

# Ruth Paine: Social Activist or Contra Support Networker?

by Carol Hewett, Barbara LaMonica & Steve Jones

Ruth Paine's friends describe her abiding interest in social and humanitarian issues as evolving from a personal spirituality grounded in the pacifist Quaker faith. Similarly, her deep feelings for those in trouble would motivate her to shelter Marina Oswald.<sup>1</sup> However, many researchers have suggested that Ruth's activism and altruism are grounded in a role as informant, casual or otherwise, for some aspect of US intelligence. The following is an overview of Ruth's political activities gleaned from FBI documents, grand jury testimony and first-hand reports. Ruth's efforts on behalf of peace and civil rights, and her presence in Nicaragua during the late 80's and early 90's, will be reviewed. While no definite conclusion can be drawn as to her motives, and certainly nothing emerges to suggest that she was not a sincere Christian, patterns do emerge that could be consistent with intelligence associations.

## Early Activities

Ruth's activism began during the fifties when she attended several Young Friends conferences devoted to stimulating the participation of youth groups in church activity. At a conference held at Quaker Haven in Syracuse, Indiana in 1955 Ruth acted as a coordinator. It was out of this conference that the East-West Contacts Committee was born. The Committee's goal was to explore the possibility of young Quakers making contact with young Soviets through pen pal correspondence and subsequent personal contacts, in order to help relieve East-West tensions.<sup>2</sup> The inspiration for this project was the American Friends Service Committee (of which this group was not a part) who sent a delegation of students to the Soviet Union to promote world peace. It is entirely possible that the East-West Contact Committee was a more conservative response to the liberal AFSC efforts.

An integral part of the East-West Contacts Committee was the pen-pal program, and in at least one document a confidential informant suggests that it was through pen-pal activity during this period that Ruth first contacted the Oswald family while they were in Russia.<sup>3</sup> Ruth denies contact with the Oswalds, and organizers for the Contact

Committee claim that no effort was ever made to coordinate the correspondence of persons participating in the pen-pal activity, nor were any records made of persons who took part in this program, or with whom they corresponded.<sup>4</sup> This reflects a strange lack of procedure for an organization whose main goal is to make personal, and presumably lasting contact with Soviet youth. Other goals of the East-West Contact Committee were to encourage students to "prepare themselves through study of literature, modern history, economics and Russian language for eventual contact with Soviet young people."<sup>5</sup> It was during this period that Ruth began her study of Russian by attending the University of Pennsylvania and later spending summers at a special Russian language institute in Middlebury, Vermont. Russian language institutes, which often employed a mixture of right wing eastern European refugees and white Russians, were prime recruiting grounds for various agents and informants.<sup>6</sup> The schools Ruth attended, and her instructors should be further researched. Ruth's Russian studies finally culminated in 1963 when she acquired a live-in tutor—Marina Oswald.

It is also likely that Ruth was under surveillance during these years, since there are FBI reports of her receiving mail from Russia while she was living on her in-laws' (the Youngs) property in Paoli, Pa. in the late 50's.<sup>7</sup> This period coincided with a CIA letter opening project that attempted to monitor mail coming from communist countries to the United States. By the end of the period the CIA had opened over 13,000 letters and placed many names and organizations on surveillance lists. Eventually this information was shared with the FBI.<sup>8</sup>

FBI documents record her interest in civil rights shortly before and after the assassination. She attended Martin Luther King's historic August 1963 march on Washington and stopped off in Selma, Alabama during that same trip to express condolences, in the

form of a donation to CORE, for the four black school girls who had been killed in a church bombing just three days before.<sup>9</sup>

More interesting, however, is an FBI document which chronicles Ruth's one-woman crusade to advance racial integration in Dallas, Texas, after the assassination. According to a Mr. Smith, the Regional Director for the Federal Housing Administration, he was telephonically contacted at least three times by a Mrs. Ruth Paine who, "asked him for the identities of Negro families who might be interested in buy-

ing housing in Irving, Texas."<sup>10</sup> Mr. Smith also received a letter from Mrs. Paine that he provided to the FBI. In the letter Ruth describes a house that is being built for an employee of Bell Helicop-

ter, and suggests that a similar house could be built on an adjacent lot for a black family. Is this lot part of the property Michael Paine bought from Jack Arnold in 1963?<sup>11</sup> Another employee of the Federal Housing Administration in Dallas states that he believes "Mrs. Paine contacted some Negro people in the area, but they do not want to have anything to do with her." He said, he "was contacted by a leader of the Negro community who told him they did not want to have anything to do with Ruth Paine, and asked if he could keep her away from them."<sup>12</sup> Is Ruth just making a sincere attempt to carry out President Kennedy's civil rights plans? Or did the black community sense that Ruth was some sort of informant seeking to identify potential "troublemakers"?

