

After 17 years of silence, ^{12/8/80} FBI Oswald agent speaks up

The FBI agent responsible for monitoring Lee Harvey Oswald in Dallas has remained silent since the assassination of President John F. Kennedy 17 years ago. Now he has decided to tell his side of what happened "because one of these days they are going to have to face up and tell the public the truth."

By EARL GOLZ

The Dallas Morning News, 1980

Documents referring to Lee Harvey Oswald's trip to Mexico City, where he met with a Soviet agent for assassination and sabotage two months before President John F. Kennedy's death, were secretly re-

moved by the FBI from Oswald's internal security file in Dallas hours after Kennedy was shot, says the agent who monitored Oswald's activities in Dallas.

A file of the FBI's pre-assassination investigation showed Oswald met with Valeriy V. Kostikov in the Soviet embassy in Mexico City less than two months before the assassination, former FBI agent James P. Hosty Jr. said. But nothing he saw at FBI headquarters or other bureau field offices before the assassination indicated Kostikov was a KGB agent responsible for assassination and sabotage, Hosty said.

This is the bombshell Hosty said he would have dropped if the House Assassinations Committee had permitted him to testify in 1978.

The Warren Commission in 1964 could not determine what happened at the meeting between Oswald and Kostikov because the CIA apparently did not know and still does not know. The Soviets were not about to tell — if they knew.

"The true identity of the man (Kostikov) Oswald was in touch with was never given to me," Hosty said. **See FBI on Page 6A.**

6A The Dallas Morning News

Monday, December 8, 1980 **** 1

FBI boss denies Oswa

Continued from Page 1A.

said, "They just didn't want to dwell on that."

Hosty learned of Kostikov's espionage work when an intelligence source tipped him three years after the assassination.

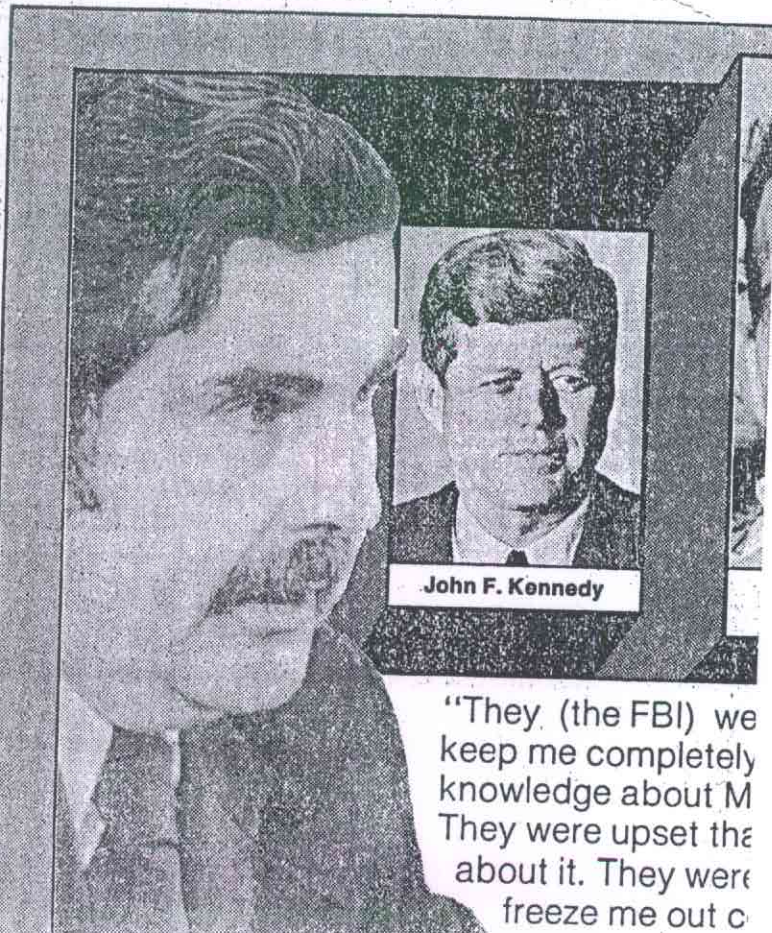
Neither the FBI's domestic intelligence division, where Hosty was assigned, nor bureau headquarters "authorized an intelligence investigation into possible foreign complicity in the assassination," the House Assassinations Committee said last year. The FBI "failed to cooperate fully" with the Warren Commission and provided "misleading" and "incomplete" information, the panel said.

