

one in the delicate business of picking an FBI chief. "I don't think there's anybody who has an inside track," admitted one key Justice aide. Attorney General Griffin Bell himself said he would put off the search for at least two weeks, planning "to let the dust settle and rethink the selection process."

The loss of Johnson was a bitter disappointment to Bell, and another blow to the FBI. The bureau is still rattled by the indictment of agent John Kearney and the ongoing grand-jury investigation of higher-ups for ordering the opening of mail, break-ins and wiretaps against radicals in the early 1970s. Even Bell, who made the decision to indict Kearney in April, now seems uncomfortable with it. Bell's original strategy was to try Kearney first, then bring other indictments.

Department was "foolish" to indict Kearney. Andrew Decker, the head of the records-management division, has accused some Justice officials of "engaging in a vendetta" against the FBI. Another agent, David Ryan, has filed a suit in Federal court that charges the Justice Department with undertaking "unethical

shown Bell's written authorization—but Bell could not guarantee the agent's second request.

The threat of lawsuits worries many agents. Though Kearney is the only agent who has ever been indicted on criminal charges, 224 civil lawsuits have been filed against the bureau or individual agents. According to FBI deputy associate director James Adams, the current law has a Catch-22 hook. Government lawyers will defend him—unless he argues that he was only carrying out official duties. Then the government is locked in a conflict-of-interest situation. It will pay for the agent to retain outside counsel, but either way, he is personally

liable for damages. Bell is in a world of pain. He would make out "under" contends that threat of criminal keep rogue a body agrees, must have in rate and to carry out our

Secret: Bec domestic intellemas will the only new encountered FBI files under Act, man harder to co-identities w for example, pages of doc vestigation a nation (box), due out nex confidential: one agent are crippled Just how e side, Kelley criticism in agents to un claim up. B field officers the first ten out of 8,300 If there is bureau's p decisive let now out of are hoping outstanding courage ne and integri

OPENING THE JFK FILE

Never satisfied with the official explanation of the assassination of John F. Kennedy, those with a well-honed sense of conspiracy have sifted the available evidence for years. This week, assassination buffs will have a new muller to mine when the FBI releases the first half of its 80,000-page file on the death of Kennedy.

NEWSWEEK has examined 600 pages in the file and nothing in them upsets the basic finding of the Warren Commission—that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone in killing Kennedy. What is revealed—in memos, cables and reports—is largely favorable to the FBI. The new material indicates that the FBI checked out every lead, regardless of how improbable it seemed. And contrary to popular criticism, the documents also suggest that the late J. Edgar Hoover did not casually dismiss the possibility of a conspiracy.

But the new information does create some new loose ends. According to the documents, FBI agents traced the bullets that killed Kennedy—6.5 mm Mannlicher-Garcano shells—to the Western Cartridge Corp. of East Alton, Ill. They found that the company had manufactured 4 million rounds of that

same type of ammunition for the Marine Corps in 1964. In a memo dated Dec. 2, 1963, one agent wrote: "The interesting thing about this order is that it is for ammunition which does not fit and cannot be fired in any of the USMC weapons. This gives rise to the obvious speculation that it is a contract for ammunition placed by CIA with Western under a USMC cover for concealment purposes."

Bullets: The papers do not resolve the agent's speculation. The most sinister possibility is that Oswald was given the ammunition by the CIA. But there are two less sinister possibilities: (1) the bullets were destined for a covert CIA operation overseas, but ended up in the U.S. where Oswald purchased them, or (2) the bullets came from a different batch of ammunition manufactured in another year. At any rate, the CIA denied last week that it ever placed such a contract.

Other documents delve into the question of whether Oswald was part of a conspiracy with a man named Alec Hidell. According to all official accounts there was no such man; Oswald only used the name to purchase the rifle that killed Kennedy from a mail-



Photo: Detroit Free Press

Oswald, Mannlicher: More questions

order house in Chicago. This version is supported by the fact that Oswald carried a draft card bearing Hidell's name. Until now, it has been widely accepted that Dallas authorities waited 24 hours to reveal the existence of Oswald's fake Hidell draft card. To some, the delay suggested that the authorities planted the card on Oswald to link him to the assassin's rifle—and thus cover up the existence of Hidell. But the new documents reveal that only minutes after Oswald was confined to the Dallas police headquarters, the San Antonio bureau of the FBI got an "urgent" message from a local Army intelligence officer named Lt. Col. Robert E. Jones.

It said that "Oswald was carrying a selective service card having the name of Alek Hidell." The message was immediately passed along to Hoover in Washington and to FBI colleagues in Dallas.

Close Watch: How did Jones acquire the information? In one part of his message to the FBI, he says he was listening to "news broadcasts," but it is not at all clear if that's where he learned about the draft card. Had some reporter's scoop gone unnoticed in the tumult of the day? Was Army intelligence aware of a conspiracy? Or did Jones simply have a contact in the Dallas Police Department?

The new material also shows that the FBI kept close watch on Oswald for years, but lost track of him for several weeks in September and October of 1963. He had moved with his wife Marina from New Orleans to Dallas, and three days before Kennedy was killed, the New Orleans office sent a routine memo to Washington and Dallas, advising that it was passing the responsibility for monitoring Oswald to the Dallas office. The memo notes Oswald's business address: Texas School Book Depository, 411 Elm Street, Dallas, Texas. It arrived on Nov. 22.

—PETER BONVENTRE with DAVID C. MARTIN and JOHN J. LINDSAY in Washington

Johnson: A tough

—PETER BO DANE C/