

Investigative Unit For Warren Panel Opposed by FBI

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Acting on an early tip from the Central Intelligence Agency, FBI officials apparently successfully resisted efforts of the Warren Commission to organize its own investigating staff.

Instead of taking that step, the commission wound up relying primarily on the FBI and the CIA to serve as its investigators for the inquiry into the murder of President John F. Kennedy.

FBI officials learned on Dec. 17, 1963—the day after former Solicitor General Lee Rankin was sworn in as general counsel for the Warren Commission—that Rankin was “considering an investigative staff to conduct additional investigation.”

“Frankly I think Rankin should be discouraged from having an investigative staff,” Al Rosen, head of the FBI’s general investigative division, told Alan H. Belmont, one of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover’s top assistants. Rosen said the bureau “should make it clear that we stand ready to run out additional investigative leads the commission wants covered.”

The Senate Intelligence Committee concluded just last year that both the FBI and CIA withheld crucial information from the commission, particularly in connection with the CIA’s attempts to assassinate Cuban Premier

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Fidel Castro and in connection with “the significance of Oswald’s contacts with pro-Castro and anti-Castro groups for the many months before the assassination.”

The FBI files, made public this week under the Freedom of Information Act, show that the tip about Rankin’s plans came from the CIA’s chief of counterintelligence, James Angleton, who had “picked up comments from Allen Dulles” about the proposal. Dulles, the CIA’s former director who left the agency shortly after the Bay of Pigs debacle in 1961, was a member of the Warren Commission.

Just six months after the assassination, some Warren Commission officials began worrying about gaps in the evidentiary material amassed by the FBI and about their vulnerability to criticism from outside.

The FBI was never too busy to overlook any damage to its reputation.

Top bureau officials were incensed on Nov. 23, 1963, the hectic day after the assassination, when Dallas Police Chief Jesse Curry was reported to have charged publicly that the FBI failed to notify his department about Lee Harvey Oswald even though the bureau had him under surveillance.

In a three-page memo that same day, FBI assistant director Cartha (Deke) DeLoach indignantly related that the Dallas FBI agent in charge, Gordon Shanklin, had been told to get hold of Curry “and set him straight regarding these allegations” and get Curry back on television and in touch with the wire services to inform them “immediately of the falsity of his statements.”

“I asked him [Shanklin] if he knew why Chief Curry would make such stupid statements,” DeLoach reported to the FBI’s John Mohr. “Shanklin stated that Curry was usually very cooperative, a very good friend of the FBI, however, did not think very fast and obviously made the above statements without giving any thought to the repercussions.”

Curry “agreed to make the retractions” and told the media, with apologies to the FBI, according to the memo, “that the FBI was under no responsibility to report to the Dallas Police any individuals of subversive backgrounds who might be in Dallas

DeLoach added that “we called our sources at both United Press International and the Associated Press” as well as “Jerry O’Leary of the ‘Washington Evening Star’” who was in Dallas and who agreed to contact Curry immediately. DeLoach said O’Leary later called back to say he had interviewed Curry and “has prepared an article putting Curry on record as stating there was a misunderstanding.”

Curry “further told O’Leary that ‘someone last night told him the FBI had recently interviewed Oswald.’ Curry added that he now knows this to be false.”

FBI agents questioned Oswald twice at length in 1962 following his return from Russia. An FBI agent in New Orleans also interviewed Oswald in Au-

gust, 1963, following his arrest there in connection with his distribution of Fair Play for Cuba leaflets.

FBI agent James Hosty of Dallas had been looking for Oswald in early November and was informed by Ruth Paine, friend and landlady of Oswald’s wife, Marina, that he was working at the Texas School Book Depository.

Nonetheless, UPI reported on the afternoon of Nov. 23: “Police at first said the FBI, knowing of Oswald and his pro-Communist, pro-Castro background, had questioned him a week ago in Dallas. Later the police withdrew the statement as not in accordance with the facts.”

