

Hoover Kept Fuming by Critics

By MARGARET GENTRY

WASHINGTON (AP) — In the years following John F. Kennedy's assassination, J. Edgar Hoover fumed over the mounting criticism of the FBI investigation of the case but decided to ignore most of the critics, at least publicly.

In private, he kept meticulous records on the critics' personal lives as well as their public comments about the bureau.

The details emerged from 58,754 pages of FBI files that the bureau made public Wednesday to comply with requests under the Freedom of Information Act.

The half-ton of documents, together with 40,001 pages released in December, comprise virtually all of the bureau's investigative files on the murder of the president Nov. 22, 1963, in Dallas.

This batch of files begins in mid-1964. Scores of letters and memos reflect the cool but polite relationship between the FBI and the Warren Commission as the commission launched its probe of the case.

Later that year, the commission was to report its conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald killed Kennedy and that he acted alone. Hoover had arrived at the same belief months earlier.

However, a number of writers and researchers were attracting considerable public attention with their theories that Oswald and the man who shot him to death in the Dallas police station, nightclub owner Jack Ruby, were part of some dark conspiracy of varying origins.

Nothing was found in the first batch of FBI files to disprove the Warren Commission's conclusion. The initial scrutiny of the second batch of files also yielded no startling new information.

What the material does show is the

countless hours FBI men spent trying to document claims made by such critics as Mark Lane, Harold Weisberg, Edward J. Epstein and Dick Gregory in speeches, books and broadcast interviews.

An FBI official prepared a line-by-line analysis of a William Manchester article to be published in Life magazine. The bureau obtained tapes and transcripts of radio and television shows featuring the critics.

Such reports often set off debates within the FBI about how the bureau should respond. Should Hoover ignore the criticism or should he answer it? One published report criticized Hoover for failing to express condolences to the Kennedy family. The FBI issued a public statement saying that was false, and a later bureau memo called the public statement a successful strategy.

Disturbed about Gregory's attacks in 1964, one FBI official wrote to Hoover, "We have long suspected that Gregory is demented. Nevertheless, the comments he has made are utterly ridiculous and we should confront him and tell him in no uncertain terms that he better stop putting out such gutter talk." Hoover concluded that a confrontation would serve no purpose and vetoed the proposal.

Two years later, author Richard J. Whalen approached FBI officials to solicit cooperation in writing a magazine article answering critics of the Warren Commission.

William C. Sullivan, one of Hoover's top advisers, supported Whalen, calling him "reliable and trustworthy and has an extremely high opinion of the bureau."

"It appears that it would be in the best interests of this bureau to cooperate with Mr. Whalen in his efforts to bring the complete truth before the American people," Sullivan wrote. "Our investigation was sound, we have absolutely nothing to hide, and no critic has brought even one scintilla of evi-

dence that would disprove our findings."

In the margins of the memo, Hoover scrawled, "Absolutely no. Again, an emphatic no. I am absolutely opposed."

Whatever the bureau's public response, there was no doubt about where the critics ranked with Hoover and other FBI officials in private. Memos refer to the "infamous Mark Lane, reportedly a communist sympathizer." Weisberg and Gregory are described in disdainful language.

The chairman of the Warren Com-

mission, Chief Justice Earl Warren, was not spared Hoover's sharp tongue. In a 1964 memo, Hoover noted that he had told commission counsel J. Lee Rankin "that I had not appreciated what I had interpreted as carping criticism of the chief justice when he referred to the bureau's report originally submitted to the commission as being a 'skeleton' report."

A notation on an FBI memorandum dated Nov. 29, 1963, reports the initial refusal of Warren to head the commission. It says simply that Deputy Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach "advised the chief justice had declined to head the commission."

Although the documents don't reflect

it, before the day was out, President Lyndon B. Johnson had persuaded Warren to head the commission. Warren, who had been reluctant to take part in activities off the bench, told the story himself years ago.

Manchester's book quotes Warren as saying he accepted after Johnson told him his service was vital lest there be wild rumors and foreign repercussions that could even lead to war.

Another version of that story has it that Johnson finally overcame Warren's reluctance by telling him that he'd already announced the appointment of the chief justice.

The FBI files also show that the bureau and the Justice Department two

years ago investigated to determine whether any FBI officials should be prosecuted for destroying assassination-related documents.

The probe centered on the destruction of a note that Oswald left with the Dallas FBI office several days before the assassination. Testimony before a House committee two years ago indicated that Oswald threatened the FBI in the note if it didn't stop questioning his wife. Other testimony described the note's destruction after Oswald was charged with Kennedy's murder.

There was no indication what the investigation concluded. However, no FBI official has been prosecuted for the incident.