## Nicaragua, 1991

During the ensuing decades, the focus of US intelligence activity shifted away from Cuba to Central America, culminating in the Reagan administration's efforts to destabilize and overthrow Nicaragua's Sandinista government, whose successful revolution terminated the rule of the corrupt and hated Somoza family, through a CIA proxy war. In

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the early sixties the CIA molded anti-Castro Cuban refugees into a paramilitary mercenary gang dubbed a "liberation brigade," just as in the eighties they would bankroll former Somoza National Guardsmen into the mercenary army, dubbed "freedom fighters." Several alumni from the Bay of Pigs' rogues gallery materialized in Nicaragua to train the Contras including: Felix Rodriguez, long time CIA agent and member of Operation 40 Assassination Unit which was formed to assassinate Fidel Castro; Rafael Quintero, who escaped from Cuba after the failed Bay of Pigs invasion and returned to Miami to work under CIA agent Thomas Clines; and Theodore Shackley, former CIA station chief in Miami.<sup>13</sup>

In third world countries, the CIA routinely utilizes religious organizations to undermine the social movements of indigenous peoples, and to advance the goals of U.S. policy. During the era of Washington's unofficial war against the Sandinistas the CIA was heavily involved with religious groups due to the ideological struggle emerging from within the churches themselves. "Liberation Theology," born out of the experience of Latin American grass-roots theologians, advocated a church of social action. It attempted to shatter the traditional alliance of the churches with oppressive governments and rich elites. The call of liberation theology, deeply threatening to church hierarchies and the CIA, inspired many progressive U.S. church organizations and individual citizens from around the world to go to Latin American countries and assist the people in their attempt to gain human rights. Known as "Internationalists," they flooded Nicaragua by the thousands to help in the Literacy Crusade, to teach, to build, to plant, and to provide medical assistance. This became a clarion call for the CIA to increase funding to the missionary and relief efforts of more conservative and fundamentalist groups who supported the Contras. It was also believed that the more progressive relief groups were heavily infiltrated. During these embattled years, Ruth Paine must have forsaken her Russian for Spanish, since she too shows up in Nicaragua, as a Quaker relief worker. Sue Wheaton, a Kennedy researcher and volunteer with the U.S. Ecumenical Committee, also went to Nicaragua, saw Ruth there, and detailed several incidents which promoted suspicions that Ruth may have been an informer.

Even after the election of Violetta Chamorro—essentially the favorite of the CIA—Nicaraguan political life remained divisive. The Sandinistas held onto many seats

in the assembly, and American groups, sympathetic to the achievements of the revolution continued to arrive in Nicaragua.

It was in this context in 1990 that Sue Wheaton met Ruth Paine. Ruth was representative of a group called Pro-Nica, a project of the Southeastern Yearly Friends Meeting, based in St. Petersburg, Florida. It is important to note that the Southeastern Yearly Friends Meeting is a totally separate group from the American Friends Service Committee. Many people associate Quakers or Friends with the American Friends Service Committee, a progressive social action committee, founded by several east coast Quaker meetings. Historically, when individual Quakers began to leave the northeast and east coasts and migrate to the Midwest, there weren't enough of them to comprise their own meeting house, so they sometimes attended Baptist or Presbyterian church services. The Midwest and southern Friends meetings evolved along more conservative lines due to the influence of these more fundamentalist churches. It is with these more conservative meetings that Ruth is associated. According to Wheaton, Ruth told her that her Quaker group was funded primarily by "6 wealthy, conservative individuals from the Southeast."<sup>14</sup> It was curious to Wheaton that conservative individuals would want to support humanitarian aid to Nicaragua, especially in light of the previous Contra War. Ruth's group also ran a sawmill project on the east coast of Nicaragua, a Contra holdout and nexus of CIA based activities. Ruth Paine showed up at one of Wheaton's council meetings of the anti-contra group—of which Pro-Nica is not a member—centered in the Casa Benjamin Linder. According to Wheaton:

I myself, did think Ruth was taking down information about Americans in Nicaragua who opposed U.S. policy there. She constantly wrote down names of individuals and organizations. Her project sent a letter to all the US Peace organizations which visited Nicaragua encouraging them to stay at the Quaker hospitality house. Someone told me she studied the bulletin board there, copying everything on it....Also she made reference to people she knew in the U.S. Embassy. Most of us did not know people in the Embassy as we associated it with policies we abhorred.<sup>15</sup>

