

Secret Service Testimony In JFK Probe Chides FBI

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Washington — The House Assassinations Committee is assessing whether the FBI did all it should have done in the investigation of the murder of President John F. Kennedy.

Witnesses were testifying today about the FBI investigation and the agency's cooperation with other agencies and the Warren Commission.

The committee shifted into that general area yesterday with testimony from two retired Secret Service officials who said their agents performed well although they failed to save Kennedy from the assassin's bullets in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963.

They disputed charges the elite presidential security corps left Kennedy vulnerable during his Dallas visit. And they said the Secret Service simply did not know who Lee Harvey Oswald was.

FBI files released last year show the bureau knew of Oswald's background as a former defector and potentially violent social misfit, but felt it had no obligation to alert the Secret Service about his presence in Dallas.

Testimony by Thomas J. Kelley, now assistant director of the Secret Service's Protective Operations, indicated it never did so. Asked whether the Secret Service as a whole had failed Kennedy through inadequate advance security arrangements, Kelley replied, "No, I don't think so, because the Secret Service had no knowledge of Oswald's background."

"If we had known the background and we knew he was working at the (Dallas) book depository at the time of the parade, we would have done something to make sure that we knew what he was doing at that time."

The Warren Commission said Oswald shot Kennedy from a window in the school book depository overlooking the motorcade route.

In its report on the assassination, the presidential commission headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren had said the service's Dallas security arrangements were "seriously deficient."

It said agents failed to check all the buildings along Kennedy's motorcade route and noted some agents had stayed up drinking until 2 a.m. the day of the murder.

Kelley said an investigation in the aftermath of the slaying had determined the drinking bout did not affect the performance of the agents involved. They were never reprimanded, he said.

Wrapping up public testimony on longstanding rumors of Cuban involvement, the committee referred to a stream of murky allegations, but did little to clarify them or establish how reliable they might be.

There was nothing murky about Cuban President Fidel Castro's denial of involvement in the assassination or prior knowledge of it.

Contending it would have been "tremendous insanity" for Cubans to plot the assassination of a U.S. president, Castro accused the Central Intelligence Agency of circulating such reports.

Castro made his statements during a four-hour interview with committee

members and investigators last April. The committee released a transcript yesterday.

Describing his personal reaction to the news of Kennedy's death, Castro said, "I was very badly depressed. I was very sad about it. He was an adversary. You may always have the adversaries, but you have an assessment of them as a person, as an intellectual. To a certain extent, we were honored in having such a rival. He was not mediocre. He was an outstanding man."

In addition, Castro said he had sensed Kennedy was moving toward a somewhat friendlier policy toward Cuba in the wake of the missile crisis and the Bay of Pigs invasion.