Hosty's story bolsters reports FBI director J. Edgar Hoover became committed very early to defending the idea Oswald was a lone nut who shot the president.

The loner theory insulated the FBI from criticism. Lone nuts are not within the purview of the FBI, but former defectors to Russia who deal undercover with the likes of Kostikov are.

Hoover sent President Lyndon B. Johnson a background report on Oswald the day after the assassination, omitting reference to the FBI's security case against Oswald in Dallas.

Three weeks later, the FBI submitted its report on the assassination, concluding Oswald was the



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— James P. Hosty

Dallas Morning News: Craig Spaulding

Hosty said, "They were going to keep me completely out of any knowledge about Mexico City (before his Warren Commission testimony). They were upset that I even knew about it. They were trying to freeze me out completely."

Twelve years later, the FBI sent someone to a hospital to question the gravely ill Belmont about the quotes Hosty attributed to him. Belmont reportedly said he "couldn't remember," Hosty said. Belmont died about a week later.

Testifying before the Warren Commission the day after Hosty, Belmont said the FBI had "no indication at Oswald was in any way connected or within the service of a foreign government." The only testimony Belmont gave about Mexico City was Oswald's visits to the Soviet embassy "were evidently for the purpose of securing a visa, and he told us during one of the interviews that he would probably take his wife back to the Soviet Union some time in the future."

No comprehensive report devoted to Kostikov's KGB credentials was even submitted to the Warren Commission until the CIA's one to general counsel J. Lee Rankin one week before the Warren report went to press.

The FBI agent-in-charge in Dallas during 1963, J. Gordon Shanklin, did not remember hearing the name Kostikov when he was contacted recently.

"If they had ever brought it to my attention, as highly placed as... the name (Kostikov) was, I probably would have remembered something," Shanklin said.

Shanklin and FBI inspector James Malley of Washington, liaison between the bureau and the Warren Commission, deny knowing of any mention on Mexico City being lifted

from the FBI files on
Oswald in Dallas

there was very little effort made to really follow up and investigate (foreign conspiracy leads) properly. They (FBI) were more concerned with not embarrassing themselves.

"The story he (Hosty) told us, we checked it out and tried to pin him down every which way and he was very straight with us," the former staffer said.

In its final report in 1976, the senate committee said it was "most surprising" Soviet experts at FBI headquarters in Washington "did not intensify their efforts in the Oswald case after being informed Oswald had met with vice consul Kostikov at the Soviet embassy in Mexico City.

"Further, the bureau's Soviet experts had reason to believe he (Kostikov) was an agent with the KGB's department that carries out assassination and sabotage."

The senate committee also noted the FBI report three weeks after the assassination concluding Oswald was the lone assassin was issued "on the basis of a narrow investigation of the assassination focused on Oswald without conducting a broad investigation of the assassination which would have revealed any conspiracy, foreign or domestic... Facts which might have substantially affected the course of the investigation were not provided the Warren Commission."

The committee succeeded in getting the 1964 CIA document of Oswald's contacts with Soviets declassified in 1976, for the first time publicly identifying Kostikov as a member of the KGB's department for assassination and sabotage.

Hosty said the staff of the House Assassinations Committee twice called him to Washington in 1977 and 1978 but put off his testimony before the committee after he said he intended to tell what he knew of the Mexico City documents taken from the Oswald file and about the Dallas cover-up of FBI knowledge of Kostikov before the assassination.

"They didn't want me to talk to the congressmen," Hosty said. "They couldn't control it then."

G. Robert Blakey, chief counsel for the now defunct committee, said if Hosty had "a real bombshell, we (committee) would have talked about it" publicly. He said Hosty had "no new information to offer this committee."

