

JFK Killing: FBI Files Raise Questions, Give No Answers

LONG-SECRET RECORDS, now disclosed, are reviving old controversies about the possibility that there was a conspiracy in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

The records, made public by the Federal Bureau of Investigation on December 7, did not solve the mysteries that still intrigue many Americans about the shooting at Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963.

There was nothing in the 40,001 pages of internal FBI memos to challenge the official finding that Kennedy was shot by Lee Harvey Oswald. But they did show that the late FBI Director, J. Edgar Hoover, was troubled by doubt as to whether Oswald acted alone.

One reason for the doubt was revealed by a Hoover memo of Dec. 12, 1963, that said: "We [the FBI] have several letters ... written to him [Oswald] from Cuba referring to the job he was going to do, his good marksmanship, and stating when it was all over he would be brought back to Cuba and presented to the chief."

Hoover was so skeptical about the authenticity of the letters, however, that he did not mention them in a report he was preparing for the commission headed by then Chief Justice Earl Warren that investigated the killing.

One ground for suspicion was that one letter—which mentioned money payments to Oswald—was mailed after the Kennedy assassination, though dated earlier.

But the existence of the letters, the FBI chief said, "was the reason I urged strongly that we not reach the conclusion that Oswald was the only man" involved in the shooting.

Another suggestion of Cuban involvement came from a report that the Spanish intelligence service had established a link between Castro, Oswald and the Kennedy killing.

Apparently, Hoover later abandoned his doubt as to whether Oswald acted alone. The records do not show why he changed his mind. But he testified before the Warren Commission in May, 1964, that he could not find "any scintilla of evidence showing

any foreign conspiracy or any domestic conspiracy." The Commission, in its final report, agreed with Hoover.

The FBI files suggest there was pressure from the Justice Department for a quick announcement that there were no conspirators. Some advocates of the conspiracy theory contend high officials were fearful that investigations might disclose that the Central Intelligence Agency had been attempting to kill Castro. Their theory is that Castro engineered the Kennedy killing in revenge for the plots on his own life.

The Warren Commission was not told about the CIA plots against Castro. They did not become public knowledge until they were disclosed by a Senate investigating committee in November, 1975.

Part of the argument of those who charge conspiracy is that there was a second gunman firing at Kennedy. Some contend Oswald could not have fired three shots as rapidly as those aimed at the Kennedy car. Hoover, the files show, rejected this theory. He said FBI tests proved Oswald's gun could have been fired even more rapidly.

The files show that the FBI checked out several reports of a connection between Oswald and Jack Ruby, the Dallas night-club operator who shot Oswald to death two days after Kennedy died. Ear-

ly in the investigation, Hoover said that "while I think there was no connection," he was not "100 per cent sure on that." In his testimony the following May, however, he said positively that "we found no association between Oswald and Ruby." Until his death of cancer in 1965, Ruby denied even knowing Oswald.

Although the FBI records shed little new light on the assassination—or the motives behind it—they do contain some interesting, sometimes amusing, details of how the Bureau investigated the case. Agents spent thousands of man-hours meticulously checking out hundreds of leads and tips, no matter how preposterous they might seem.

Within hours of Oswald's arrest, the FBI was able to provide a detailed history of his life. A former Marine, he went to the Soviet Union in 1959, lived there nearly three years, married a Russian girl and then brought her back to the U.S. in 1962.

According to the FBI records, Hoover issued handwritten orders to muzzle an FBI agent who had been quoted as saying the agency knew in advance that Oswald was capable of an assassination. Hoover insisted that the FBI did not view him as a potential killer.

Warning calls. One document revealed that both the FBI and the Dallas sheriff's office had received phone calls at 8:30 a.m. on Nov. 24, 1963, warning that Oswald would be killed. Oswald was killed hours later. But the killer, Ruby, insisted he had not planned the shooting in advance.

Several documents reflected the FBI's feud with the CIA that later became so bitter that Hoover refused to co-operate with the spy agency.

The nearly half-ton of FBI records were made public in response to requests under the Freedom of Information Act, which has opened many Government files to public scrutiny. Many of the FBI documents were heavily censored—to protect names of innocent individuals or information classified as secret for security reasons.

Despite the numerous nuggets of intriguing information the files contained, they did not change the facts as most Americans have known them for years about that historic day in Dallas.

However, a congressional committee is now investigating questions raised about the Warren Commission verdict. Another 40,000 pages of FBI records on its investigation are to be made public, probably next month.

And the FBI has never closed its books on the case. As J. Edgar Hoover told the Warren Commission in 1964: "As far as the FBI is concerned, the case will be continued in an open classification for all time."

News reporters comb through 40,001 pages of FBI files on the investigation of President Kennedy's assassination.



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