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Allen-Scott Report

Warren Secrets May Be Bared

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WASHINGTON — As the third anniversary of President Kennedy's assassination nears, a headline-making controversy is shaping up here over whether several dozen still-secret documents and working papers of the Warren Commission's investigation should be made public.

This backstage debate, under way for weeks at the highest levels of the Johnson administration, was touched off this summer by Congressional passage of the Freedom of Information Law.

Although this new federal public records statute doesn't become effective until July 4, 1967, the Justice Department is interpreting White House instructions for implementing it as a mandate to make available to the public nearly all the classified documents of the Warren Commission probe.

On Aug. 17, 1966, the attorney general's office asked the National Archives "to apply the same standards of public accessibility to the working papers and administrative reports" as to other public documents it has received from the Warren Commission.

REVELATION POSSIBLE — Initiated by Asst. Atty. Gen. Frank Wozencraft, head of the department's Office of Legal Counsel, this little-noticed move could clear the way for publishing hundreds of secret FBI, Secret Service, State Department and Warren Commission staff papers dealing with the assassination.

In most instances these documents already have been carefully combed by William Manchester, the Baltimore writer picked by Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy to do a family-authorized book on the Dallas tragedy.

Manchester, who knows a good story when he sees one, predicts that his book will cause a major sensation. Friends of the writer report this may be an understatement. They say Manchester not only deals with the actual deed but relates the assassination to a wider context of events leading up to and immediately following it.

According to these friends of Manchester, his book covers the six crucial days from Kennedy's last public appearance at a White House function before leaving Washington for his Texas tour to after the state funeral.

ISSUE UNRESOLVED — Still secret — and the center of the present debate — are several dozen government investigative reports and documents of the commission barred from the public "in the national interest."

Only a directive from President Johnson can rip the secrecy seal from these papers, including one from the Central Intelligence Agency calling it the official policy of the KGB, the Soviet Secret police, to assassinate or discredit Western leaders actively opposing Russia's foreign policy.

Other documents still under lock and key at the National Archives are CIA and FBI reports, which, if published, would reveal investigative techniques and sources of these agencies both in this country and abroad.

For example, one of the more sensational documents reputedly includes the names of several Russian sources that furnished some startling but still uncorroborated information about Oswald and his widow, Marina, during the time they lived in the Soviet Union.

PROS AND CONS — In the debate raging in the administration, Undersecretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach has taken the lead in arguing for publication of all documents on the grounds that sooner or later these papers or their contents will leak to the press. He was still attorney general when his aide called for disclosure of the still secret commission documents.

Katzenbach's position is supported by a number of officials, especially in the Justice Department, who are holdovers from the Kennedy administration. They believe publication of these papers will revive interest in the late President's death and indirectly help the political fortunes of Sen. Robert Kennedy, D-N.Y.

It is common gossip among these officials that Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy, in a profound if not wholly explicable fashion, holds President Johnson partly responsible for her husband's untimely death.

This is said by her friends to be the explanation for Mrs. Kennedy's consistent refusal to meet Johnson or even his wife socially ever since the state funeral, despite repeated friendly overtures on their part. She has the feeling, they say, that had the then vice president not been so insistent on her husband's making the trip to Texas he might be alive today.