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**Interview of Former Special Agent of the FBI  
Nat A. Pinkston (1940 – 1968)  
By Brian R. Hollstein  
On July 19, 2007**

*Edited for spelling, repetitions, etc. by Sandra Robinette on August 24, 2007. Final edit with Mr. Pinkston's corrections by Sandra Robinette on September 20, 2007.*

Brian R. Hollstein: Okay. I'll turn on the recorder. One of the problems with recording on the telephone is that my voice comes over very loud and your voice won't come over very loud at all. So, I'd like to ask you if you would please speak up when we're talking.

Pinkston: Okay.

Hollstein: And I'll keep an eye on my little light here that tells me that things are recording okay.

Today is July 19, 2007. My name is Brian R. Hollstein. I'm recording an interview on the telephone as part of the FBI Oral History, sponsored by the Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI. I'm talking to Mr. Nat A. Pinkston. And you're in where now? Where are you located now, Nat?

Pinkston: I'm at Trophy Club, Texas.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. That's just outside of Dallas, right?

Pinkston: Yes. Actually, it's 30 miles out of Dallas.

Hollstein: Well, I used to go down there a lot for Xerox. We had operations over there in Mockingbird Road, was one of the ... one of the locations. And then we had a little manufacturing operation there, too, in Dallas.

Before we started, just a little ground rules. Did you receive the material and Copyright?

Pinkston: Yes.

Hollstein: Okay. Now, you're a lawyer, so I don't have to tell you too much about that; but if you decide that you want to write a book, or be interviewed by someone else, there's no problem with that. The Copyright is only on this particular recording that we're making now.

I'd ask you, while we're talking, to please refrain from using the names of informants, even though that goes way back, in some cases, but even so we want to avoid those.

Pinkston: Right.

Hollstein: If, in the nature of your work area, you'd been using cover companies, we ask that you not use the name of the company. And that we also want to avoid classified information discussions. And one of the ways we insure that is that once you've looked at the transcript and approved of it, we'll send it through the Bureau's pre-publication people and they will tell us if there's any information in it that's classified.

Pinkston: Okay.

Hollstein: Good. Just a little quick preliminary background and then we can go back in detail concerning your career. Where were you born?

Pinkston: I was born in Dallas on November 26, 1915.

Hollstein: Good. And where did you go to school?

Pinkston: I went to grammar school at a school named Ruthmeade, for about four years and then they changed the name of it to J. F. Peeler. And I finished there. The same school, they just changed the name.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Pinkston: Then I went to Oak Cliff High School. I went there four years and they changed the name of it shortly after I left to Adamson.

Hollstein: (Laughing)

Pinkston: He was the principal while I was there and then he died and they changed the name of the school to honor him.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Pinkston: Then I went to North Texas Agricultural College, a two-year branch of Texas A & M, in Arlington, Texas. I graduated there. It was a junior college. And then I went to SMU, Southern Methodist University Law School, for three years; graduated there in June of 1939.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. Good. And they didn't change any of those colleges names after you left. (Laughing)

Pinkston: Oh, well, they changed the name of the North Texas Agricultural ...

Hollstein: Oh really! (Laughing)

Pinkston: Yes. It's now the University of Texas at Arlington. It's a branch of the University of Texas now instead of A & M.

Hollstein: (Laughing) Okay. Good. Then after you graduated from college did you join the Bureau right away?

Pinkston: No. Actually, I was working my way through college. And when I finished high school ... this was during the Depression ... I had no money to go to college. My father was an attorney and I worked for him for a year as his gofer, his secretary, stenographer, and everything he needed.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Pinkston: And after two years of law school, I claimed a year of study in his office and they granted it to me and gave me credit for three years of college and I went down and took the Bar Exam and I passed it, and had my law license a year before I graduated from school.

Hollstein: Wow!

Pinkston: So, during my last year in school, I practiced law and worked as law librarian and carried a full course at the same time.

Hollstein: You didn't have much spare time.

Pinkston: Yes. And then I practiced law for another year from June of 1939 to May of '40, when I went to work for the Bureau.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. How did you happen to find the Bureau?

Pinkston: Well, when I was going through law school, in the summer, I was working for the County Road and Bridge District as a manual laborer, digging ditches, building bridges, shoveling concrete, shoveling gravel ... and I worked outside. Got used to working outside, and I practiced law for a year and sittin' inside the office nearly ran me crazy. And I started looking for a job that would take me outside.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Pinkston: The FBI had been to the SMU Law School looking for applicants, and I applied.

Hollstein: Oh, I see. Okay. I'd like to go back to the Training program in just a minute but, after you completed Training, what offices were you assigned to?

Pinkston: My first office was Baltimore.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. And from there you went to?

Pinkston: I went from there to Knoxville.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Pinkston: From Knoxville to Newark; from Newark to New Orleans; New Orleans to the Shreveport, Louisiana Resident Agency.

Hollstein: Um-hmm.

Pinkston: And then back to New Orleans and then to Dallas.

Hollstein: And you entered in 1940. Is that right?

Pinkston: May 27, 1940.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. And retired then in '68?

Pinkston: January 16, 1968.

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Hollstein: When you went through Training, this is at a time we were leading up to war there, how long was the Training program?

Pinkston: Well, it was supposed to be six weeks. When I got there, I reported in Washington and we started class in the old Justice Building and we went there for three or four days and they opened the new Academy in Quantico. They had just built a new building for the FBI and they moved us into that building. And we spent four weeks there, then they sent us back to Washington to act as aides and gofers for the National Academy Class that was graduating at that time.

Hollstein: Oh, I see. When you were back in D.C., you said aides and gofers for National Academy?

Pinkston: Yes!

Hollstein: Those are regular police officers, right?

Pinkston: That's right.

Hollstein: And what type of work did you do for them?

Pinkston: Well we were there for a week doing whatever they needed to do to set up their graduation and to make it smoother.

Hollstein: Oh, I see. Uh-huh. And then you were, at that point, then, you were graduated and ready to go to work, huh?

Pinkston: Yes.

