

# Hoover sure Oswald killed JFK, pondered about help from Cuba

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WASHINGTON (AP) - Two weeks after John F. Kennedy's death, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover was convinced that Lee Harvey Oswald was the assassin but he wondered at least briefly whether Oswald had help from Cuban conspirators, according to FBI files released Wednesday.

The documents show Hoover had concluded within hours after Kennedy's death that Oswald fired the fatal bullets. But the agency later obtained letters written to Oswald from Cuba, and those messages raised the perplexing conspiracy questions which linger to this day.

Hoover later labeled one of the letters an apparent hoax.

The mountain of material offers fresh clues about Hoover's suspicions of a conspiracy, but does not reveal how he resolved them. It will take historians and researchers months or even years to evaluate this batch of FBI files and more yet to come.

Hoover, of course, was hardly alone in pondering the possibility of a Cuban connection. Oswald had spoken of his admiration for Cuban chief of state Fidel Castro and he had distributed pro-Castro leaflets in New Orleans.

Castro has denied that Cuba was involved in the assassination in any way. The Warren Commission concluded after its investigation of the case that there was no evidence of any Cuban government role in Kennedy's death.

While the documents indicated that Hoover pondered the possibility of a conspiracy, preliminary examination of the FBI files turned up nothing to disprove the Warren Commission's finding that Oswald acted alone.

The files released Wednesday show that Hoover was anxious to find out who had killed Kennedy, and portrayed him as deeply concerned about protecting the FBI's image. The documents show that Hoover went to great lengths to counteract criticism of the bureau.

The 40,001 pages of files, weighing nearly a half ton, offer a rich tapestry of the tragedy and drama rippling from the gunfire in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963. The FBI released the documents, half of its total file on the Kennedy assassination, to comply with requests under the Freedom of Information Act. The other

40,000 pages are due for release in January.

The memos include confidential reports passed among the highest officials of the government. And they include letters from ordinary citizens expressing outrage and sorrow and, in some cases, intense hatred of the Kennedy family. Some documents were censored to delete material classified secret or otherwise exempt from disclosure.

The material may be of greatest value for what it shows about the inside operations of the FBI as the bureau handled one of its most important missions ever. It is a picture that has emerged only in vague outline until now.

Two hours after Kennedy was pronounced dead in a Dallas hospital at 2 p.m. EST on Nov. 22, Hoover wrote that he had told the president's brother, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, that Oswald was the assassin and that he had been apprehended near the Texas School Book Depository where the shots were fired.

But on Dec. 12, Hoover confided to his chief aides that he was troubled by the conspiracy questions and was unsure how to resolve them. Reporting on a conversation with a caller, Hoover wrote, "I said I personally believe Oswald was the assassin; that the second aspect as to whether he was the only man gives me great concern; that we have several letters ... written to him from Cuba referring to the job he was going to do, his good marksmanship and stating when it was all over, he would be brought back to Cuba and presented to the chief."

Hoover continued, "We do not know if the chief was Castro and cannot make an investigation because we have no intelligence operation in Cuba." The reference was to Cuban chief of state Fidel Castro.

The FBI is restricted to domestic operations, and the CIA gathers intelligence abroad. It was not clear whether Hoover meant to imply that the CIA, as well as the FBI, had no operations in Cuba. During this period, the FBI maintained liaison with the CIA although Hoover later severed the relationship.

The memo was Hoover's report of his

discussion that day with Lee Rankin, the Warren Commission's general counsel, who had called to make arrangements for dealing with the FBI during the commission probe. The Warren Commission later concluded that Oswald was the assassin and that he acted alone.

Because of the letters to Oswald from Cuba and the difficulty in checking their validity, Hoover said, "I urged strongly that we not reach (the) conclusion Oswald was the only man."

One of the Cuban letters illustrates the problem. It was written in Spanish and mailed from Havana to Oswald in Dallas. It was dated 12 days before the assassination, but postmarked six days after Kennedy was killed. The fact that it was postmarked long after news of the assassination had spread worldwide suggests that it might have been the work of a headline-seeker.

On the same day he wrote of his conspiracy questions, Hoover told the State Department and the CIA he considered the letter an apparent hoax. But he asked those agencies to pass along any information they might gather about it.

The letter, as translated by FBI agents, referred to Oswald as "Friend Lee" and said: "After the affair, I am going to recommend much to the chief...I told him you could put out a candle at 50 meters...Leave nothing that could lead to your trail and when you receive my letters, destroy them as always."

"After the affair, I will send you the money and we will see each other in Miami as always." It was signed Pedro Charles.

Hoover reported that another letter mailed from Havana and addressed to Robert Kennedy "alleged that Lee Harvey Oswald assassinated President Kennedy at the direction of Pedro Charles, a Cuban agent." The letter bore the signature of Mario del Rosario Molina.

FBI analysts determined that both letters were prepared on the same typewriter, signed with the same kind of pen and ink, and mailed in the similar envelopes. Because of those circumstances, "it appears this matter represents an attempted hoax," Hoover wrote.

He asked the department and the CIA "to promptly advise this bureau in the event any information is received" about Molina.

However, other documents show that Hoover also was concerned about a speech by Castro vowing retaliation against American leaders if they continued to plot his own assassination. That speech came before Kennedy visited Dallas.

Three days after the assassination, Katzenbach wrote the FBI to express

concern about the growing rumors of conspiracy and said it was important to satisfy the public that Oswald was the assassin and that there were no conspirators still at large.

Referring to the pressure from Katzenbach, Hoover aide Courtney Evans wrote that there's "no doubt" Oswald had fired the gun.

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