While the FBI researched its files

for derogatory information on people who may have written things critical of or embarrassing to the bureau, it also kept what it called a “Special Correspondents List,” in which it rewarded its friends, including Leslie Scott, editor of “Security Gazette,” a British publication.

Always attentive to what the national and international media was saying about the assassination and investigation, high-level bureau officials frequently exchanged memos summarizing the latest articles. A Jan. 9, 1964, memo to assistant director DeLoach summarized an article in “Security Gazette,” which described breaches in security surrounding the Kennedy trip to Dallas. The article concluded that the main reasons for the security failure were the lack of coordination between the FBI, the Secret Service and the local police, and the atmosphere of violence in the United States.

Because a search of FBI files showed the bureau to have “friendly relations” with the magazine, the bureau tried the old soft sell.

“In view of the friendly relationship that exists between the FBI and the officials of this publication,” the memo said, “it is felt that the best interest of the bureau would be served by having Legat, London, contact Mr. Scott and tactfully point out to him the splendid relationship that exists

between the FBI and the Secret Service.”

Others weren’t so lucky. Thomas Gittings Buchanan Jr. wrote a series of articles for the French newsweekly L’Express, expressing doubts that Oswald acted alone and that he may have once been an informant for the FBI or CIA. An April 8, 1964, memo noted that he was a member of the Communist Party who had been dismissed from the Washington Evening Star in 1948 when he informed his editor of his party membership.

One Buchanan article was caustically dismissed in the FBI memo with the note that it was “typical of his previous articles in L’Express” in that he deals in implications and previously published speculation on the guilt or nonguilt of Oswald, the claim that Oswald was part of a conspiracy, and the allegation that Ruby was also involved in that conspiracy.”

Another memo of the same day said Mark Lane, then raising doubts about Oswald’s guilt, “has long been a Soviet apologist, has participated prominently in the activities of various CP front groups and reportedly enjoyed CP support in an unsuccessful effort to secure nomination as a congressional candidate.”

When Staughton Lynd and Jack Minnis wrote an article entitled “Seeds of Doubt” for The New Republic, which again raised questions about the assassination, White House aide Arthur A. Schlesinger Jr. for-

warded it to the bureau. A Dec. 26, 1963, memo from W. A. Branigan to W. C. Sullivan, both high bureau officials, noted that Lynd had associated with "known Communists" and Minnis had been in touch with the Soviet embassy in 1958. Branigan recommended that this information be sent to the assistant attorney general for the Justice Department's Criminal Division.

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sion had concluded that Ruby acted alone in killing Oswald in the basement of Dallas police headquarters.

Hundreds of telephone calls—many of them far-fetched and apparently from persons with nothing more than a casual knowledge of the case—were pursued with the same degree of diligence the FBI had tracked down earlier tips on the movements of Oswald.

The volume seemed to increase after it became known that Ruby, imprisoned in the Dallas County jail, was dying of cancer.

On March 7, 1964, Deputy FBI Director Rosen reported in a memo that 3,357 interviews had been conducted into Ruby's background and the slaying of Oswald, and that there was no evidence that Ruby had conspired with anyone before the shooting.

The Warren Commission accepted the FBI's conclusion in its own report of Sept. 27, 1964, but the tips continued, and the FBI kept on amassing new volumes of documents on Ruby.

A waitress in a Chicago restaurant, for example, was the subject of a lengthy report from Chicago FBI agents because Ruby had apparently dined there once in the summer of 1963 and attempted to "get her a screen test if she desired."

In lavish detail, the report told how Ruby had suggested the waitress resembled Elizabeth Taylor, and that he had telephoned her several times from Dallas offering to help pay her way through college if only she would go to Texas to meet him.

In other instances, the FBI recorded detailed interviews with people who appeared to have been nothing more than one-time patrons at Ruby's nightclubs. In many cases, the bureau followed up the patrons' innocuous statements with background investigations of the persons interviewed.

The documents also contain allegations of curious voyeuristic sexual interests on the part of Ruby.

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