

# New York Times

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2009

## C.I.A. Is Cagey About '63 Files Tied to Oswald

By SCOTT SHANE

WASHINGTON — Is the Central Intelligence Agency covering up some dark secret about the assassination of John F. Kennedy?

Probably not. But you would not know it from the C.I.A.'s behavior.

For six years, the agency has fought in federal court to keep secret hundreds of documents from 1963, when an anti-Castro Cuban group it paid clashed publicly with the soon-to-be assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald. The C.I.A. says it is only protecting legitimate secrets. But because of the agency's history of stonewalling assassination inquiries, even researchers with no use for conspiracy thinking question its stance.

The files in question, some released under direction of the court and hundreds more that are still secret, involve the curious career of George E. Joannides, the case officer who oversaw the dissident Cubans in 1963. In 1978, the agency made Mr. Joannides the liaison to the House Select Committee on Assassinations, but never told the committee of his earlier role.

Continued on Page A11

From Page A1

That concealment has fueled suspicion that Mr. Joannides's real assignment was to limit what the House committee could learn about C.I.A. activities. The agency's deception was first reported in 2001 by Jefferson Morley, a journalist and author who has doggedly pursued the files ever since, represented by James H. Lesar, a Washington lawyer specializing in Freedom of Information Act lawsuits.

"The C.I.A.'s conduct is maddening," said Mr. Morley, 51, a former Washington Post reporter and the author of a 2008 biography of a former C.I.A. station chief in Mexico.

After years of meticulous re-

porting on Mr. Joannides, who died at age 68 in 1990, he is convinced that there is more to learn.

"I know there's a story here," Mr. Morley said. "The confirmation is that the C.I.A. treats these documents as extremely sensitive."

Mr. Morley's quest has gained prominent supporters, including John R. Tunheim, a federal judge in Minnesota who served in 1994 and 1995 as chairman of the Assassination Records Review Board, created by Congress to unearth documents related to the case.

"I think we were probably misled by the agency," Judge Tunheim said, referring to the Joannides records. "This material should be released."

Gerald Posner, the author of an anti-conspiracy account of the Kennedy assassination, "Case Closed" (Random House, 1993), said the C.I.A.'s withholding such aged documents was "a perfect example of why nobody trusts the agency."

"It feeds the conspiracy theorists who say, 'You're hiding something,'" Mr. Posner said.

After losing an appeals court decision in Mr. Morley's lawsuit, the C.I.A. released material last year confirming Mr. Joannides's

deep involvement with the anti-Castro Cubans who confronted Oswald. But the agency is withholding 295 specific documents from the 1960s and '70s, while refusing to confirm or deny the existence of many others, saying their release would cause "extremely grave damage" to national security.

"The methods of defeating or deterring covert action in the 1960s and 1970s can still be instructive to the United States' current enemies," a C.I.A. official wrote in a court filing.

An agency spokesman, Paul Gimigliano, said the C.I.A. had opened all files relevant to the assassination to Judge Tunheim's review board and denied that it was trying to avoid embarrassment. "The record doesn't support that, any more than it supports conspiracy theories, offen-

sive on their face, that the C.I.A. had a hand in President Kennedy's death," Mr. Gimigliano said.

C.I.A. secrecy has been hotly debated this year, with agency officials protesting the Obama administration's decision to release legal opinions describing brutal interrogation methods. The House speaker, Nancy Pelosi, came under attack from Republicans after she accused the C.I.A. of misleading Congress about waterboarding, adding, "They mis-

## Stonewalling by an agency bolsters conspiracy theorists.

lead us all the time."

On the Kennedy assassination, the deceptions began in 1964 with the Warren Commission. The C.I.A. concealed its schemes to kill Fidel Castro and its ties to the anti-Castro Directorio Revolucionario Estudiantil, or Cuban Student Directorate, which received \$50,000 a month in C.I.A. support during 1963.

In August 1963, Oswald visited a New Orleans shop owned by a directorate official, feigning sympathy with the group's goal of overthrowing Mr. Castro. A few



do we know what he didn't give us?"

After Oliver Stone's 1991 film "J.F.K." fed speculation about the Kennedy assassination, Congress created the Assassination Records Review Board, to release documents. But because the board, too, was not told of Mr. Joannides's 1963 work, it did not peruse his records, said Judge Tunheim, the chairman.

"If we'd known of his role in Miami in 1963, we would have pressed for all his records," Judge Tunheim said.

No matter what comes of Mr. Morley's case in Federal District Court in Washington, Mr. Tunheim said he might ask the current C.I.A. director, Leon E. Panetta, to release the records, even if the names of people who are still alive must be redacted for privacy.

What motive could C.I.A. officials have to bury the details of Mr. Joannides's work for so long? Did C.I.A. officers or their Cuban contacts know more about Oswald than has been revealed? Or was the agency simply embarrassed by brushes with the future assassin — like the Dallas F.B.I. officials who, after the assassination, destroyed a handwritten note Oswald had previously left for an F.B.I. agent?

Or has Mr. Morley spent a decade on a wild goose chase?

Max Holland, who is writing a history of the Warren Commission, said the agency might be trying to preserve the principle of secrecy.

"If you start going through the files of every C.I.A. officer who had anything to do with anything that touched the assassination, that would have no end," Mr. Holland said.

Mr. Posner, the anti-conspiracy author, said that if there really were something explosive involving the C.I.A. and President Kennedy, it would not be in the files — not even in the documents the C.I.A. has fought to keep secret.

"Most conspiracy theorists don't understand this," Mr. Posner said. "But if there really were a C.I.A. plot, no documents would exist."



CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

George Joannides, center, in July 1981, with his wife, Violet, and Bobby R. Inman, deputy director of the C.I.A.



## C.I.A. Is Cagey About '63 Files Tied to Oswald



BRENDAN SMALOWSKI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Jefferson Morley, a journalist and author, on Oct. 8 in his office in Washington with documents released to him by the C.I.A.

days later, directorate members found Oswald handing out pro-Castro pamphlets and got into a brawl with him. Later that month, Oswald debated the anti-Castro Cubans on a local radio station.

In the years since Oswald was named as the assassin, speculation about who might have been behind him has never ended, with various theories focusing on Mr. Castro, the mob, rogue government agents or myriad combinations of the above. Mr. Morley, one of many writers to become entranced by the story, insists he has no theory and is seeking only the facts.

His lawsuit has uncovered the central role in overseeing direc-

torate activities of Mr. Joannides, the deputy director for psychological warfare at the C.I.A.'s Miami station, code-named JM/WAVE. He worked closely with directorate leaders, documents show, corresponding with them under pseudonyms, paying their travel expenses and achieving an "important degree of control" over the group, as a July 1963 agency fitness report put it.

Fifteen years later, Mr. Joannides turned up again as the agency's representative to the House assassinations committee. Dan Hardway, then a law student working for the committee, recalled Mr. Joannides as "a cold fish," thin and bespectacled, who firmly limited access to docu-

ments. Once, Mr. Hardway remembered, he handed me a thin file and just stood there. I blew up, and he said, 'This is all you're going to get.'"

But neither Mr. Hardway nor the committee's staff director, G. Robert Blakey, had any idea that Mr. Joannides had played a role in the very anti-Castro activities from 1963 that the committee was scrutinizing.

When Mr. Morley first informed him about it a decade ago, Mr. Blakey was flabbergasted.

"If I'd known his role in 1963, I would have put Joannides under oath — he would have been a witness, not a facilitator," said Mr. Blakey, a law professor at the University of Notre Dame. "How