Hollstein: Good. And your first office was?

Pinkston: Baltimore, Maryland.

Hollstein: Baltimore. Okay.

Pinkston: They saw U.S. Navy in my personnel file so they sent me to Annapolis. Not as a Resident Agent but that was my assigned territory. That's the location of the Naval Academy.

Hollstein: Yep. How did you happen to have Navy in your background?

- Pinkston: Okay. When I was in law school, I was looking for anything I could find to get a little more income and I joined the Naval Reserve. We had a weekly drill and then each summer we went to sea for two weeks, so I joined the Naval Reserve in March of 1936, for four years; and in March of 1940, I reenlisted for another four years.
- Hollstein: (Laughing) what a career. You packed in an awful lot in your youth!
- Pinkston: Well, I could go a little further. In the Spring of 1941, I was in the office one day and I opened my mail and here's a letter from the Navy telling me to report to 90 Church Street the next day for a physical exam and board ship at the Brooklyn Navy Yard the day after that!
- Hollstein: Wow!
- Pinkston: So, I promptly went in to see my SAC and told him what my problem was. Now before that, the Bureau had sent out a memo to all Agents with Reserve Commissions to send in a resignation and they'd be accepted. Well, I didn't have a Reserve Commission; I was an enlisted man.
- Hollstein: Oh. Uh-huh.
- Pinkston: So that didn't cover me. So, the SAC said, "Well, go ahead and take the physical," and he'd call Washington and see what he could do. Well, I passed the physical but I talked the doctor into a 90-day medical deferment.
- Hollstein: Uh-huh.
- Pinkston: I reported back to the office, talked to my boss and he said, "Well, Washington came back and said you didn't give them enough time," so I was going to have to spend the time in the Navy. And I told him I had 90 days now to work on it, and in about two to three weeks I received a discharge from Washington.
- Hollstein: Uh-huh. Now I came in 1967 and I came in straight out of the Army and they made me give up my Reserve Commission also.

Pinkston: In my four years in high school I was in ROTC and reached the rank of Captain and I was on the Rifle Team. We competed nationally and we did fairly well. Then in junior college, I was in the ROTC, Senior ROTC for two years and reached the rank of Lieutenant, also on the Rifle Team where we competed nationally.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. Wow!

Pinkston: I had six years of ROTC and actually five and a half years in the Navy.

Hollstein: Well then, you know, you can't blame them for wanting to cash in then on your time.

Pinkston: When I got to Newark, the SAC saw the Navy in my file so I spent the next five years working the New York Harbor waterfront.

Hollstein: (Laughing) For your sins, huh. Well, what type of work did you do in the Annapolis RA?

Pinkston: Personnel ... I mean, Personnel Applicants.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. Okay. And you were there for how long?

Pinkston: Three months.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. And then from there you went to?

Pinkston: To Knoxville. I was there for three months.

Hollstein: Oh boy! What kind of work did you do in Knoxville?

Pinkston: A general mixture. It went like this. When I got to the Knoxville Office, the personnel there consisted of the Number One man, who they call now an ASAC; two Agents, one Resident Agent in Chattanooga and me.

Hollstein: Oh for goodness sake!

Pinkston: Well, the next week the other two Headquarters Agents were transferred out, leaving the Number One man and me and one Resident Agent.

Hollstein: (Laughing)

Pinkston: And that was the Field Office.

Hollstein: I'm surprised they didn't make you SAC (laughing).

Pinkston: (Laughing) Well, we had a funny thing happen. Bill Murphy was the SAC, and shortly before I got there, they got a call about a bank robbery in Jackson, Tennessee. So, the Number One man was Bud Mann.

Hollstein: Uhm-hmm.

Pinkston: So Bill Murphy had sent a teletype to the Bureau, said that he was proceeding Jackson, Tennessee, Mann Acting.

Hollstein: Uhm-hmm. (Chuckling)

Pinkston: Well, Bud Mann being the ASAC was our Acting SAC. But by 'Mann Acting' we thought about the Interstate Transportation of Females ...

Hollstein: Right. Right for illegal purposes. Right.

Pinkston: So they made a joke about that.

Hollstein: (Laughing)

Pinkston: One peculiar thing that happened to me in Tennessee ... I learned that when you go in the Smokey Mountains in a car that looked like it could be a Government car, you'll hear an explosion. And you get through up there and you come out and you'll hear another explosion. Well, they got a kid there with some dynamite. When a Government car goes up, he shoots a stick of dynamite and all the moonshiners would bank their fires and go home. When you'd leave, he'd shoot another stick of dynamite and they'd go back, stoke their fires again and start their business again.

Hollstein: (Laughing) Oh my God! There's a lot to be learned, isn't there?

Pinkston: Yep.



Hollstein: Moving into the different areas of the Country and, at that time, I'm sure moonshine was a big deal too.

Pinkston: Well, every law enforcement agency in Tennessee, except the FBI, was looking for moonshiners.

Hollstein: Yes.

Pinkston: And come a holiday, the District Attorney's Office would call us and want to know where they could buy liquor for the holidays.

Hollstein: (Laughing)

Pinkston: We could usually tell them.

Hollstein: Yeah. Yeah. It doesn't take too long to figure it out. Out of Knoxville, then, you went up to Newark?

Pinkston: Yes.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. And how long were you in Newark?

Pinkston: Five ... five years.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. So things really heated up at that point.

Pinkston: Oh yes.

Hollstein: And they put you on the docks. What did that mean?

Pinkston: Oh yeah. Security ... Internal Security, Espionage, Sabotage.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Pinkston: Shortly after I got there I got into working on the biggest spy case the Bureau ever had. It was called the DUCASE, named after one of the principal subject's name. His name was Duquesne.

Hollstein: DUCASE. Yeah.

Pinkston: Yeah, 33 German spies were arrested and all convicted. Thirty men and three women.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Pinkston: And I was involved with one of those subjects.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. What was your involvement?

Pinkston: Just a surveillance, and then the apprehension and photographing.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. Do you remember his name?

Pinkston: Yes. It was Schuh.

