



DALLAS MORNING NEWS VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

Lee Harvey Oswald, in custody after shooting, worried Soviet authorities.

Documents From Russia Included Oswald Letter

Asylum Sought in 1959; Papers Reveal Concern

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MOSCOW, June 22—The documents that President Boris Yeltsin turned over to President Clinton on the assassination of President Kennedy include the handwritten letter Lee Harvey Oswald wrote to Soviet authorities seeking asylum in 1959.

The documents also include material gathered by Soviet authorities about Oswald while he lived in Minsk and records of high-level reaction to the assassination in which Soviet officials expressed fears that Moscow would be blamed, experts said.

At the summit in Cologne, Germany, on Sunday, Yeltsin unexpectedly gave Clinton about 80 pages of material on the assassination from Russian archives.

Historians have expressed hope that the

documents would shed light on whether Oswald schemed to kill Kennedy when he lived in the Soviet Union from 1959 to 1962. The White House has promised the documents will be made public eventually. A group of researchers was rebuffed in 1996 trying to obtain the documents.

Maxim Zhukov, a reporter for the newspaper Kommersant, obtained three of the documents and published them today. They were Oswald's letter; a Foreign Ministry document discussing the Soviet reaction to the assassination; and a document describing plans for attendance at the Kennedy funeral.

Vladimir Sokolov, a Foreign Ministry

archivist familiar with the documents, said in a television interview that they include secret cables, among them the first one sent by Anatoly Dobrynin, the longtime Soviet ambassador to Washington, at the time of the assassination. Sokolov said all the materials went directly to Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev.

"The 80 pages can be divided into two parts," Zhukov said. "One about the time Oswald spent here, the other, Soviet documents about official reaction to the killing of Kennedy." He said the documents might also include transcripts of meetings with Oswald.

Oswald, a former Marine, defected to the Soviet Union in 1959 and renounced his American citizenship. Sokolov said the documents show Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko was reluctant to grant him Soviet citizenship, "giving the argument that judging by the first acquaintance with him, so to speak, he is an unbalanced man, and so on. After he got a rejection, he cut his wrists."

"To the Surprem [sic] Soviet of the USSR," Oswald wrote in the single-page handwritten letter on Oct. 16, 1959, while on a visit to Moscow. "I Lee Harvey Oswald, request that I be granted citizenship in the Soviet Union . . ."

"I want citizenship because I am a Communist and a worker. I have lived in a decadent capitalist society where the workers are slaves. I am 20 years old. I have completed three years in the United States Marine Corps. I served [sic] with the occupation forces in Japan, I have seen American military imperialism in all its forms."

Oswald said he did not want to return to "any country outside of the Soviet Union" and was willing to relinquish his American citizenship. He said he saved his money to come to Moscow but did not have enough for a return. The envelope was marked: "Moscow, Hotel Berlin, Room 320, Lee Harvey Oswald."

Oswald later lived in Minsk, the Belarussian capital, where he was under KGB surveillance. In 1962, disenchanted, he and his wife, Marina, returned to the United States and settled in Dallas. Oswald was slain by Dallas nightclub owner Jack Ruby two days after the Kennedy assassination. The Warren Commission concluded Oswald acted alone, a conclusion that has long been disputed.

A second document made public today is dated Nov. 26, 1963, four days after the assassination. Gromyko proposed issuing instructions to the Soviet press to denounce reports in the United States that Oswald was somehow linked to the Soviet Union.