

FBI Tried to Avert Post Editorials

Memo Relates Effort Against Appeal for Assassination Panel

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High-ranking FBI officials made an elaborate attempt to stop The Washington Post from editorializing about the need for a "presidential commission" to investigate the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963, according to internal FBI documents released yesterday.

Cartha (Deke) DeLoach, a retired FBI assistant director and onetime confidant of director J. Edgar Hoover, told Hoover in a Nov. 25, 1963, memo that then Post managing editor Alfred Friendly at first assured him such an editorial would be killed but that Friendly withdrew the "commitment" 40 minutes later.

DeLoach said in the memo that Friendly "obviously had talked with Russ Wiggins," then editor of The Post and the person responsible for Post editorial policy.

Friendly called DeLoach back, the memo said, "to let me know as of this time no definite commitment could be given."

DeLoach then added: "This, of course is the usual 'hogwash' on the part of Wiggins who cannot be trusted and usually attempts to run opposite good judgment in order to satisfy his own ego."

The memo also notes that Nicholas deB. Katzenbach, deputy attorney general under Robert Kennedy at the time, called Wiggins and asked him not to be "specific" about the kind of mechanism for investigating the assassination.

Wiggins and Friendly, both now retired from The Post, said yesterday they could not recall an attempt by DeLoach to stop any editorials.

"I have no recollection of it whatsoever," said Friendly. "... It would have been absurd for him to call me. In the first place, I had no control or authority over editorials [as managing editor, Friendly was in charge of news operations at The Post], and in the second place, I never would have given such a commitment [to kill an editorial]."

Wiggins said he does recall Katzenbach's call. "He asked that we not be specific as to alternative [ways of investigating the assassination since the murder of suspected assassin Lee Harvey Oswald precluded a conventional criminal trial]."

Wiggins said Katzenbach's call had no effect. "We wrote what we wanted."

The Post ran two editorials on the subject shortly after Kennedy's death on Nov. 22, 1963. On Nov. 26 the day following the DeLoach memo, The Post published an editorial entitled "Full Inquiry."

It called for the federal government to "prosecute

this inquiry by means that assure the most objective, the most thorough and the most speedy analysis and canvass of every scrap of relevant information."

Two days later, on Nov. 28, another editorial noted that more than 50 FBI agents were assigned to the investigation in Dallas, where Kennedy was slain, but "it will remain for an experienced body of fact-finders to sift this evidence, to pursue any avenues that may remain clouded and to give the country a comprehensive view of the crime and why it happened."

In his memo, DeLoach complained that a Post editorial urging a "presidential commission"—in which the FBI would be a subordinate element—"would merely 'muddy the waters' and would create further confusion and hysteria."

DeLoach said he stressed to Friendly that the FBI's own investigation was being personally supervised by Hoover and was "proving to be swift and intensive."

Additional internal memoranda released by the FBI yesterday indicate that the FBI role in the Kennedy assassination investigation generated other encounters with the press.

In one incident, DeLoach said he countered a published report that Oswald had been an FBI informant by issuing a general denial to the "wire services" and to Jeremiah O'Leary, longtime law enforcement reporter for the Washington Star who was known for his closeness with Hoover.

In the same memo, DeLoach described Jay Iselin, a correspondent for Newsweek magazine, as "friendly" to the FBI. He said Iselin told the FBI he had talked with Thomas Gettings Buchanan Jr., author of the Oswald-informant story, and believed Buchanan was a member of the Communist Party.

In another memo addressed to DeLoach, FBI official M. A. Jones expressed surprise about an article critical of the FBI that appeared in Security Gazette magazine, a publication with which "we have enjoyed friendly relations."

The article, which appeared in the magazine's December 1963 issue, criticized what it called an "apparent lack of liaison between the Secret Service, the FBI and the local police" in preparing for Kennedy's Dallas visit.

The memo suggested that FBI officials contact the magazine's editor and "tactfully point out to him the splendid relationship that exists between the FBI and Secret Service."