Hollstein: Uh-huh! Okay. I've run across a couple of people that have had some relationship to the Duquesne case. One comes to my mind is Jack Danahy, who was in the New York Office for much of that.

Pinkston: There's another peculiarity about the case. There I met a Bureau Support Employee who was in charge of the radio station, the maintenance and operation of it, and when I got to Dallas, I found him again in charge of the radio equipment, maintenance of the cars in the Dallas FBI Office.

Hollstein: So you had a little crossings in your career then. Tell me some more about the Duquesne case and how it developed there in the Newark area.

Pinkston: Well, the original informant came into the New York Office and reported that he had been an American naturalized citizen but was in Germany in 1939 and, being a native German, they drafted him. But when the Gestapo found out that he was a naturalized American, and spoke English fluently, they pressured him into becoming a spy. He came into the States to set up and operate a radio station, a shortwave station, to communicate with the Gestapo in Germany.

Now he came to the office and said that he was supposed to set up this station. So, instead of him setting it up, the Bureau set it up. And the Bureau operated it from ... oh, about March of 1940 until the summer of '41. By that time, thirty-three spies had reported in to this radio station with information to be sent to Germany.

Hollstein: Uh-hmm.

Pinkston: And they had all been photographed and recorded in their reports.

Hollstein: So you had done some surveillance on one of them?

Pinkston: Yes.

Hollstein: This fellow Schuh?

Pinkston: Yes.

Hollstein: And so, he had reported into this guy up in, where was he, in New York, that he was reporting?

Pinkston: No. On Long Island, New York.

Hollstein: On Long Island, huh. Now had all of them just come over on regular transports or had any of them been dropped off by submarine or something like that?

Pinkston: Well, they had all been set up as, I guess you call, sleepers.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Pinkston: This was before we got into the war, you understand.

Hollstein: Right.

Pinkston: So they were all just, most of them were naturalized citizens.

Hollstein: Um-hmm. Oh, I see. So they just collected them from various places around the area then.

Pinkston: The man that came over originally, he didn't know all these people. And we didn't get them identified until they came in with their reports.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. I see. And Schuh, did he live in the New York area there?

Pinkston: Yes.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. What type of work did he do?

Pinkston: I don't recall at this time.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. Had something to do with the docks?

Pinkston: No. I didn't have anything to do with questioning him.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. So you had done what ... surveillance?

Pinkston: Yes.

Hollstein: And then the arrest?

Pinkston: Yes.

Hollstein: I imagine he was surprised.

Pinkston: Yes. (Chuckling)

Hollstein: (Laughing)

Pinkston: And the photograph that the Bureau has in a big framed picture is the one I took.

Hollstein: Oh, is that right?

Pinkston: Yes. I have a copy of it. A reduced copy, it has 33 pictures around it in a rectangular shape. And then an explanation of how the case developed.

Hollstein: Yeah. How did they all fare? Were they all executed?

Pinkston: No. No, they were all sentenced but with nominal sentences, anywhere from two to ten years.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. So they even though it was wartime, they didn't ...

Pinkston: No. We weren't in war at that time.

Hollstein: Well, it was pretty darn close to it.

- Pinkston: Well then, the next big case I got in to was the one involving eight saboteurs who were landed by submarine, four on Long Island and four in Florida.
- Hollstein: Right.
- Pinkston: The Bureau had become aware of the possibility of landings and I was representing the Bureau at a conference on Governor's Island with the Army Intelligence, the Navy Intelligence, and Coast Guard.
- Hollstein: Uh-hmm.
- Pinkston: The conference was to try to figure out what we could do about this possibility of submarine landings. The conference had just started, it'd been going on for about fifteen minutes, and a Coast Guard officer walked into the conference and told us that what we were afraid of had already happened.
- Hollstein: Oh my. Huh.
- Pinkston: The previous night a Coast Guard Patrolman, who was patrolling the beach, had happened onto four men. They were white men; they all spoke good English, and claimed to be fishermen. He questioned them but decided he had no grounds on which to hold them and released them. When he reported back to the CO, the CO grabbed a bunch of men and they went back to the beach and started searching it and they uncovered a bunch of stuff that these men had buried. It was material for sabotage and espionage.
- Hollstein: Uh-huh.
- Pinkston: Now, one of the things that they dug up was a handkerchief with invisible writing on it. Now, on this handkerchief was the name and address of a man who lived in Newark. He was to be a contact for these saboteurs. Well, we set up a surveillance on this man and found out he was living in a working-class man's rooming house. So, we had an Agent there at that time who was typical German in appearance, big, square-shouldered, square-headed ...
- Hollstein: (Chuckling)

Pinkston: ... blonde hair, blue eyes from a German settlement section on the Michigan Upper Peninsula. He was single, so we had him go to this rooming house and get a room. So he lived at this rooming house with the finance man for the rest of the war.

Hollstein: Oh really! Huh!

Pinkston: And with his help in getting all the people out of the house and knowing when they were out, we put microphones in practically every room in the house. And wired them in to a studio we had on the floor above our office. So, then, we could sit in the office or at the studio, and record everything that went on in the rooming house.

Hollstein: You know, I just saw one of those setups. A former Agent had kept a diary, as well as a bunch of pictures of his work. And it dates back to around that time. Now, you were using big platters right? Big platters ... like a big 33 rpm record, right?

Pinkston: No, it was 78.

Hollstein: Yeah, but it was 78. Right. So these are great big recording devices.

Pinkston: That's right. Very primitive.

Hollstein: Yeah. You had a recording studio there.

Pinkston: Yeah.

Hollstein: Wow! Were they difficult to work with?

Pinkston: Very. You had a needle [and it made] a big groove in a record, and (chuckling) you had this cutting all over the place.

Hollstein: (Laughing) So, it was difficult to deal with. And these microphones were pretty good sized, weren't they?

Pinkston: Well, actually we stole most of them out of pay telephones.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. Yeah, that's what somebody was telling me. They were always the best microphones to use.

Pinkston: That's right!

Hollstein: Yeah.

Pinkston: They were real good.