Blakey has been strongly criticized by members of his staff for dismissing any possibility of a foreign or domestic intelligence connection to Oswald. Under Blakey's guidance, the committee concluded in 1979 a conspiracy probably resulted in Kennedy's assassination and the report pointed at certain organized crime figures and anti-Cas-

sion received information from the CIA Kostikov's KGB responsibilities included assassination, Slawson said the Russian was "more important than that."

"He was high enough up so that he was the central director, so to speak, for KGB activities in the Caribbean area which as I say was a very important area because it was kind of a spy clearinghouse and presumably as assassination clearinghouse, too," Slawson testified. "The principal objective of my work in Mexico was to find out what had gone on between Oswald and this very important KGB operative. Obviously it was a suspicious circumstance."

Despite Slawson's testimony, Kostikov is mentioned only once in the 307 pages about the Kennedy assassination in the house committee's final report last year.

The report merely states the CIA was "advised that Oswald had spoken with an individual possibly identified as Soviet consul Kostikov on Sept. 28, 1963," during his visit to the Soviet embassy in Mexico City. Nothing in the body of the report and accompanying references notes that Kostikov was a KGB agent.

The committee published a 300-page report, "Lee Harvey Oswald, the CIA and Mexico City," but it is classified.

Hosty notes Oswald and his wife, Marina, also were tight-lipped about Mexico City.

Before he was shot to death by Dallas nightclub operator Jack Ruby, Oswald did not acknowledge to Dallas police he had traveled to Mexico City less than two months earlier. Marina refused to admit under FBI questioning she knew her husband had been to Mexico City until seven weeks later when she testified under oath before the Warren Commission.

Oswald complained to the Dallas FBI office several weeks before the assassination about Hosty interviewing Marina. Hosty said he believes Oswald feared she might start talking about Mexico City.

Howard P. Willens, the Warren Commission's special liaison officer to the justice department, recalled in testimony before the House Assassinations Committee in 1978 the CIA was "keenly interested in the possibilities of either a Soviet or a Cuban involvement in the assassination."

The house committee concluded the Soviet government was not involved in the assassination "on the basis of the available evidence." The committee also said it had "no evidence that the Soviet government had any interest in removing President Kennedy, nor is there any evidence that it planned to take advantage of the president's death."

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one item mentioned Kostikov, "who functioned overtly as a consul in the Soviet embassy" in Mexico City and who also was "known to be a staff officer of the KGB." Kostikov was a member of the KGB's "thirteenth, or 'liquid affairs' department whose responsibilities include assassination and sabotage," the report said.

Hoover told the Warren Commission 10 days later he had been "unable to find any scintilla of evidence showing any foreign conspiracy or any domestic conspiracy that culminated in the assassination of President Kennedy."

Hoover "resented criticism to a degree greater than any other person that I have known," former Deputy Atty. Gen. Nicholas Katzenbach told the House Assassinations Committee in 1978. If the FBI "made any mistake or anything for which the public could criticize the bureau, the bureau would do its best to conceal the information from anybody," said Katzenbach, who was Atty. Gen. Robert Kennedy's top aide at the time of the assassination.

At least four Mexico City documents were removed from the Dallas file during the afternoon of the assassination, Hosty said. At least one of the items was checked out by his supervisor, Kenneth C. Howe, he said. They were taken without Hosty's knowledge from his workbox after he was instructed to attend Oswald's interrogation by Dallas police the afternoon of the assassination.

Howe, retired and living in San Diego, Calif., said he has "no recollection of anything like that.

"There was nothing taken out of his box as far as I was concerned except something I may have taken out as a supervisor which I was entitled to do," Howe said. "If I did so it cer-

tainly would be in connection with business and not surreptitiously."

No evidence indicates the excised Dallas documents ever reached the Warren Commission, although Hosty said they were reinserted into the file after he testified five months later before the commission. By that time, possibility of the commission demanding to see the Dallas file had faded. One day after Hosty's testimony, Chief Justice Earl Warren urged other commission members to refrain from examining the FBI headquarters file on Oswald on the basis it contained classified material.

