating the killing of John F. Kennedy.

CHAPTER ONE

The date was March 8, 1964, and Willem Oltmans had just finished presenting a lecture at the Criterion Club of Wichita Springs, Texas. After a short commuter flight back to the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport, he was awaiting his departure to New York when he spotted 55-year-old Marguerite Oswald, mother of accused assassin Lee Harvey Oswald.

In his personal notes, he described her as a disheveled-looking middle-aged woman struggling with her luggage, which consisted of a broken suitcase and multiple cardboard boxes. Seeing the possibility of a story, Oltmans approached Mrs. Oswald and asked if he could be of assistance.

“How do you know me?” she asked. His reply was, “The whole world knows you.” The two began a short conversation, during which he discovered that they would both be traveling on American Airlines Flight 25 to the recently renamed John F. Kennedy International Airport.

She was on her way to sell sixteen handwritten letters that Lee had sent to her while he was living in Russia. Esquire magazine would be buying them for \$4000. She had signed and dated each one and included a small notation, as if to add a personal touch.

In his notes, Oltmans describes Marguerite Oswald as a worn out and deeply-stressed woman with dark, inset eyes, wearing dark-rimmed cat's-eye glasses and a look of helplessness and despair. She was a picture of total sadness. But her mind seemed to be moving at a thousand miles an hour, and it never stopped during the entire trip to New York.

Soon after they settled into seats 7E and 7F on the plane, she began a asking series of what he characterized as “questions on top of questions”.

Why had her son not been given legal counsel on that Friday afternoon or evening, nor the entire day Saturday, nor all the way until he was shot dead in the Dallas Municipal Building? If he had been wealthy, might he be alive today?

Was my son denied the right to a lawyer because he had no money? Why was no recording ever made of the more than twenty hours of interrogation that had been done between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning? Why were no notes ever taken? Her son was accused of murdering the President of The United States, and no notes were taken and a recording wasn't made. It just didn't seem right. Something was fishy.

Lee had steadfastly denied again and again shooting anyone, from his arrest on Friday afternoon all the way until he was murdered in handcuffs. She said she had been allowed to meet with him at the jail on Saturday, and “he looked me straight in the eyes and said, 'Momma, don't worry. I did not murder anybody, not the police officer or no one, and this will all be cleared up'”.

In Oltmans' notes, he tells of asking Marguerite Oswald if it was at all possible that her son could have killed President Kennedy. And Mrs. Oswald replied that there was a chance that he had. “But until it is proven in our United States court system, I will fight for my son's rights and I will never believe that he did kill the President,” she said. “My son is dead and he can not defend himself, so as his mother I will defend him to the last stand.

In my testimony before the Warren Commission in Washington, I asked Chief Justice Warren why wasn't there a recording of my son's interrogation on that Friday and Saturday, being that he was accused of such a horrible crime?”

Chief Justice Warren couldn't provide an answer, but he did pose the same question to Dallas Police Chief Jesse Curry. The response was, "Well, we were going to buy a recorder for important cases. We talked about getting one, but we just never got around to it." In an awkwardly quiet moment in the hearing room, everyone wondered how could that have happened.

She spoke of the day of Lee's funeral and how even in death there was no peace or respect for her murdered son, killed while in custody and - even worse - handcuffed to a policeman. Rose Hill Memorial Cemetery, at 7301 East Lancaster Avenue in Fort Worth, was the only one in the entire metropolitan area that would accept Lee Oswald for burial.

There were eight Dallas police officers, two guard dogs and a few news people in attendance. A small prayer service had been planned for four o'clock in the chapel, but that was halted before it could begin. The family was heartbroken. How could this be happening? Events had moved so quickly from Friday to Monday that it was all a blur in their minds.

Now it was time to bury Lee and each of them would begin what would be a lifetime of soul-searching and wondering what had really happened. Bitterness and hatred followed them all like a pitch-black shadow. Even half a century later, the name "Oswald" would evoke horrible memories in the mind of anyone who had lived through those traumatic days.

The Oswald casket was a #31 Pine Bluff model, made from cheap wood. Records would reveal that Robert Oswald, brother of the deceased, had purchased it on November 24, 1963, from the Miller Funeral Home of Tarrant County, Texas, for \$300.