Hollstein: (Laughing) But they're still pretty good size.

Pinkston: Oh yeah. They're about the size of a silver dollar.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. How did you conceal them? Do you recall?

Pinkston: Well, let's not go into that.

Hollstein: Okay. Alright.

Pinkston: We had time to plant them and run wires, concealed, out of the building and where we put them on to leads to telephone lines and brought them into the office.

Hollstein: So all through the war, then, this key guy was well-bugged.

Pinkston: Well, we got him a job at Westinghouse in a war industry. And he would go to it every morning and punch the clock and then go out the back door and come to the office and work ... and he worked in the sound studio. And then he'd go back to Westinghouse and clock out.

Hollstein: (Laughing)

Pinkston: And go back to the rooming house.

Hollstein: (Laughing) That was how you got your man in and out.

Pinkston: Yeah.

Hollstein: Now this fellow that was, the German that was there, was the paymaster?

Pinkston: Yes. His name was Karl Krepper.

Hollstein: So you would know, then, as people came in and went just who he was paying and how it all ...

- Pinkston: His payment was through the sale of valuable stamps that the Germans had taken away from the Jews apparently.
- Hollstein: Uh-huh. Oh, that's interesting. Do you recall how, roughly, how many people he was paying?
- Pinkston: Actually, he never did pay anybody that we were able to identify. Because, before he had a chance to pay anybody, we caught these eight men and tried them. Six of them were executed as spies; and the two that cooperated were sent to the penitentiary and after the war was over they were released and deported.
- Hollstein: Uh-huh. I was curious because one of the fellows was telling me ... he was in the SIS down in Buenos Aires, Argentina ... and they had a paymaster down there who sent money up to the States. Through some techniques, they got the secret codes so that you would go in and tell this paymaster, you know, whatever the code was, and then he would give you the money.
- Pinkston: Yep.
- Hollstein: Well, they ended up receiving very large sums of money coming through this guy because they knew the codes.
- Pinkston: Uh-huh.
- Hollstein: And then they sent it back up to the States to be used in the war effort. So, kind of an interesting way of operating.
- Pinkston: Yeah.
- Hollstein: Turning things around on the bad guys. So, when Krepper, then, you didn't arrest him at all. At the time, you just kept an eye on him and?
- Pinkston: Well, right after the war was over he was arrested and sent to the penitentiary.
- Hollstein: Uhm-hmm. Good. Any other things going on there, during the war?



Pinkston: Well, yes. I was assigned later on, during the war, I was assigned to the waterfront section of the Communist Party – USA.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Pinkston: I was given that assignment. It was located at Jersey City, New Jersey. They had an office on the second floor of a three story building, that had store fronts on the ground floor and then there was an apartment on the third floor; and the Communist had the second floor. So when I realized what I had, I went to the young couple that had the third floor ... they had a couple of young kids ... and told them that I wanted to use their apartment for a few hours ... for them to go to the movie. I gave them the money to go to the movie. So they left and left me in the apartment and I put these same microphones in the floor above the ceiling of the Party and ran the wires under the molding on the wall, out to the back of the building, all covered up all the way. And then I borrowed a vacant store front that was around the corner, about a half a block away. I borrowed it from the owner and set up a recording studio in the little office in the back of it. (chuckling)

Hollstein: (Laughing)

Pinkston: Now, you said leave out companies that served as informants, but I'm only, I'm going to put this one in because the company is no longer in existence.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Pinkston: But shortly after I got to Newark, I was assigned to survey a defense industry. It was a CO<sub>2</sub> Fire Equipment Company. They made fire extinguishing systems for big ships, for airplanes, for tanks and most anything that moved. And, in surveying this plant, I got to be real friendly with the president of the company. We later became brothers-in-law when we married sisters.

Hollstein: Ohh, whatta ya know! (chuckling)

Pinkston: So, when I was setting up this office for the surveillance location on the Communist Party, I borrowed his company truck and a whole bunch of great big boxes with the logo on them. I had them in the truck and we moved into this store front and stacked these, all these boxes in there, so it looked like a storage location for the CO<sub>2</sub> Fire Equipment Company.

Hollstein: Sure.

Pinkston: And I stacked the boxes so that, from the street, you couldn't see the entrance to the private office in the back. And in the back we set up, I went and put in an Army cot, and a hotplate and we had a sink and a toilet there. The sink was leaking. We had an Agent who had been a plumber and asked him to stop the leak. He said, "Well, have you got a lead pot and heating stuff?" I said, "Hell no." (Laughing) "And I don't expect to have one either."

Hollstein: (Laughing)

Pinkston: He said, "Well, I can't fix it then." So I got me a hammer and beat on it till it quit leaking.

Hollstein: (Laughing) That solved the problem. Well, tell me something now, where did you get your tech training?

Pinkston: My tech training?

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Pinkston: I was a sound man. I got it at Washington.

Hollstein: Okay. So you had gone through the Bureau's sound school at some point then.

Pinkston: Yes. Now, I grew up with automobiles as my hobby. And I was a good auto mechanic before I went to work for the Bureau. I paid my way through junior college by driving a car from Dallas to Arlington, Texas, every day and carrying five kids with me. And they paid me two dollars a week apiece.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Pinkston: Well, that paid for my education for two years.

Hollstein: (Chuckling) That did it, huh!

Pinkston: And had to maintain the car.

Hollstein: How long was the Bureau training?

Pinkston: Fifteen days.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. Just a couple of weeks, huh?

Pinkston: Yep.

Hollstein: And the equipment, itself, as you mentioned, was like a regular recording studio and everything was operated on vacuum tubes. Right?

Pinkston: Yeah.

Hollstein: At the time. So very bulky and also fairly delicate, I guess.

Pinkston: That's right.

Hollstein: Did you use commercial equipment or is this military equipment?

Pinkston: It was equipment that was manufactured for the Bureau.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. Oh, I see. Okay. So, it was our design, then.

Pinkston: Yes. Somebody in the Bureau designed it. They contracted it out to a manufacturing ...