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Wheaton goes on to recount Ruth and an associate of hers, Jon Roise, attending several meetings of the solidarity committee at Casa Benjamin

Linder. Ruth took copious notes and another friend of hers, Sean Miller, made several tape recordings and took photographs. Ruth claimed that the photographs were being taken for the Nicaragua Network in Washington DC. Later, when a friend of Wheaton's checked with the Nicaragua Network, they claimed they had not com-

missioned anyone to take pictures in Nicaragua. Thus, the explanation given by Ruth Paine was false. Months later Jon Roise volunteered to secure speakers for the regular meetings at Casa Benjamin Linder. The two speakers he brought were former Contras who complained of lack of support from the Americans, except for a Quaker group who "always came through for them."

### Other Associations

What conclusions can be drawn about Ruth Paine's political philosophy and her possible relationship with elements of the intelligence community in the light of her social activism and FBI files? Three things stand out: she was strongly anti-communist, she was under surveillance before her relationship with the Oswalds, and virtually every member of her family was either under surveillance and/or had connections with government agencies that had ties to the intelligence community.

We can safely say that her political philosophy is considerably more to the right than one might assume. As mentioned previously, her association was with Quaker meeting groups which were more conservative in nature. Several FBI documents record Ruth's anti-communism as well. In one such document, reference is made to a letter Ruth wrote in which she describes attending an International Christian Endeavor Conference in 1955. Ruth seemingly was inspired by a speech which stated:

we must reach out in help to the hungry and illiterate peoples of the world...so we can win the battle against the communist...we can give them the teaching so they can feed themselves, become literate and know lies from truth and be able to read the Bible.<sup>16</sup>

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April 8, 1968

Dear Mr. Salandria:

I have been thinking over our four and a half hour visit of yesterday, and I have a few comments to make.

You have made some very serious charges concerning my daughter and her husband. In effect you have said they are or were working for the CIA, and as undercover agents were not to be trusted. You equated Ruth with a Russian spy, and asked me if I would believe what such a person said. You did admit that it was possible that Ruth's actions were unwittingly influenced by what the CIA pressured. I suggested that it would be fair to consider that she had her own personal reasons for what she did, and you said you weren't interested in her personal reasons. But you are interested in motivation. If you fail to look at personal motivations, you are being remiss, I believe.

At any rate, I phoned Ruth yesterday afternoon. What puzzles her is why in the world she would consider working for the CIA. What possible motive could she have? It was obvious that she could think of none. However, when I said you wanted her to take a lie detector test, she was willing.

My own comment, as I indicated to you, is that even lie detector tests are not infallible. Anyone who goes into it with strong presumptions of guilt will, in my opinion, be impossible to satisfy, no matter what the taker of the test says.

Let me reiterate what I said yesterday. I am in a position to know my daughter perhaps better than anyone else, certainly very well. I state categorically that she has not, would not, could not work for the CIA. She is a truthful person, and you may believe what she says, much more, in fact, than some of the writers you presented as evidence against her. If a writer uses scornful innuendo, that in itself makes him suspect as far as I am concerned.

I read the material you left, and I was happy to see that you use the factual approach in your style. But in your zeal to fit together the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle of the assassination, take care lest you be carried away. Leave more room for coincidence and fate, if you can. And be prepared to trust those whom you concede are "good" persons, like Ruth and Michael.

Cordially yours,

Carol E. Hyde

APPROVED FOR RELEASE 1993  
CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM

DATE: 7-30-71

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Hoke, Sylvia H.

FILE # : 348201

1. Subject, under the name of Sylvia Hoke

with an address of

523 Monticello Drive, F.C. Vawas identified as a CIA employee in the '61 issue of theF. C. Va Dir

2. Since it is known that opposition intelligence services have in the past checked similar publications, it should be presumed that the indicated employment of Subject by CIA is known to other intelligence organizations. The basic memorandum on which paragraph one is based is available in Volume III of Exposure of CIA Personnel, OS # 601 818. This memorandum contains no additional information concerning Subject and a further review of file #601 818 can normally be considered unnecessary.