The Warren Commission concluded Oswald traveled to Mexico City and visited the Soviet and Cuban embassies in an attempt to get a visa to Russia. One month after he returned from Mexico — and 10 days before the assassination — he mailed a letter to the Soviet embassy in Washington recounting his efforts in Mexico City and noting he met "with comrade Kostin," who the CIA said probably was Kostikov.

In its 1964 report, the commission said Kostikov was a member of the Soviet consular staff in Mexico City and was "also one of the KGB officers stationed at the embassy. It is standard Soviet procedure that KGB officers be stationed in embassies and in consulates to carry on the normal duties (processing visas) of such a position in addition to undercover activities."

That was all the Warren Report had to say about Kostikov. The Oswald letter, intercepted by the FBI, was "no more than a clumsy effort (by Oswald) to ingratiate himself with the Soviet embassy," the report said.

The commission indicated Oswald would not have been a candidate for Soviet intelligence work because of his extensive Marxist exposure in

the United States. Investigators with the House Assassinations Committee, however, have speculated Oswald's pro-Communist demonstrations made him ideal as a double agent for U.S. intelligence.

The CIA's handling of the Oswald case before the assassination "was deficient because CIA headquarters was not apprised of all information that its field (Mexico City) sources had" about Oswald, the house committee said. For example, the panel was unable to determine "whether Oswald had any associates in Mexico City," the committee report said.

Hosty testified before the Warren Commission in May 1964 he "was quite interested in determining the nature of his (Oswald's) contact with the Soviet embassy in Mexico City. I had not resolved that on the 22nd of November (assassination date). We are still waiting to resolve that."

Samuel A. Stern, commission lawyer, did not ask Hosty one question about Kostikov because "they knew I didn't know," Hosty said.

Stern, however, said recently he has "no idea who Kostikov is ... I asked him all the questions I could think of, and if I missed something it wasn't by calculation."

During a preliminary briefing with Stern and Hoover's assistant, Alan H. Belmont, one day before his 1964 testimony, Hosty recalled something that shocked and angered Belmont: Hosty remembered on the day of the assassination seeing in the Oswald file in Dallas at least three documents mentioning Oswald's contact with the Soviet embassy in Mexico City, including one that noted Oswald met with Kostikov.

Hosty said Belmont, in charge of the assassination investigation, muttered under his breath, "Damn it, I told them not to let you see that."

"That's when I got suspicious," m

Back pay can't erase censu

By EARL GOLZ

The man who many say J. Edgar Hoover made the scapegoat in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy has been partially vindicated after 17 years.

"Rather than come out and admit it (that Hosty was unfairly punished by the FBI), they (FBI) just gave me my money back," said James P. Hosty Jr., the FBI agent responsible for monitoring Lee Harvey Oswald in Dallas.

After Hosty, 56, retired last year, the FBI returned more than \$1,000 of the salary withheld from him in 1964 when Hoover suspended him for 30 days and transferred him from Dal-

ladas to Dallas. He received letters of censure and probation.

Hoover never told the Warren Commission of the censures. They were not publicly disclosed until 13 years later.

One of Hoover's top aides, William C. Sullivan, said Hoover disciplined his men in order to protect himself from blame.

Hoover calculated the censures as a means of "protecting himself against any indictment that he was at fault in the assassination," said Sullivan, Hosty's boss in the FBI's domestic intelligence division and another of the disciplined men.

"If he was charged with culpability in the assassination of President

himself as a victim of an intelligence system that passes down information to agents only on a "need to know" basis, an old intelligence creed, he explains.

Hosty was not told by FBI intelligence of Oswald's contacts with the man he terms a "key to Soviet espionage in the Western Hemisphere" less than two months before the assassination. And when he learned of agent Valeriy V. Kostikov's KGB role in assassination and sabotage it was three years too late.

Pre-assassination information reaching Hosty in Dallas from the FBI in Washington and other government sources was enough to put him on alert, he said. But he had not been in