

Russian files on Oswald could shed light on JFK assassination

■ An OSU historian who helped review records of the assassination hailed the documents' release.

By Karen Gullo
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Documents that Boris Yeltsin gave to President Clinton could shed light on whether Lee Harvey Oswald schemed to kill President Kennedy while he was an American defector living in the Soviet Union, an Ohio State University professor said.

Yeltsin's surprise gift Sunday to Clinton — declassified papers containing information gathered by Russian intelligence agencies about Oswald — are a "monumental breakthrough," said Kermit Hall, an OSU historian and former member of the Assassination Records Review Board.

That federal panel, which went out of business in September, was created to gather all known records regarding the assassination.

Hall said the Russian records — which the board was unable to obtain when it sent Hall and two other board members to Russia in 1996 —

could show what Oswald was thinking and doing in the years leading up to the 1963 assassination of Kennedy in Dallas.

"It's really critical," Hall said. "This could tell us if he was scheming to do anything."

He said the files could answer some lingering questions about Oswald's activities in Russia, providing fodder for or extinguishing theories about whether Oswald had contacts with U.S. intelligence officials in Russia.

"This would be extraordinarily interesting material."

Oswald, a former Marine, defected to the Soviet Union in 1959 and renounced his American citizenship. That attracted the attention of the KGB, which bugged his apartment in the Belarus capital city of Minsk, paid neighbors to inform on him and kept Oswald and his Russian wife, Marina, under constant surveillance.

The KGB amassed a six-volume file on Oswald's activities in Minsk, Hall said.

Disenchanted with his life in Russia and his menial factory job, Oswald returned to the United States in 1962, settling in Dallas with his wife and baby. Some assassination researchers concluded that

Oswald did not decide to kill Kennedy until he moved to Dallas.

The Warren Commission, which conducted the official U.S. government investigation of Kennedy's slaying, concluded that Oswald was the sole gunman.

Two days after the assassination, Dallas nightclub owner Jack Ruby shot Oswald to death as police were transferring him from the city jail to the county jail.

In Moscow, the Interfax news agency said Yeltsin gave Clinton 80 documents, which also detailed the Soviet government's reaction to Kennedy's assassination.

U.S. officials said the files, which Yeltsin gave to Clinton when they met in Germany for the Group of Eight summit, are in Russian.

It's not yet clear what they contain and whether they are the Minsk files on the Oswald surveillance or files from Moscow containing the Soviet Union's own investigation of the assassination.

"We need to translate them first," David Leavy, National Security Council spokesman, said yesterday from Slovenia.

Sandy Berger, Clinton's national security adviser, said the papers will be reviewed, "and all interesting elements will be made public."