Bruce L. Solie  
Deputy Chief, SRS

## Ruth Paine

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In another letter Ruth writes "we should prevent Latin America from being Communist controlled."<sup>17</sup> Ruth's mother, Carol Hyde, claims her daughter cannot be a Communist since "she knows the aims and purposes of the Communist and would be able to detect a fellow traveler of the Communist movement in the United States." Carol Hyde goes on to explain that her family was involved in a cooperative movement in New York City:

[They] had many run-ins with the Communists who were active in this group. She said she and her former husband were very aware of how the Communists would operate in this type of organization in order to get their opinions over to other individuals in the group, and they had often discussed these tactics when their daughter was present.<sup>18</sup>

It sounds as if Ruth, at the beginning of the "red scare" era was being well trained at identifying individuals who held controversial opinions.

Recall that the East-West Contact group of which Ruth was a founder, was probably under surveillance during the CIA mail monitoring program. FBI files from 1958 contain

information about the Young Friends Contact Committee.<sup>19</sup> FBI documents indicate files kept on Ruth's mother date back to 1952, and on her brother Carl Dudley Hyde, a conscientious objector, since 1947.<sup>20</sup>

Ruth's father, sister and brother-in-law all had connections with government agencies that often did the bidding of intelligence. According to Ruth's grand jury testimony in New Orleans,<sup>21</sup> her father William Avery Hyde, an insurance actuary, worked for both AID (Agency for International Development) and the ICA (International Cooperative Alliance). George DeMohrenschildt also worked for the ICA.<sup>22</sup> In the same testimony, Ruth states her brother-in-law worked for AID as a photographic technical advisor (although he was really a biologist). Her sister Sylvia Hoke was a psychologist working for the Air Force as a "personnel research technician."<sup>23</sup> But what Ruth doesn't indicate is that Sylvia Hoke also worked for the CIA.<sup>24</sup> Researcher Vince Salandria interviewed Ruth's mother Carol Hyde in 1968 and asked if Ruth worked for the CIA. In a letter she responds to Salandria that "my daughter has not, would not, could not work for the CIA." However, she fails to mention the CIA em-

ployment of her other daughter! (See the documents above.)

While serving on the Warren Commission, Allen Dulles was the recipient of several memos from "a friend" concerning Ruth's family. One memo concerns Ruth's father-in-law Arthur Young and his study of ESP, and Michael Paine's alleged "homosexual tendencies."<sup>25</sup> It is interesting to speculate if this "friend" is Dulles' former mistress and OSS spy, Mary Bancroft. She would be in a position to filter information to Dulles on the Hydes and Paines since she was a close friend of Michael's mother, Ruth Forbes Young.<sup>26</sup>

Information concerning a CIA investigation of William Avery Hyde also comes by way of a memo.<sup>27</sup> It seems the CIA was considering using Mr. Hyde for an AID project (a cooperative education center) in Vietnam in 1957. Coincidentally, this is the same year that the Summer Institute of Linguistics, through the auspices of the CIA, initiated work in Vietnam. The SIL, ostensibly a religious educational organization, in reality paves the way for US corporate interests in the Third World by using Christianity to gain the compliance of indigenous peoples.<sup>28</sup>

## Conclusion

Ruth's activities on behalf of world peace and the less fortunate may derive from a sincere wish to help others and do God's work. Nevertheless, this sincerity has a strong foundation of anti-communist sentiment, influenced by a family that was government and intelligence connected. Her activities, such as popping up at peace marches and making calls to contact black leaders in the Dallas community are consistent with the "casual informant" classification. These are individuals who are not on any agency's payroll, but will gladly identify participants in a rally or leaders of social/political movements. This was done out of a sense of patriotism and was not that uncommon in the days before the FBI and CIA fell into disrepute. Ruth herself may have given us an apt description of her activities. In a *Redbook* article (June, 1964), Ruth claims an FBI agent came to her house on November 1, 1963, to encourage Marina's confidence and to offer her protection against blackmail threats from Russia. Ruth is quoted as saying:

My respect for the FBI which was already great, went up after that visit. We discussed the difficulty in a free society of politely watching people with queer, possibly dangerous ideas. Unlike a congressional committee, the FBI never makes their suspicions of an individual public until they have evidence that will stand up in court...<sup>29</sup>

If Ruth respected the FBI, the feeling must have been mutual. In an uncharacteristic concern for people's privacy, J. Edgar Hoover writes a letter to J. Lee Rankin, warning that serious repercussions may ensue if documents containing information of a highly personal nature concerning the lives of Ruth and Michael Paine are released to the public.<sup>30</sup> Hoover is also worried about "gossip and rumor" concerning Jack Ruby and the DeMohrenschildts. Could these be the same "nasty rumors" that surfaced about Lee Harvey Oswald's role as an informant?