Hollstein: I see. Okay. At the time, nobody knew what ... well, of course, eventually the Soviets became allies of ours during the war, but, at the time, nobody knew for sure where things were going with the Communists.

Pinkston: Right.

Hollstein: ... eventually they were thoroughly ... thoroughly penetrated.

Pinkston: We could listen to them operating in their office and it soon became quite apparent to us that they were receiving all their instructions from Moscow.

Hollstein: Is that right?

Pinkston: Yeah. And they were told what to do, and when to do it.

Hollstein: Uh-hmm. And how did they get these communications?

Pinkston: Oh, they were our allies. Then, it was done openly.

Hollstein: So they'd just make a telephone call or a telegram or something?

Pinkston: Usually a telephone call.

Hollstein: Is that right?

Pinkston: And with the microphones I put in there, we could hear one end of the telephone call and sometimes get the other end.

Hollstein: Hmm! Now were they speaking in English?

Pinkston: Yeah. Uh-huh.

Hollstein: And then you would know from telephone records, and what have you, where they were calling from, I'm sure.

Pinkston: Well, not really. But we listened to them so much we soon knew who all the people were that were involved in the conversation. (Laughing)

Hollstein: (Laughing) And there were these networks all over the country.

Pinkston: Yes.

Hollstein: I remember as a kid, there was an early television ... there was a show called "I Led Three Lives."

Pinkston: Uh-huh. I remember it very well.

Hollstein: Herb Philbrick, I think, was the name of the guy. And that was an interesting set of shows and it really was quite revealing.

Pinkston: Right. A funny thing happened on this surveillance. I was on the microphones one Saturday and they had about six or seven members of the Party there cleaning up. They were going through old files and throwing them away.

Hollstein: Uh-hmm.

Pinkston: So, I got two cars, there were two men in each car, waiting for them to throw this stuff out. Well, about ten o'clock, they carried a big, new garbage can down and put it on the curb, apparently full of their stuff. Well, they stood there and talked for a few minutes and then walked off in various directions. And as soon as they got out of sight, a car whipped up there and a man jumped out and grabbed this can and threw it in his car and took off.

Hollstein: (Laughing) That was the beginning of the garbage coverage, right?

Pinkston: Yeah.

Hollstein: Trash coverage.

Pinkston: With two cars following him, they located where he was going. They found out who he was and we worked for about three or four days frantically trying to identify what part he had in it. And we couldn't find anything. So we picked him up and questioned him about it. And we'd only gotten a few words out when he said, "Fellas, I'm awfully sorry. I was just stealin' the garbage can."

Hollstein: (Laughing) Oh my goodness!

Pinkston: At that time, they had the ration on metal. They weren't making garbage cans and this was a big new one.

Hollstein: Imagine being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Pinkston: Right.

Hollstein: That must have been a shock to have the FBI pick you up.

Pinkston: It was.

Hollstein: For stealing a garbage can.

Pinkston: Now, another thing that happened that is a little bit unusual. When I was in the Naval Reserve, going to sea at summer; my job as a Third Class Quartermaster was handling the steering wheel on the ship. I drove the ship. And I got to be rather proficient at it. And, after these submarine saboteurs landed on Long Island and in Florida, I gave myself the assignment of surveying the New Jersey Coast to see where they might land in New Jersey.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Pinkston: So, in order to do this, I finally decided that the only thing I could do was to try to get the Navy to let me ride in something airborne to cover the coast. I called the Navy and they gave me permission to ride the Navy blimp that was running in convoy from New York to Philadelphia, carrying twenty-seven merchant ships down there. So I went to Lakehurst, New Jersey, and got on this blimp about two o'clock in the morning and as soon as he got it off the ground, the Skipper turned to me and says, "Pinkston, you know you're the co-pilot today."

Hollstein: (Laughing)

Pinkston: (Chuckling) I said, "Really? I've never been on a blimp before." Well, at that time, I don't know whether the blimps still control the same way as it did then, but the Skipper sat in the left-hand seat and he had a big wheel that was under his right arm. And he controlled vertical flight by turning this wheel up and down. The co-pilot sat in the right-hand seat and he had a big wheel in front of him. And he controlled horizontal flight. Well, after about ten minutes I found that this blimp steered exactly like the destroyer did, that I was good at driving. So, I did fine for the next eighteen hours on the blimp, out at sea, over submarine territory. We didn't see any submarines, but we saw a bunch of ships laying on the bottom that the submarines had sunk.

Hollstein: Yeah. Those were bad times. They were having a field day ... the Germans.

Pinkston: Oh yeah.

Hollstein: On the East Coast. Yeah. All up and down the coast. Yeah.

Pinkston: So, I was armed with my GI pistol and riding on the Navy blimp, out at sea.

Hollstein: You would have showed them what for ... right!

Pinkston: Dangerous work in the water.

Hollstein: (Laughing)

Pinkston: So, in that capacity, I qualified for membership in an organization in Dallas called, "Happy Warriors of World War II," which is composed of Navy ... I mean, of military flyers of all kinds.

Hollstein: (Laughing)

Pinkston: So, they granted me permission to join.

Hollstein: (Laughing) That's a great story! So many interesting things were happening at that time. You're only limited, really, by your imagination, I think, in terms of developing things. Do you remember, roughly, how many people were actually in the Bureau when you came in?

Pinkston: Eight hundred.

Hollstein: Eight hundred, covering the whole country?

Pinkston: Right.

Hollstein: Well, you know, I talked to one guy, he had the New England roadtrip out of New York. And he took care of all the crime in New England, all Federal crimes. From New York through Connecticut, and Massachusetts, and on up to the tip of Maine ... up in the Canadian Border.

Pinkston: I took care of the Eastern half of Tennessee for three months.

Hollstein: (Laughing) Yeah.

Pinkston: (Chuckling) I was the only Agent working out of Headquarters.

Hollstein: You know, it's a shock. You know, nowadays, there are over a thousand Agents in the New York Office, just in New York. It's a big crew. And I think it's grown, well, it grew in your time though, too.

