

12-1-77
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WASHINGTON, Dec. 5 - Initial examination of formerly secret files on the FBI's investigation of the John F. Kennedy assassination reveals nothing that seriously undermines the Warren Commission finding that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone to kill Kennedy.<

But explicit details contained in the heavily censored documents are sure to provide enough bits and pieces of information to refuel the arguments of those who contend that Oswald was part of a larger conspiracy to murder Kennedy.<

The 40,000 pages of documents, the first of 90,700 pages the FBI eventually will make public, show that the bureau went to nonierous lengths in tracking down a variety of conspiracy theories and came up with nothing conclusive.<

But the files also show that FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover had his own doubts that Oswald acted alone. Twenty days after the Nov. 22 1963 assassination Hoover persuaded President Johnson to withhold a tentative Justice Department finding that Oswald was the lone assassin pending further investigation.<

Nothing found in the files so far, however, indicates whether or when Hoover finally was convinced there was no conspiracy.<

It is clear from the files that Hoover was greatly concerned with any criticism of his investigation. At the time he was under heavy pressure to solve the Kennedy murder, he also was spending considerable time and effort to protect his agency's reputation, the files show.<

Within days after the assassination, Hoover was battling critics within the Justice Department, the CIA and the Dallas police force.<

The strongest attack allegedly came from CIA Director John McCone, who, the FBI documents charged, planted a story with Rep. Gerald R. Ford, R-Mich. - a member of the Warren Commission - and with newspapers that the CIA had uncovered information in Mexico City that Lee Harvey Oswald received \$6,500 to kill Kennedy.<

An FBI internal memorandum says the Mexico City story was false and, by putting it out, the CIA "attacked the bureau in a vicious and underhanded manner characterized with sheer dishonesty."<

Hoover also bitterly discredited the authors of a study paper raising questions about the FBI's investigation which had been forwarded to him by then Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy. Rather than rebut any of the specific questions raised in the paper, Hoover told Kennedy that FBI records showed the authors - Jack Minnis and Staughton Lynd - had extensive connections with subversive groups.<

Just two days after the assassination, Hoover ordered the agent in charge of the FBI's Dallas office to "straighten out" Dallas Police Chief Jesse E. Curry, who had been critical of the FBI's handling of the case.<

In addition, the files show that Hoover tried to convince Johnson not to appoint the Warren Commission, arguing that the FBI was capable of handling the investigation on its own.<

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Three days after the assassination, Hoover had one of his top aides, Cartha DeLoach, attempt to convince the Washington Post not to run an editorial endorsing the concept of a special commission to investigate Kennedy's murder. DeLoach reported that he told a Post official such an editorial would "muddy the waters and create further confusion and hysteria." <

The FBI's voluminous and explicitly detailed files are certain to fuel continued debate and speculation for a number of reasons:<

- Hundreds of apparently crucial documents, including many involving investigations by the CIA and State Department, are missing from the files or have been heavily censored.<

- The files indicate that the FBI, which had Oswald under periodic surveillance as a potential subversive since his return from the Soviet Union in 1962, lost track of him for a time prior to the assassination. The agency apparently still has been unable to fully account for Oswald's activities when he visited Mexico City in 1962. Oswald went there in an effort to get a visa to visit Cuba.<

The files reveal that Hoover ran background checks through FBI files on all persons who corresponded with him on the assassination - including a sixth-grader who wrote asking for information on Oswald.<

The FBI labored over the tiniest of details, the documents show. For example, one five-page cable is devoted entirely to the type, size and quality of a plain paper bag Oswald was seen carrying the day of the assassination.<

Other items in the file include:<

- Jack Ruby told Dallas policemen that "I just wanted to save the state some money" after he shot Oswald two days after the assassination. Ruby also reportedly said "I just wanted to be a dammed hero and all I've done is foul things up." <

- Mrs. Marina Oswald, Lee's widow, asked Dallas authorities to have "mercy" for Ruby.<

- The FBI spent several days trying to locate a New York City fortune teller who witnesses said had predicted Kennedy's assassination. Agents also interviewed a Canadian clairvoyant who reported her visions of seeing Oswald and Ruby together.<

The bureau interviewed hundreds of persons who, in barroom and beauty parlor conversations, advocated Kennedy's assassination. One interview was with a military man who witnesses said laughed when he heard of Kennedy's death. It later turned out that the GI laughed because he did not believe it.<

- A Buffalo, N.Y., businessman wrote Hoover suggesting the bureau investigate the possibility that Oswald was brainwashed in Russia and killed Kennedy because of a post-hypnotic suggestion implanted by Soviet secret police. Top bureau officials, after discussing the pros and cons of an investigation, decided against it because they feared it would create public sympathy for Oswald.<

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