

I have received your letter of December 9th and can concern prompting your communication.

In response to your request about watching Lee Harvey day of the assassination of President Kennedy, I would Federal investigative agency, it is our obligation



Lee Harvey Oswald in Dallas on Nov. 23, 1963, telling reporters he did not kill Kennedy

The FBI Story on J.F.K.'s Death

Improbable leads, new insights and an old verdict vindicated

Three days after John F. Kennedy was shot in Dallas, the Justice Department ordered the FBI to write a comprehensive report that would "settle the dust" of controversy and suspicion surrounding the assassination. In 14 years the bureau compiled more than 80,000 pages of documentation. Half of that massive archive was released to the public last week following freedom-of-information lawsuits (see following story); the other half will come out next month. While the avalanche of paper will not sweep away all the doubts, mysteries and conspiracy theories, it leaves very much intact the verdict reached by the Warren Commission in 1964: Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, murdered Kennedy.

The FBI's investigation was thorough in the extreme. No clue was too unpromising or too bizarre to pursue. Agents scoured Manhattan's 43rd Street for a fortuneteller reported to have precisely predicted the time of the President's death by reading tea leaves. Two FBI men sat patiently at the bedside of a witness who professed to know the names of six people involved in the killing, but was too drunk to stand. Investigators listened to a woman who was certain that her husband's family had something to do with the slaying. Why? Because they were "mean" people. Agents checked out accusations that Lyndon Johnson and George Wallace were behind the mur-

der. A Logan, Utah, man got a respectful hearing for his claim that Kennedy was alive and the assassination a hoax to trap the Mafia. So did dozens of men and women who had "seen" Oswald and his slayer, Jack Ruby, together.

People thought to have sat next to Oswald on a bus were tracked down all over the world. Agents heard out a woman who was sure that someone had put

JONES told him that ... in the opinion of JONES this was upper club.

RUBY had expressed gratitude id that he was pl... to go to ster out and a... would JONES RUBY was all JONES had



Jack Ruby at a Dallas hearing, January 1964

The commission ignored his Mob ties.

glass crystals and cleanser in her sitz baths after she had reported seeing Oswald and Ruby together in Michigan (neither was ever in the state). The bureau spent weeks trying to trace a bad check Oswald was supposed to have cashed in a bar in Pflugerville, Texas, and months tracking the origins of graffiti discovered in a boxcar reading LEE OSWALD—FUTURE MAN OF DESTINY, APRIL 4, 1963 (it turned out a railway workman had scribbled the words as a post-assassination prank).

The files released last week, which weigh 60 lbs. and cost \$4,000.10 per set, also reveal—at times unwittingly—an FBI afflicted with paranoia, obsessed with counterespionage, and out of the control of the Justice Department. Within 48 hours of the assassination, J. Edgar Hoover sanctioned the refusal of his underlings to follow an order from his superior, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy. "Properly handled," commented Hoover after a bureau official had dismissed a Kennedy request as "unnecessary and undesirable." The FBI spied on the Texas judge who presided over the Jack Ruby trial, on the director of Central Intelligence and on the Warren Commission itself. The bureau engaged a friendly Republican Congressman and commission member to keep it posted on the closed-door sessions. His name—Gerald Ford. The FBI even lent Ford an agent's lockable briefcase so he could take secret documents on a skiing vacation.

Hoover opposed the establishment of the Warren Commission, presumably because he thought the FBI should handle the case. At one point he dispatched aides to the Washington Post to try to stop that paper from publishing an editorial supporting such a blue-ribbon panel. The mission was unsuccessful. He thought many requests made by the commission were foolish (one he labeled "poppycock"). But he dispatched agents to fulfill them. Hoover's personality, including his most odious and eccentric characteristics, comes through vividly in the files. He told aides that President Johnson wanted all leads pursued vigorously "without complete regard for technicalities," and he had a fetish about not letting any bureau reports go to the commission marred by spelling or grammatical errors.

The bureau's investigation shed light on a number of the murkier aspects of the crime. After exploring the mountains of transcripts, memoranda and telex messages, TIME Correspondent Hays Gorey sent this summary of the 40,001 pages of FBI documents:

On the Mafia. The files make clear that the Warren Commission failed abysmally to pursue FBI leads linking Oswald's own assassin, Jack Ruby, to the Mob. Ruby had ties to mobsters in Chicago, New York, Los Angeles and Dallas, and even,

Nation

as a boy, to the infamous Al Capone. Nor did the commission seem impressed that Ruby, twelve days before he shot Oswald, asked a notorious Teamster racketeer from Chicago, Barney Baker, to "straighten out" a troublesome union dispute at Ruby's Dallas night club. (The commission might have been more interested, of course, had the FBI disclosed that the CIA had recruited Chicago gangsters to kill Cuban Premier Fidel Castro.) There is no evidence that organized crime had anything to do with the Kennedy murder, but the commission's failure to investigate the possibility left a fertile field in which conspiracy theories have flourished.