Pinkston: Yeah. Oh yes.

Hollstein: During the war, they ramped up very fast.

Pinkston: I think it got up around 7,500, 8,000 during the war.

Hollstein: Yeah. And when I went in, it was somewhere around that, when I started in '67.

Pinkston: Uh-huh.

Hollstein: But it's really ballooned now with everything going on. Any other interesting stuff going on in?

Pinkston: Well, I had another case assigned to me that I thought was interesting. I got a teletype one day handed to me to arrest a fugitive, supposed to be in Dallas, on a warrant out of San Diego. I had no information on the background of the case or what it was about. They just told me there was a warrant. Well, I went to the guy's house and knocked on the door. He came to the door and I introduced myself, and told him he was under arrest. He said, "Well, I've been expecting it." So I said, "Would you like to tell me about it? I don't know anything about your case." And he said, "Yeah."

So we sat down on his front porch and talked for about two hours. He tried to give me all the details. It went something like this. This was after the war and it happened in Dallas.

He and some other kids, a young fella, they were all in their late teens. [They] had purchased government surplus airplanes on the West Coast, down around San Diego, and had learned to fly.



Pinkston: And one of them had come up with information that the Mexican Government had stationed fishermen on Baja, California, to fish for lobsters; and the Mexican Government would send the collectors by and they'd pick up these lobsters and take them to Mexico City. Well, these kids found out that they could take their airplanes and tear out the front seat and build a tank in there and they'd fly out to sea from San Diego ... fly out of sight and then fly down to a spot on Baja, California, where these fishermen were and fly back in and land on the beach. They put sea water in the tank in the front seat and then buy lobsters from these fishermen. The fishermen were selling the lobsters that actually belonged to the Mexican Government. They were selling to these kids and they would fly back out to sea and then up even with California, and fly back in to San Diego and land. And they had a big business going on selling the lobsters to the restaurants in San Diego.

Hollstein: (Laughing)

Pinkston: Well, this kid had engine trouble and landed in Mexico. Well, they seized his airplane but he got away. He came back to the States and got the parts necessary to fix his airplane. He went back to Mexico and went into the impound place where his plane was held, repaired the engine; started it and flew it back to the States.

Hollstein: Oh, my goodness.

Pinkston: Well, this didn't make the Mexicans happy. Then he kept hauling lobsters and he had engine trouble again and they caught him and the airplane.

They put him in a prison located in Mexico in ... I guess it's Mexicali. There on the Mexican-California line, there's a town ... it's kinda like Texarkana, Texas.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Pinkston: It's Calexico, California on one side and Mexicali on the Mexican side, but it's the same town.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Pinkston: But it's got a chain-linked fence running through the middle of it. Well, some of this guy's buddies got a hold of a machine gun and a bolt cutter. They got down there and they cut a hole in this chain-linked fence and, with the machine gun, they went into Mexico, and they held up the prison and rescued this guy and brought him back to the States.

Hollstein: Wow!

Pinkston: And left a hole in the fence.

Hollstein: That's an exciting life. Hold on just a second, I'm going to have to turn over here.

Pinkston: Okay.

Hollstein: We're back on again.

Pinkston: Anyhow, they sent this kid back to California and I went out and testified against him and the jury turned him loose.

Hollstein: (Laughing) With a story like that how could you put him in jail, right? (Laughing)

Pinkston: (Laughing)

Hollstein: Well, what year did you get into Dallas? Do you recall?

Pinkston: In the fall of '47.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. So it was Newark and then to Dallas.

Pinkston: No. I went by New Orleans.

Hollstein: Oh that's right. Yeah, you had mentioned New Orleans too.

Pinkston: I was in New Orleans for two years.

Hollstein: Uhm-hmm. What was going on down there?

Pinkston: Well, I didn't have a whole lot of business in New Orleans. Shortly after I got there, they transferred me to the Shreveport Resident Agency.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Pinkston: And I was in Shreveport for about a year and a half and got in trouble on a civil rights case and got transferred back to Headquarters.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. Was that real civil rights at that point?

Pinkston: Yup. We were trying to solve a Civil Rights case there. It was involving a number of local law enforcement officers. And some of the Agents had interviewed a Deputy Constable and he didn't tell them the truth according to the Agent supervising the case in the Resident Agency. And he ordered me to go back and get this Deputy Constable and chew his ass out for not telling the truth.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Pinkston: And I told the man that I was going to have to work with this guy after this case was over and I wasn't going to do it. And he insisted and I insisted that I wouldn't go out just to eat his ass out. So he reported it to the SAC and they transferred me back to Headquarters with a Letter of Censure.

Hollstein: Oh. Well, in those days, civil rights was mainly police brutality, wasn't it?

Pinkston: Yeah.

Hollstein: Yeah. We didn't have any other Federal laws that you would be able to work with.

Pinkston: That ... that's what it was.

Hollstein: Yeah. Yeah. It wasn't until Lyndon Johnson times in the '60s, that we actually had other civil rights legislation you could work with.

So, after the New Orleans Division then, you went to Dallas?

Pinkston: Yes.

Hollstein: When was that, roughly?

Pinkston: In November of 1947.

Hollstein: Okay. So you had a good long time in Dallas, then.

Pinkston: Yeah. I was there 20 years.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. Yeah. And a lot going on in Dallas, I'm sure.

Pinkston: Oh yes.

Hollstein: What type of work did you work there when you got there?

Pinkston: Well, when I first got there, there was no waterfront for them to put me on (chuckling).

Hollstein: (Laughing)

Pinkston: So, the first two years, I spent as a relief man for Resident Agents. Whenever a Resident Agent had to go to In-service or go on vacation, I went and spent two weeks holding down his job in the RA. So, we had about ten or twelve Resident Agencies and I spent most of two years in those Resident Agencies ... two weeks at a time. And I got well-acquainted with the north half of Texas.

Hollstein: I'll bet!

Pinkston: I got to where I knew it well enough that I hardly ever looked at a map when they told me to go somewhere.

Hollstein: (Laughing) Just take off and go to work.

