Daily News
2/3/92

'JFK' sparks flood of calls to FBI about assassination

By Jack H. Taylor Jr.
Daily News Staff Writer

Los Angeles

DALLAS, Texas — The FBI is hearing all about Oliver Stone's controversial new movie "JFK."

"There have been calls which have told us we ought to open the files," said Oliver B. "Buck" Revell, special agent in charge of the Dallas office and a former FBI assistant executive director in charge of investigations.

"There have been some that have called in advancing various theories," he said. "And there have been others who have called in that were essentially very anti the movie, saying it was a communist plot to try to stir up trouble.

"Youngsters going in and seeing this are going to come out 99 percent convinced (there was a conspiracy)," Revell said. "And those who were doubters to start with will have their doubts confirmed."

Nearly three decades after the assassination of President Kennedy, the FBI still keeps the investigation open and occasionally follows up a new lead.

Stone's $40 million, three-hour epic film, which mixes fact with fiction, has given new impetus to the debate over who killed the president — lone gunman Lee Harvey Oswald or conspiratorial government figures.

With interest in conspiracy theories high again because of "JFK," Dallas police last week opened thousands of pages of

See KENNEDY / Pg. 11

KENNEDY / From Page 1

closed files on the assassination. Pressure is mounting for release of congressional and FBI files that originally were sealed until 2029 — enough documents to fill two or three 9-by-12-foot rooms, wall to wall, floor to ceiling, officials say.

"There will be a lot of information in those files that is essentially non-germane," Revell said. "But it will be titillating. It will be sometimes sensational, not from its credibility, but for the people it involves. And there will be reputations tarnished and damaged because of some of this."

FBI officials say the last time they pursued any substantive lead was in the summer of 1989 when an aging organized crime boss was quizzed at length following repeated reports from government informants inside two federal prisons that he had acknowledged complicity in the assassination.

But 81-year-old Carlos Marcello of New Orleans flatly denied any involvement when confronted by FBI agents from Dallas, officials said.

Marcello's own associates say he suffers from Alzheimer's disease and cannot remember enough about the assassination to respond to questions.

Marcello was released from prison in October 1989, after serving six years of a 10-year sentence for attempting to bribe a Los Angeles judge.

Initially, Marcello was imprisoned at the Federal Correctional Institution in Texarkana, Texas. After a series of strokes, he was transferred to the Bureau of Prison's medical facility in Rochester, Minn., where he was questioned by FBI agents from Dallas in July 1989.

The FBI had received an increasing number of reports from informants inside both prisons that Marcello had admitted complicity in the Nov. 22, 1963, assassination in mumblings during sleep and in conversations with other inmates.

Revell and Bobby R. Gilliam, who was special agent in charge of the FBI's Dallas Division at the time of the inquiry, said agents questioned Marcello at the federal prison hospital in Minnesota in 1989.

FBI agent Tase Bailey, the Dallas agent assigned to question Marcello, said Marcello made no admissions and provided nothing substantive enough to pursue further. In effect, the FBI was mired where it had been a decade earlier when pursuing the same trail after the House Select Committee on Assassinations concluded that Oswald did not act alone and there might have been organized crime involvement.

Robert G. Blakey and Richard N. Billings, who were chief counsel and editorial director to the House committee, later elaborated on their view that Kennedy was killed by the Mafia in their 1981 book, "The Plot to Kill the President." John F. Davis also expounded on the mob-conspiracy theory in his 1988 book, "Mafia Kingfish: Carlos Marcello & the Assassination of John F. Kennedy."

"We would have loved to pin the Kennedy assassination on the mob," Revell said during a recent interview. "That would have fit right in with the Bureau interest in wiping out the mob . . .

"But the fact of it is there was never a scintilla of credible evidence to connect the mob to Lee Harvey Oswald's actions.

The FBI's actions so many years after the assassination illustrate that the FBI still will follow leads on the case, however remote, because of the continuing controversy over the Warren Commission's conclusion that the assassination was the work of a lone gunman.

Revell said the FBI keeps the case open "because of the nature of the crime, the trauma to the nation."

"Officially, there was a closure in '88, but it wasn't like a final closing-type memo," said Farris L. Rookstool III, an investigative analyst for the FBI in Dallas who is a Kennedy assassination specialist.

"I would say a lot of people find a lot of fascination with Mafia figures or people that have been linked to organized crime, and I think the fact to actually elicit a conversation or a confession out of someone, despite what their state of health is, might be something that might be worthwhile," Rookstool said.

"I understand that he (Marcello) had been making some ramblings," Rookstool said. "The only reason someone such as himself would merit an interview as opposed to some person, some indigent, off the street is strictly because his past animosities toward the Kennedys are known."

Marcello could not be reached.

Dorothy Ott, his longtime personal secretary, said she and Marcello family members were dismayed at the informant reports that spurred the FBI to question Marcello. She described those reports as "a crock" and contended that the FBI agents who flew to Minnesota didn't know he was in failing health, a contention the FBI disputes.

"(He) looks good (but) he doesn't remember any of us," she said.

Udo "Woody" Specht, a retired FBI agent who was once the Kennedy assassination case agent in Dallas, said agents questioned Marcello because they concluded it was odd for him to say anything about the assassination so many years afterward, even in his sleep, and they frankly "hoped for a confession."

The FBI has maintained secrecy on its recent attention to Marcello because of apprehension that disclosure would fuel conspiracy theorists who long have believed there was an organized crime connection with the assassination.

Based on an almost endless chain of circumstantial evidence and guilt-by-association links to Oswald and to his assassin, Dallas nightclub owner Jack Ruby, proponents of the theory that organized crime was involved in the assassination long have pointed the finger at Marcello.

Although the Warren Commission, the FBI and the CIA said they were unable to tie Oswald to organized crime, the House Select Committee on Assassinations report in 1979 said elements of organized crime "probably" conspired to have Kennedy murdered.

The House committee drew its conclusions from circumstantial links that Oswald had numerous associations with Marcello; that Oswald's uncle, Charles Murret, was a minor gambling figure in Marcello's New Orleans crime family; that David Ferrie, a Marcello associate, had been a Civil Air Patrol instructor of Oswald's; and that Oswald's mother was acquainted with several men associated with Marcello lieutenants.

The House committee's conspir-

acy theory turned largely on the analysis of the Dallas police tape recording of sounds picked up by a motorcycle officer's radio. The panel concluded it was highly probable two gunmen fired at Kennedy, but re-examination of the recording by both the FBI and National Academy of Sciences later discounted the finding.

"The fact is that the overwhelming forensic evidence and all of the supporting evidence points to Oswald as the sole assassin and there is no credible evidence that anyone else is involved," Revell said.

"Now what we have also said is there is no credible evidence that anyone else was involved. We have not said no one else was involved. We simply have not seen any credible evidence of anyone besides Oswald being involved in the assassination. So, therefore, we have not found a conspiracy."

Rookstool added: "You can never really prove that there wasn't a conspiracy. All you can prove is that we have no evidence for a conspiracy."