

Russian files on JFK's killer called 'monumental breakthrough'

Review board member hopes records will shed light on Oswald's motive

BY KAREN GULLO

WASHINGTON — Long-sought KGB files on Lee Harvey Oswald just handed over to the U.S. government could provide fresh information about whether Mr. Oswald plotted to shoot President John F. Kennedy while he was a defector living in the Soviet Union, historians say.

The papers, a surprise gift from Boris Yeltsin to U.S. President Bill Clinton, are a "monumental breakthrough," said Kermit Hall, a former member of the Assassination Records Review Board, a now-defunct federal panel that tried, but failed, to obtain the documents in 1996.

The review board, which went out of business last September, was created to locate, gather and eventually release to the public all known assassination records.

Mr. Hall said the Russian records — declassified papers containing information gathered by Soviet intelligence agencies about Mr. Oswald — could show what Mr. Oswald was thinking



Lee Harvey Oswald was under constant KGB surveillance while he lived in the Soviet Union between 1959 and 1962.

and doing in the years leading up to the 1963 assassination of president Kennedy in Dallas.

"This could tell us if he was scheming to do anything," said Mr. Hall, the incoming provost at North Carolina State University.

Mr. Oswald, a former Marine, defected to the Soviet Union in 1959. That at-

tracted the attention of the KGB, which bugged his apartment in the Belarus capital city of Minsk, paid neighbours to inform on him and kept Mr. Oswald and his Russian wife, Marina, under constant surveillance.

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

Previous news accounts of Russian files on Mr. Oswald have said the documents showed that the KGB suspected Mr. Oswald was an American spy when he defected.

In 1991, ABC News reviewed Mr. Oswald's KGB file with assistance from a Soviet translator and a KGB case officer.

The network said top-ranking KGB officials believed the former Marine was not sophisticated enough to carry out the assassination alone.

ABC wasn't allowed to make copies of Mr. Oswald's file and the Soviets eventually withdrew their co-operation and refused to allow further access to it.

Disenchanted with his life in Russia and his menial factory job, Mr. Oswald returned to the United States in 1962, settling in Dallas with his wife and baby.

Some assassination researchers concluded that Mr. Oswald did not decide to kill Mr. Kennedy until he moved to Dallas.

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