

Files Show Hoover Chafed At Criticism

WASHINGTON (AP)— In the years following John F. Kennedy's assassination, J. Edgar Hoover fumed over the mounting criticism of the FBI investigation of the case but decided to ignore most of the critics, at least publicly.

In private, he kept meticulous records on the critics' personal lives as well as their public comments about the bureau.

The details emerged from 58,754 pages of FBI files which the bureau made public Wednesday to comply with requests under the Freedom of Information Act.

The half-ton of documents, together with 40,001 pages released in December, make up virtually all of the bureau's investigative files on the murder of Kennedy Nov. 22, 1963, in Dallas.

This batch of files begins in mid-1964. Scores of letters and memos reflect the cool but polite relationship between the FBI and the Warren Commission as the commission launched its probe of the case.

Later that year, the commission was to report its conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald killed Kennedy and that he acted alone. Hoover had arrived at the same belief months earlier.

However, a number of writers and researchers were attracting considerable public attention with their theories that Oswald and the man who shot him to death in the Dallas police station, nightclub owner Jack Ruby, were part of some dark conspiracy of varying origins.

Nothing was found in the first batch of FBI files to disprove the Warren Commission's conclusion. The initial scrutiny of the second batch of files also yielded no startling new information.

What the material does show is the countless hours FBI men spent trying to document claims made by such critics as Mark Lane, Harold Weisberg, Edward J. Epstein and Dick Gregory in speeches, books and broadcast interviews.

An FBI official prepared a line-by-line analysis of a William Manchester article to be published in Life magazine. The bureau obtained tapes and transcripts of radio and television shows featuring the critics.

Such reports often set off debates within the FBI about how the bureau should respond. Should Hoover ignore the criticism or should he answer it? One published report criticized Hoover for failing to express condolences to the Kennedy family. The FBI issued a public statement saying that was false, and a later bureau memo called the public statement a successful strategy.

Disturbed about Gregory's attacks in 1964, one FBI official wrote to Hoover,

"We have long suspected that Gregory is demented. Nevertheless, the comments he has made are utterly ridiculous and we should confront him and tell him in no uncertain terms that he better stop putting out such gutter talk."

Two years later, author Richard J. Whalen approached FBI officials to solicit co-

operation in writing a magazine article answering critics of the Warren Commission.

William C. Sullivan, one of Hoover's top advisers, supported Whalen, saying he was "reliable and trustworthy and has an extremely high opinion of the bureau."

"It appears that it would be in the best interests of this bureau to cooperate with Mr. Whalen in his efforts to bring the complete truth before the American people," Sullivan wrote. "Our investigation was sound, we have absolutely nothing to hide, and no critic has brought even one scintilla of evidence that would disprove our findings."

In the margins of the memo, Hoover scrawled, "Absolutely no. Again, an emphatic no. I am absolutely opposed."

Whatever the bureau's public response, there was no doubt about where the critics ranked with Hoover and other FBI officials in private. Memos refer to the "infamous Mark Lane, reportedly a Communist sympathizer." Weisberg and Gregory are described in disdainful language.

The documents show that the FBI was intensely curious about the federal grand jury investigation which New Orleans Dist. Atty. James Garrison launched in 1966. Garrison claimed to have proof that the assassination was the product of a conspiracy, but his charges were later discredited.

The files show that the FBI learned of the Garrison probe from David Ferrie, a New Orleans airline pilot who Garrison claimed was a key figure in the alleged assassination plot. Ferrie alerted the FBI when he was subpoenaed to testify before the grand jury. Ferrie was found dead in February, 1967, a few days after the Garrison probe became public.

FBI agents in New Orleans frequently reported to Hoover what they had learned about the progress of the Garrison probe.

"More and more it becomes evident we should stay as far away as we can from this shyster," Hoover responded at one point. "I want no injection of the FBI into this farce. Already it is backfiring on Garrison and any action of ours can be twisted by this egomaniac."

The chairman of the Warren Commission, Chief Justice Earl Warren, was not spared Hoover's sharp tongue. In a 1964 memo, Hoover noted that he had told commission counsel J. Lee Rankin "that I had not appreciated what I had interpreted as carping criticism of the chief justice when he referred to the bureau's report originally submitted to the commission as being a 'skeleton' report . . ."

A notation on an FBI memorandum dated Nov. 29, 1963, reports the initial refusal of Warren to head the commission. It says simply that Deputy Atty. Gen. Nicholas Katzenbach "advised the chief justice had declined to head the commission."

Although the documents don't reflect it, before the day was out, President Lyndon B. Johnson had persuaded Warren to head the commission.