

Someone Lied to FBI Probers About Oswald's Role

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By Norman Kerner
Washington Star Staff Writer

Somebody lied to FBI investigators this year about a 12-year cover-up in the bureau's Dallas field office of a letter written by Lee Harvey Oswald just a few days before the murder of President John F. Kennedy.

That seems to be the one uncontroverted fact that emerged from the first full-scale congressional hearing to examine the role played by the FBI in the Warren Commission's investigation of the Nov. 22, 1963, assassination.

After listening to James B. Adams, deputy associate FBI director, describe the bureau's internal investigation of the destruction of the letter, House Judiciary subcommittee chairman Don Edwards, D-Calif., said the panel will have to call additional witnesses to attempt to untangle the contradictions.

"We certainly can't drop it now," Edwards said in a telephone interview.

ADAMS SAID a three-month probe, begun as a result of a newspaper inquiry and just completed, "leaves no doubt" that Oswald, named by the Warren Commission as the lone assassin of Kennedy, visited the Dallas field office sometime in November 1963 to drop off a note complaining of FBI harassment of his Russian-born wife, Marina. Shortly after Oswald was killed by Jack Ruby, the letter was destroyed.

That, Adams said, is about all that is known for sure. The FBI investigation did not discover who ordered the note destroyed, who decided not to tell the Warren Commission about it, why the note was destroyed or even exactly what said.

The biggest question, of course, is why the FBI con-

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sidered the note important enough to cover up. Nothing that is now known about it would seem to indicate that it is very different from the scores of documents concerning Oswald that were retained in FBI files.

Also left unanswered was the question of whether the late FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover knew of the letter or had anything to do with ordering its destruction. Adams said there was no evidence that Hoover knew anything about the matter, but he conceded it is difficult to prove what a dead man may or may not have known.

ADAMS SAID he did not know why the letter was destroyed, but he said the agent who admitted destroying it said he did so to avoid embarrassing either the FBI or himself.

Adams related that the FBI investigators heard a number of different versions of the story, some of them directly contradictory to others. There can be no doubt that someone did not tell the truth. As presented to the committee, these are some of the issues:

- James B. Hosty, the agent to whom the Oswald letter was addressed, said that about two hours after Oswald was pronounced dead on Nov. 24 he was instructed by Gordon Shanklin, the chief of the Dallas office, to destroy the letter and a memo regarding it.
- Shanklin, who recently retired, said he knew nothing of the Oswald visit or the note until last July. He denied issuing orders to destroy the letter.
- William Sullivan, a former FBI assistant director, said Shanklin told him during the course of the original Kennedy assassination investigation that he had an internal problem involving one of his agents who had received a threat-



Harold N. Bassett (left), FBI assistant director, and James B. Adams, deputy associate director, testify before the House judiciary subcommittee on civil and constitutional rights.

ening message from Oswald.

- Sullivan said he thought it was "common knowledge" at FBI headquarters that the Dallas office had received a threatening message from Oswald.

- Other top officials of the FBI who were assigned to headquarters at that time said they knew nothing of the letter.

- A receptionist in the Dallas office, who read the note, said it was a warning that Oswald would "blow up the FBI and the Dallas Police Department" if agents

did not stop bothering his wife."

- Hosty said, the note did not threaten to blow up anything but Oswald did warn that if the harassment of his wife did not stop he would "take appropriate action and report this to the proper authorities." He said he did not consider the note to be "threatening" or an indication that Oswald might be capable of violence.

The Justice Department has decided that no prosecutions are possible because of the statute of limi-

tations. But Adams said FBI Director Clarence Kelley is still considering possible administrative action.

Sullivan declined to comment on the matter in a telephone interview from his retirement home in New Hampshire. He refused to repeat the assertion that the letter was common knowledge in the Washington headquarters and he declined to say if Hoover knew about it.

HOSTY, NOW assigned to the Kansas City office, passed the word that he was

—Associated Press

unwilling to discuss the matter.

While the committee was unable to learn much about the significance of the letter, they did pick up one bit of information that Edwards said came as a surprise to him.

Adams said that Hoover took disciplinary action against "a number" of FBI agents as a result of their handling of the Oswald case prior to the Kennedy assassination. There had been hints of some punishment, but this was the first official confirmation.

Adams did not say how many agents were involved, but other sources said there were "more than 10" and they were stationed in Washington, Dallas and New Orleans, Oswald's former home.

Adams also repeated the FBI's denial that Ruby had been a paid informant of the bureau. He referred to a letter which Hoover wrote to Warren Commission Chief Counsel J. Lee Rankin revealing that during 1959 the bureau tried nine times to enlist Ruby as an informant. The letter said that, although Ruby promised cooperation, he never provided any useful information.

Edwards said he was mystified by the failure of the Warren Commission to even mention the FBI's attempt to recruit Ruby as an agent. Hoover's letter to Rankin was held in the commission's classified file until last December when it was released.

Edwards said later that he cannot understand why both the Warren Commission and the FBI chose to withhold the information from the public.

"Why was this letter classified?" he asked rhetorically. "What national security matter could have been involved? This just doesn't add up."

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