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AP file photo

OSWALD CONNECTION? George de Mohrenschildt, with his wife in an undated photo.

JFK files may shed light on witness's death

By Tom Squitieri
USA TODAY

On the morning of March 29, 1977, the House Assassinations Committee phoned the Florida home of George de Mohrenschildt — "a crucial witness" in the panel's John F. Kennedy assassination probe — to arrange a meeting.

It never reached him.

That afternoon, de Mohrenschildt — described in CIA and FBI memos obtained by USA TODAY as being close to accused assassin Lee Harvey Oswald — was found dead, killed by a blast to his face from a 20-gauge shotgun.

De Mohrenschildt (dee MORN-shield), a Russian exile with murky ties to the CIA, has become a central figure for some promoters of conspiracy theories in the JFK slaying.

"I would say he was a handler for Oswald," says Oliver

Stone, director of the movie *JFK*, which has renewed debate about the assassination.

A CIA memo describes de Mohrenschildt as "well-acquainted" with Oswald since 1962; another says he was briefed about Oswald by a CIA agent months before the Nov. 22, 1963, assassination.

Details of de Mohrenschildt's death — ruled a suicide — and his relationship with Oswald may be clarified when sealed files on the JFK shooting are opened.

A congressional resolution ordering the files opened, delayed in recent weeks, is now expected to be introduced Wednesday. