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Hoover Ire On Oswald Is Revealed

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Washington, (News Bureau)— FBI records show that at the same time bureau officials were trying to convince President Johnson that the FBI "had absolutely no clue that Lee Harvey Oswald was a potential assassin," the late FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover ordered 17 agents punished for failing to put Oswald on the potential assassin list.

The Hoover memo, written a week after the Nov. 22, 1963, assassination of Kennedy in Dallas, is not included in the 40,000 pages of raw FBI data made public this week. It was made available to The News by Sen. Richard Schweiker (R-Pa.), who obtained it from the FBI more than a year ago.

Although the material released this week includes several memos by FBI brass defending their failure to warn the Secret Service about Oswald, there are no memos questioning the failure.

In fact, one FBI memo notes that the Secret Service eventually agreed that Oswald did not meet the criteria to be included as a potential assassin. (Neither the FBI nor Secret Service knew at the time that Oswald had shot at former Army Maj. Gen. Edwin Walker a few weeks earlier.)

Hoover was furious at the performance of the Dallas FBI office before the assassination. In a memo to headquarters aides, he wrote: "Certainly no one in full possession of his faculties can claim Oswald didn't fall within these criteria" (for placement on the security index). Special Agent James Hosty had interviewed Oswald a few weeks before the shooting.

Hoover ordered that 17 FBI employees, including three special agents-in-charge and two headquarters section chiefs, be censured or placed on probation.

FBI officials said yesterday that the Hoover memo would probably be released when a second batch of 40,000 pages is made public in a few weeks.

The newly released FBI documents also show that the bureau was, in effect, conducting an investigation within an investigation. Not only were the agents trying to find out what motivated Oswald, they wanted to know what motivated J. Lee Rankin, the Warren Commission chief counsel, who was sending over assignments for the FBI.

In a February 1964 memo, an FBI official analyzed just why Rankin wanted to know how long it took to travel between various locations in Dallas. Rankin was being close-lipped with his FBI investigators and the agents reviewed each assignment to find out where the probe was going.