Pinkston: Yeah. And after that first two years, I had worked auto theft cases in these RAs, to a big extent, and was successful with them so they made me an Auto Theft specialist for the next ... next eighteen years, I was the Auto Theft man.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Pinkston: So, I was real successful in that. Enough so that I got acquainted with all the police agencies that were handling auto theft throughout the north half of the state; and I was in on the organization of the International Association of Auto Theft Investigators.

Hollstein: Oh yeah. Yes. I remember that.

Pinkston: And it's still in operation, big time. They've got members all over the world now. And they have a big national convention every year.

Hollstein: Are they the ones that put out the book?

Pinkston: Which book?

Hollstein: Where the value of cars and also where the VINs were hidden. You know, the secret VIN.

Pinkston: No. No. They didn't put that out. That was The National Auto Theft Bureau.

Hollstein: That's what it was. Yes. So you didn't use your tech training anymore, then?

Pinkston: Well, I put telephone taps on Oswald; and microphones in his widow's residence.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. So you were working that stuff, then. That was because of the Soviet connection, right?

Pinkston: No. No. This was the Kennedy assassination.

Hollstein: No. No. But, I mean, he had lived in the Soviet Union for awhile, right?

Pinkston: Oh yeah.

Hollstein: And then also Marina was a Russian, right?

Pinkston: Yeah.

Hollstein: Um-hmm. So, is this before the Kennedy assassination, or after?

Pinkston: No. After.

Hollstein: After. Uh-huh.

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Pinkston: I had nothing to do with the Russian part on the microphones and telephone taps. I was just doing what the SAC told me to do. Somebody else was handling the case.

Hollstein: Oh, I see. Okay. So you're just in and out.

Pinkston: I was the first Agent on the scene after the assassination.

Hollstein: Oh really!

Pinkston: Yeah.

Hollstein: What was that like?

Pinkston: Well, I was in the Auto Theft Pound Office at the time of the assassination and I heard it on the police radio. I picked up the phone and called my son and asked him what I should do. I called my son because he was the switchboard operator at the FBI Office.

Hollstein: Oh. Okay.

Pinkston: I've used that several times and people still get a kick out of it.

Hollstein: (Laughing) You know, I just remembered the name of the ... of the guy ... Bob Gemberling. You knew him, then?

Pinkston: Oh yeah. Quite well.

Hollstein: Yeah.

Pinkston: And his wife Jenny.

Hollstein: Yeah. Nice guy.

Pinkston: Uh-huh.

Hollstein: So you called in ...

Pinkston: And they told me, "We have no jurisdiction, but get your ass down there and find out what's going on."

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Pinkston: So I was the first Agent there. And I got up to the sixth floor where they were searching and I ran into Carl Day, who I knew quite well, who was head of the Identification Division at the Police Department.

Hollstein: Uh-huh. Now this was at the Book Repository?

Pinkston: Yes. And he was holding a rifle in his hands. He told me that they'd just found the rifle and that they thought it was the one used in the assassination. So I took a complete description of the gun, from the gun, while he was holding it and I started out to try and identify the gun.

Well, I had an informant who was a pawn broker and a licensed gun dealer, very well acquainted with firearms, he'd been in business a long time. And I went to him and described the gun to him and he said, "Well, there were a lot of those guns sold and they were sold in Dallas by Titcher-Goettinger Company." Which was a large department store and it had a sporting goods department. So, I went to them and they had excellent records. They went through them and they said, "We have no record on the gun of that serial number. But, if we didn't sell it, it almost had to come from Klein Sporting Goods Store in Chicago." And he gave me the number of Klein's ... and the address. So I went back to the office and we sent a teletype to Chicago to check at Klein's Sporting Goods. Well, by this time of the day, they had closed up for the weekend. So, one of the Agents there went out and picked up the manager of the store and took him back to the store, and in about fifteen minutes they had a record that this gun. This particular rifle had been sold by Klein Sporting Goods Store to A. J. Hidell, to a Post Office Box in Dallas.

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Pinkston: Well, before I got that information, I went to the police department where they had the personal effects of Oswald ... that they had taken away from him when they arrested him.

Hollstein: Uh-hmm.

Pinkston: And in his personal effects was identification in the name of A. J. Hidell. The same Post Office Box.

Hollstein: Wow! So you were in the middle of all of this.

Pinkston: Yeah.

Hollstein: Great. So then all that happened very fast, then.

Pinkston: Yeah. It was all the same day as the assassination.

Hollstein: Yeah. Yeah.

Pinkston: So before the day was over, we had identified the gun as being Oswald's.

Hollstein: And then, if I remember correctly, Oswald had been picked up.

Pinkston: Yeah.

Hollstein: Because he shot the ...

Pinkston: Policeman ...

Hollstein: ... Tippit, yeah.

Pinkston: Uh-huh. He was in custody. We proved that it was his gun. Also, he had also bought a revolver from the same sporting goods store and that's the one he killed the policeman with ... it was in his possession when he was arrested.

Hollstein: Hmm! Boy, things broke quickly. But it is very typical, though, of ...

Pinkston: We had the case solved before the day was over.

Hollstein: Yeah. Well, it's typical of Bureau operations, in general. Everybody gets on these things very quickly and really gives it a good shake at the beginning and it sure makes a difference.

Pinkston: We had no jurisdiction but we were there.

Hollstein: Yeah. Oh yeah. And, well, plus the good connections that you build up over years of being in an area.

Pinkston: It's not what you know, it's who you know.



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Hollstein: Absolutely (laughing). You can learn a lot very quickly. So that was the big excitement ... I'm sure.

Pinkston: Yeah.

Hollstein: For your career there in Dallas.

Pinkston: Yes. I've had a lot of publicity over this. I've appeared in a episode of the History Channel called "Guns of Infamy." It's a series called "Tales of the Gun."

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Pinkston: And one episode was "Infamous Guns" and I reenacted my part in that investigation.

Hollstein: Hmm! I'll have to get a hold of that. I bought several of their pieces. They had one on the Duquesne case and another one on the saboteurs. And we got interviews with Agents who are no longer with us, you know.

