

Hoover opposed creating JFK panel, FBI data say

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Washington—J. Edgar Hoover, confident he had his man but suspicious of a conspiracy in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, tried to block creation of a presidential commission to probe Lee Harvey Oswald's crime and motives.

Files released yesterday by the Federal Bureau of Investigation also show that Hoover opposed a suggestion by President Lyndon B. Johnson that an early statement be issued identifying Oswald as a lone killer without foreign or subversive support.

"I said I personally believe Oswald was the assassin," Hoover, the late director of the bureau, later reported in a memo on his meeting with Johnson. He added: "The second aspect, as to whether he was the only man, gives me great concern."

Hoover was against the establishment of a presidential commission, partly be-

cause he clearly wanted to keep control of the investigation, and also out of concern it would "muddy the waters" and create further confusion and hysteria in the nation.

He told top associates that Johnson was also "very much disturbed" at the idea. Three days later, however, Johnson ordered the Warren Commission created to begin its own investigation, which ended with criticism of certain aspects of the FBI's performance.

Hoover's actions and responses in the aftermath of the November 22, 1963, assassination in Dallas, are detailed in 40,001 pages of FBI files, which were released under the Freedom of Information Act yesterday.

The records cover the first six months following the assassination. Much of the See KENNEDY, A7, Col. 1

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information involving tips and threats was not corroborated. An additional 40,000 pages detailing subsequent developments will be released next month.

Initial skimming of the floor-to-ceiling stack of papers, weighing more than 300 pounds, revealed no evidence of any conflict with the Warren Commission's basic finding that Oswald acted alone.

But Hoover's instructions, the investigators' reports and hundreds of letters from the public captured the doubts, confusion and even paranoia that the country's fourth presidential assassination created.

So assiduous was the Federal Bureau of Investigation's inquiry that agents even examined the political motives of an Air Force sergeant in Texas who laughed when he heard of Kennedy's death because he truly thought it was a joke, and followed up a Chicago bus-rider's tip that a fellow passenger was clearly the assassin because he had a scab on his nose that could have been caused by a blow from a telescopic sight when the rifle was fired.

Among other details revealed by the reports were:

- That Hoover, who died in 1972, withheld from the Warren Commission a series of provocative letters reportedly written to Oswald from Cuba because he was unable to confirm their validity and did not want to create possibly false alarm.

- In a memo, Hoover wrote: "We have several letters, not in the report [to the Warren Commission] because we were not able to prove it, written to him [Oswald] from Cuba referring to the job he was going to do, his good marksmanship and stating that when it was all over he would be brought back to Cuba and presented to the Chief. We do not know if the Chief was Fidel Castro and cannot make an investigation because we have no intelligence operation in Cuba."

- That the Federal Bureau of Investigation knew Oswald, on whom there was a security file, was in Dallas and was working at the Texas School Book Depository 11 days before the murder, but did not know his home address.

- That Hoover was particularly anxious to check into reports that Oswald had been seen in Mexico City, where he was reportedly trying to arrange travel visas to Cuba and Mexico.

- This concern was based on the fear that, unless the FBI could "explode or . . . prove" the reports, the U.S. ambassador to Mexico might one day write and "show what he notified this government of and that no action was taken."

- That the bureau was unable to establish any link between Oswald and Jack Ruby, the nightclub owner who shot him while he was being transferred to prison

two days after the assassination. The FBI checked, without success, reported sightings of the two in bars, restaurants and clubs, and the suggestion that they had a homosexual relationship.

- That the FBI uncovered a tenuous Watergate link, with the revelation that Frank Anthony Sturgis, one of the original burglars at the Democratic National Party headquarters, reportedly connected Oswald with the Cuban government G-2 intelligence ring.

- Mr. Sturgis, using the name Frank Florini, gave an interview to the *Sun Sentinel* in Palm Beach, Fla., in which he reportedly said that Oswald had telephone conversations with Mr. Castro's G-2 during November, 1962.

- He was also quoted as saying Oswald had Cuban connections in Miami, New Orleans, and in Mexico. Mr. Sturgis, contacted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, said his comments were "guesses, speculation and rumor" based on press reports, and claimed he had been misquoted.

- Mr. Sturgis was arrested last October 31 in New York and charged with harassing a woman who claimed they both were assigned to assassinate Kennedy. The charges were later dismissed.

- That Hoover was distressed by press coverage of the investigation, and tried to trace news leaks and suppress at least one editorial in the *Washington Post* that favored the creation of a presidential commission.

- On one news story he scribbled, "I thought no one knew this outside of the F.B.I. Certainly someone is doing too much talking."

- That the Federal Bureau of Investigation went to extraordinary lengths to trace the origins of the strap from Oswald's rifle, contacting not only gun manufacturers but guitar companies and even binocular firms.

- Hoover, who broke the news of the shooting to the president's brother, Robert Kennedy, the attorney general, later the same day told the attorney general that Oswald, who had lived in the Soviet Union and was married to a Russian, "is not a Communist but has Communist leanings." Subsequently Hoover put Oswald in "the nut" category.

- That Oswald, and his wife, Marina, had approached the Soviet Embassy in Washington several times during 1963, the last time 13 days before the assassination, about returning to the Soviet Union.

- That Oswald, under initial and unrecorded questioning by the Dallas police, denied being the assassin or even owning a rifle. He also questioned the validity of a photograph that showed him holding a rifle and two political sheets. Conspiracy theorists have long suggested the photo was a mock-up with Oswald's head superimposed on someone else's body.

But despite all the snippets to be gleaned from the unindexed and unnumbered pages, the main interest on first reading focused on the reaction of Hoover.

His concern over a conspiracy emerged quickly. A memo written just one hour and 51 minutes after the 12.30 P.M. (CST) shooting reveals that he had already discussed the subject with James J. Rowley, then the head of the Secret Service.

"Mr. Rowley stated he was also thinking of subversive elements—Mexico, Cuba. I then mentioned the [Ku Klux] Klan element."

In his first directive after the assassination Hoover ordered all FBI agents to "immediately contact all informants, security, racial and criminal, as well as other sources for information bearing on the assassination of President Kennedy. All offices immediately establish whereabouts of bombing suspects, known Klan and hate group members, known racial extremists."

Less than four hours after the killing, and the arrest of Oswald, Hoover reported: "I thought very probably we had in custody the man who killed the President in Dallas, but this had not definitely been established."

In a staff memo, dated December 12, 1963, Hoover's lingering doubts over a conspiracy were again voiced. He said he "flatly disagreed" with a proposal from President Johnson to issue an interim report identifying Oswald as a lone killer.

Just when Hoover became convinced that there was no conspiracy was not clear from the documents studied yesterday. But his determination to leave no stone unturned in the FBI investigation was clearly established.

The files show that agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation spent countless hours checking scores of calls.

A woman in Akron, Ohio, told the FBI that both Ruby and Oswald had been in her bar and that both had asked her to dance. She danced with Ruby twice but not with Oswald. Agents checked out the story and discovered it to be unfounded.

They also interrogated for days a woman guilty of a tasteless joke.

The woman, who argued with her uncle's pro-Kennedy views, sent him a telegram soon after the President's murder: "Thank God. You did it."

Despite the huge volume of mail and tips the bureau got, agents found time to bring to Hoover's personal attention any tips they thought he should be aware of.

A New York city couple, for example, sent Hoover a letter berating him for letting the assassination happen.

"Where were you?" they asked.

Hoover sent a personal reply: "The protection of the President . . . is the responsibility of the Secret Service."