Ruth Paine's political activities, religious beliefs and family associations do not give us a definite picture of her motivations for taking in the Oswald family, or her role, if any, in a conspiracy. However we are given a roadmap for further research. Was Ruth an

unwitting or witting informant? Was she manipulated by someone who knew that Ruth's sympathetic nature would make her take in Marina Oswald? Why is Dulles receiving secret memos from an anonymous source concerning the Paines? Why is Hoover so anxious to protect her privacy?

March 19, 1996

Steven Jones  
117 Parkview Drive  
Landsville, Pa 17538

Dear Steve,

We recently returned from Nicaragua, and to our surprise bumped into Ruth Paine at an evening mass in Managua. She was the leader of a Pro-Nica group from Florida. She was quite friendly to me, and asked for whom I was working now, etc.

Later, I talked to one of the staff members at the Casa de los Amigos where Ruth stays in Managua. He said that he was aware of suspicions about Ruth and her past, but that in his opinion she had been "used" and had not willingly participated in the events of the JFK assassination. He said that the Pro-Nica group had asked her to "tone down" her activity (i.e. stop taking notes and pictures in Managua) because she was causing unwelcome comment from people. He feels that Ruth is paranoid about groups that she is with for fear she will be "used" again. For that reason she always wants to know names and places.

I also asked him for the address of Jennie Atlee, the former connection of Pro-Nica in Managua, who had worked with Ruth. Jennie's address is: [Private address withheld] —]. You might want to contact Jennie and see what she has to say.

Best wishes,

[Name withheld by Steve Jones]

Researcher Steve Jones is attempting to follow up on Ruth's activities in Nicaragua. He has contacted other people who have volunteered in that country as part of the Ecumenical Council. The people he has spoken with share the same suspicions about Ruth as does Sue Wheaton.

Do her political activities in Central America offer us clues to her associations? Is her real role to "politely watch people with queer, possibly dangerous ideas," and to amass "evidence that will stand up in court"? ♦

## Notes

1. FBI 105-126128-94; 105-126128-56, 2/5/64
2. FBI 105-126128-56, 2/5/64
3. FBI 105-126128-10, 12/17/63
4. Ibid
5. Ibid
6. For an account of intelligence influence on campuses see Sigmund Diamond's *Compromised Campus: The Collaboration of Universities with the Intelligence Community*, Oxford University Press, 1992.

7. FBI 105-126128-11, 12/18/63
8. For a complete description of CIA mail surveillance see *The Rockefeller Report*, Government Printing Office, June 1975.
9. FBI 105-126128-75, 3/14/64
10. FBI 124-10147-10001, 9/20/65
11. FBI 105-126128-110, 4/8/64
12. FBI 124-10147-10001, 9/20/65
13. There are many books documenting this cast of characters, but a fun thing to look at is the "Iran-Contra Scandal Trading Cards" by Paul Brancato, distributed by Eclipse Enterprises, Forestville, California. These cards incorporate much of the information developed by the now defunct Christic Institute.
14. Correspondance between author and Sue Wheaton, April 12, 1995.
15. Correspondance between author and Sue Wheaton, April 24, 1995.
16. FBI 105-126128-55, 1/3/64
17. FBI 105-126128-26, 12/11/63
18. FBI 105-126128-28, 12/13/63
19. FBI 105-126128-7, 12/12/63
20. FBI 105-126128-119, 10/9/64; FBI 105-126128-26, 12/11/63
21. Testimony before the Orleans Parish Grand Jury, April 18, 1968, pp.55-59
22. WC Vol.IX pg. 202
23. Testimony before the Orleans Parish Grand Jury, April 18, 1968, p58
24. CIA memo dated 7/30/71. Memo indicates Hoke was a CIA employee since at least 1961.
25. FBI-105-126128-7, 12/12/63
26. Mary Bancroft, *Autobiography of a Spy* (New York: William Morrow, 1983), pp54-64.
27. FBI 105-12628-5, 12/12/63
28. For more information on the SIL see "The Summer Institute of Linguistics" by Louis Wolf in *Covert Action Information Bulletin*, #18, Winter 1983. Also Colby and Dennett's *Thy Will Be Done*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1995).
29. "Prelude To Tragedy: The Woman Who Sheltered Lee Harvey Oswald's Family Tells Her Story," *Redbook*, June 1964. Also FBI document 105-126128-9thNR 115, 6/18/64
30. FBI 105-126128-1stNR 120, 10/23/64