Pinkston: Yep.

Hollstein: So that's really handy. I'll have to go back. A young friend of the family is involved with the History Network, History Channel, I mean. Maybe he can help me out.

Pinkston: Well, there's two episodes. One called "Guns of Infamy" and one's called "Infamous Guns."

Hollstein: Uh-huh.

Pinkston: And I believe this one is "Infamous Guns."

Hollstein: Oh, okay.

Pinkston: I could be mistaken about that.

Hollstein: Roughly how long ago was it?

Pinkston: Three years.

Hollstein: Oh. Okay. That's pretty recent, then.

Pinkston: Uh-huh.

Hollstein: But not for television (laughing). That's a long time ago but for us, anyway, it's not too long ago.

Pinkston: I went to the School Book Depository and and I was involved in a two-hour interview for oral history.

Hollstein: Oh great. I'll look for that because, you know, if we can get footage. That's always good, you know, film and what have you. We don't have the budget with the Society's Oral History Program to do films.

Pinkston: Well, I have a copy of the TV program and I also have a copy of my interview for oral history.

Hollstein: Who interviewed you for oral history?

Pinkston: The curator of the Sixth Floor Museum.

Hollstein: Oh really!

Pinkston: Uh-huh.

Hollstein: Oh wow! Any chance we could get a copy of the interview itself?

Pinkston: If you want to make a copy, you can.

Hollstein: Hello.

Pinkston: It's on tape.

Hollstein: It's on tape?

Pinkston: Yes.

Hollstein: And who did it now again, please?

Pinkston: The curator of the Sixth Floor Museum, which is maintained in the School Book Depository.

Hollstein: Ah-huh. Okay.

Pinkston: It's still operating as a museum and it's very popular.

Hollstein: Yeah. Well good. I'll try and get in contact with them. And, if nothing else, we can set it up as a link from your interview to that one. So that if people are doing research, they can find the, you know, the whole story much more complete. A two-hour interview is a big, long time.

Pinkston: Ah-huh.

Hollstein: I mean we're just going to get an hour or so in here on this one. What other things did he cover doing such a long interview?

Pinkston: Well, the manager of the School Book Depository was a fellow named Friendly. And I interviewed him at length and I also interviewed quite a few of the employees. The Agents interviewed every employee of the School Book Depository. And we were able to prove where everybody was except Oswald. Every employee was with other employees and their location was definite with reputable witnesses to prove it.

Hollstein: Um-hmm. Yeah, 'cause you couldn't be sure that they weren't part of it; or somebody wasn't part of it anyway.

Pinkston: But we had substantiated witnesses of every employee of the School Book Depository, except Oswald.

Hollstein: Uh-hmm. Well, it was very thorough.

Pinkston: And also a few days after the investigation, and after Oswald was killed, one of the employees of the School Book Depository called me and told me that he had found Oswald's clipboard, which contained all of the orders that Oswald was supposed to be filling on the morning that he killed Kennedy.

Hollstein: Oh. What do you know?

Pinkston: It had been thrown on the floor close to where the gun was. Now, all of the employees there used homemade clipboards. And each employee had made his own. And all of these employees said that they could look at this of Oswald's and swear that it was Oswald's clipboard. Now the orders on the clipboard were to be filled on the sixth floor on that day. He was the only one who had orders for the sixth floor.

Hollstein: So he was all alone up there.

Pinkston: Yeah.

Hollstein: Um-hmm.

Pinkston: He was the only one up there and the only one that had any business up there.

Hollstein: Quite a time and we're still reeling from it. And still plenty of theories and people thinking it over, but it seems to have quieted down now. You don't hear so much about it.

Pinkston: Well, there's still a lot of comment about it.

Hollstein: Yeah. Yeah. But most of the, you know, the fringe people have been fairly well, you know, people have decided the fringe people aren't right.

Pinkston: Yeah.

Hollstein: You know, with all of the conspiracy theories and what have you. So, hopefully it'll go away.

Shall we finish it off here?

Pinkston: Well, I had one car case that was really interesting. We got a teletype one day from California. They had found a car in California that had been titled on the title of a car that had been total salvage. And the salvage had been sold to a wrecking yard operator named James Edward VanHuss, who lived in Brownwood, Texas.

- Pinkston: So I got with the manager of the National Automobile Theft Bureau and we went to Brownwood, Texas, and went into his wrecking yard. Now the laws of Texas give police officers authority to search any wrecking yard at any time, without any papers.
- Hollstein: Uh-huh.
- Pinkston: So we went out there; we asked VanHuss if we could look over his wrecking yard. Well, he gladly gave us permission. Well, we spent the next month going through his wrecking yard just to find the confidential numbers on every piece of salvage.
- Hollstein: Wow! That was difficult too, because they were up underneath everything, you know. You couldn't find them very easily.
- Pinkston: Yeah. And all of the public numbers had been taken off of the cars.
- Hollstein: Sure.
- Pinkston: The VIN plates and identification been removed. What he was doing, he was buying salvage from insurance companies and from salvage auctions. And if he had a car that was rebuildable, he would sell it to a salvage rebuilder. If it was not rebuildable, he would sell the title and all of the serial plates to this gang of thieves and they would steal one to match it, and then put the numbers on from the salvage.
- Hollstein: Sure.
- Pinkston: So, by the end of the month, we had come up with numbers of 64 cars. We then started hunting these cars in the title offices throughout the country. And we found 65 cars and recovered 65 stolen cars on the basis of this. There was one more car than we found salvaged because they had stolen two cars on the same number, because they wrecked one before they could sell it.
- Hollstein: (Laughing)
- Pinkston: They initially stole it and wrecked it before they had a chance to sell it. So they stole the second one (chuckling).

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Hollstein: (Laughing) Those were the good old days.

Pinkston: And we convicted all of them in New Mexico.

Hollstein: I guess that's all done for now.

Pinkston: Yeah.

Hollstein: They're not handling cars, except I guess they do, but not as a volume case anymore. I'll call you back and we'll talk some more.