On the Cuban Connection. When CIA attempts to kill Castro became known in 1975, the news touched off speculation that Cubans had engineered Kennedy's murder in retaliation. The files reveal that this possibility had occurred to Hoover and caused him to anguish in private over his public declarations that Oswald had acted alone. But the Director seemed reassured when two letters linking Oswald to a Cuban agent turned out to have been hoaxes. Both letters—one addressed to Oswald but mailed after the assassination, the other sent to the Attorney General—indicated that a Pedro or Peter Charles of Havana had paid Oswald \$7,000 to carry out an unidentified mission that involved "accurate shooting." The FBI discovered that both letters had been written on the same typewriter. Nonetheless, Hoover and other Bureau officials continued to worry about Ruby's own Cuban background. Ruby had visited Havana in both the pre- and post-Castro periods, and there were persistent rumors that he had run guns to Cuba in the late 1950s. An Akron woman gave testimony—later discounted—that after Oswald was slain she heard two Cuban men say: "We have to do away with Ruby because he fouled things up." However, the FBI never turned up proof of any links between Castro's government and either Oswald or Ruby.

On the CIA. So intense and bitter was the feuding between the FBI and the CIA that some bureau officials even toyed with the theory that the CIA was responsible for Kennedy's murder. An FBI memorandum stated that the ammunition Oswald used was obtainable only from the U.S. Marine Corps and that perhaps the CIA had managed to get it to Oswald. Subsequent investigation disclosed that the ammunition was readily available from several U.S. mail order houses.

After CIA Director John McCone made a statement critical of the FBI, a top Hoover aide, D.J. Brennan Jr., wrote his superiors that McCone "has attacked the bureau in a vicious and underhanded manner characterized with sheer dishon-

...idence that apparently Chief Justice Warren was
...sily used Pearson from time to time to get
...I mentioned Pearson's articles of December 14
...well knew 98% of the facts in these articles

...me that several members had been somewhat
...FBI's report had been in narrative form rather
...ual manner. I told him this, of course, was
...n. He then mentioned Chief Justice Warren
...ing the reports which back up those in
...Comr...very specific in...length



Chief Justice Earl Warren and FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover
No clue was too unpromising or too bizarre to pursue.

esty." The memo added: "Over the years, we have had numerous conflicts with all CIA directors." In retaliation, Brennan continued, the FBI should inform McCone it knew he had dispensed false information to Congressman Ford—that Oswald had received \$6,500 in Mexico to slay Kennedy—and that McCone had leaked the same story to Columnist Drew Pearson. The none-too-subtle bit of blackmail was intended to instill in McCone "a profound respect for our capabilities to be informed." The FBI brass endorsed the pro-

posal enthusiastically: eight sets of initials, including Hoover's "H," festoon the Brennan memo.

On Kennedy. The files quote Kenneth O'Donnell, a top White House aide, as absolving the Secret Service of any responsibility. "The choice was security or politics, and we chose politics," said O'Donnell, meaning the presidential party decided to remove the bullet-proof bubble so the crowds could see Kennedy during the motorcade. The files also suggest Kennedy had a cavalier attitude toward his own safety and was annoyed by Secret Service efforts to protect him. Agents recalled his habit of jumping behind the wheel of a car at Hyannis Port and zooming off; he was a poor driver and tended to ignore traffic signals. The report also notes that then Texas Governor John Connally, who was wounded by the bullet that killed Kennedy, had serious misgivings about whether Kennedy should come to Texas at all. He was concerned about right-wing hostility toward the President.

On Oswald. FBI agents had no doubt Oswald could have fired three accurate shots in five seconds, a point still disputed by some critics of the Warren Commission. The files include a Teletype message indicating that Oswald might well have been murdered even if there had been no Jack Ruby. William H. Darnall, a Huntington, W. Va., attorney, told agents he went to Dallas "to avenge the assassination of the President—and I would do it again." Oswald's Russian-born wife Marina once offered this apt assessment of her misfit husband—in her broken English: "Me like America. Lee no like Russia. Lee no like America. Lee like the moon."

Bureaucracy's Great Paper Chase

Freedom has become license under the Information Act

The hottest growth industry in Washington these days is generated by the Freedom of Information Act. It soaks up millions of dollars, employs hundreds of civil servants, and is driving many of them to utter distraction. The law has brought out of "secret" drawers many illuminating facts about the Government and its manipulations, but it has also invited misuse, abuse, overuse and a lot of silliness in the name of the public's right to know.

The 30-ft. stack of documents released last week by the FBI on the Kennedy assassination is dramatic testimony to the effort needed to comply with requests under the act. Some 280 FBI agents were called in from the field this summer for "Operation Onslaught," as the project was called. In addition, 379 people are em-

ployed full time at FBI headquarters researching 16,000 similar appeals a year. Estimated cost to this one Government agency in 1977: \$9 million.

At the CIA, 65 staffers work full time on Freedom of Information cases, at a cost of \$2 million a year. In 1976 the Defense Department had 90 employees and \$4.7 million tied up fielding more than 40,000 applications.

Though a version of the law has been on the books for eleven years, Watergate and revelations of FBI and CIA misconduct led to a radical change in its use. Over Gerald Ford's veto, Congress in 1974 amended the law, which now sets deadlines for responding, bans excessive copying fees for documents, and provides that

*The FBI charges 10¢ per page; other agencies' charges vary.