Preston McGraw of United Press International said, "Well, if we're going to write a story of this son-of-a-bitch's funeral, we're going to have to carry him out of here."

Seven newsmen, including Jerry Flemmons of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram and Mike Cochran from Associated Press, took hold of the handles and moved the body with some difficulty to the freshly-dug grave.



Oswald pallbearers



Oswald family at funeral

With no minister present, there wasn't much left to do but proceed with the burial. The grave diggers had been told that they were preparing the site for a man named William Bobo, an old Texas cowboy from a time gone by. As the family members sat close to the casket and consoled one another, just moments before the coffin was to be lowered into the ground, a dark sedan pulled into the parking area.

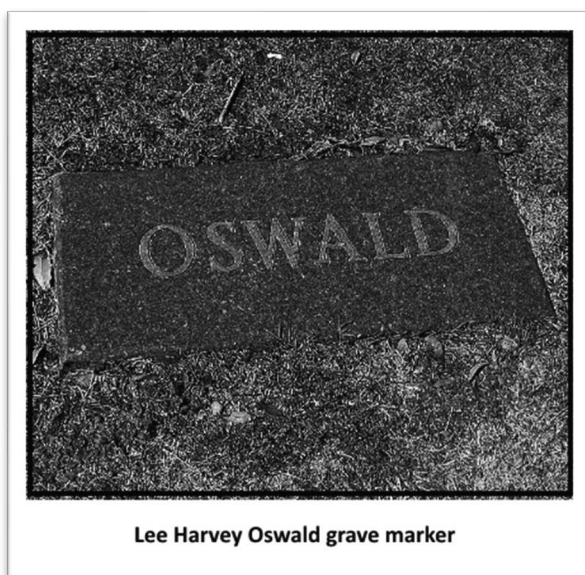
Listening to his car radio, the Reverend Louis A. Saunders, Executive Secretary of the local Council of Churches, had heard that Lee Oswald was to be buried in the Rose Hill Cemetery and later told of his feeling that something just wasn't right. He drove to the cemetery. The Oswald family had arranged for two Lutheran ministers to conduct the funeral service, but both had backed out at the last minute, citing real fear for their own safety. Hatred and bitterness had gripped Dallas.

In keeping with his faith, Reverend Saunders stepped forward. With no Bible in hand, he conducted a short but heartfelt funeral service entirely from memory. He recited the 23d Psalm: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever." And a passage from John 14: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going."

And so, in the final seconds, Lee Oswald would have a funeral service after all. It provided some comfort to the grief-stricken family. At 4:28 P. M., the casket was interred. The Oswald family had lost a son, a brother, a husband and a father. There, on the western most edge of Rose Hill Cemetery, in the section called Sunset 18, Lee Oswald 's simple grave was all that remained. But, despite the pain and sorrow that the nation and the entire world had endured since those horrible few seconds on that Friday afternoon, there had still been a small place for forgiveness and prayer, thanks to one minister's act of kindness.

There were two funerals on that chilly November day in 1963. The one right outside of Washington, DC, a somber ceremony for a leader who had brought hope and change not only to the citizens of the United States but to people around the world, held everyone's attention. And on that small patch of earth in sun-baked Texas, one grave stood out, with its plain and simple headstone showing just a name and no dates. And within it lay secrets now buried for all eternity.



Years later, Saunders would express his regrets at having been there, saying, “I wish it could have been taken care of in a different way. But the whole experience deepened my conviction that the Christian faith has a redeeming, saving and reconciling work to say for every living being. It reinforced my awareness that God’s love is not confined to the so-called good people.” He was a native of Richlands, N.C., and a graduate of Johnson Bible College in Tennessee. Later, he studied theology at Duke University and received his divinity degree from Vanderbilt University. Until his death on April 5, 1998, Saunders remained a dedicated Christian minister.

It was these first-hand accounts, rich with detail, from Marguerite Oswald that led Oltmans to realize that he had a story that should be told - how the hardships of raising three young sons by herself affected an already poor and struggling mother who, at times, worked two jobs just to make ends meet, how a woman who, after being thrust into the middle of a nightmare event with no end in sight, could still hold her head high and tell everyone who would listen of her deep belief that her child was innocent. When they arrived in New York, he arranged a return trip to Dallas the following day to talk with her again.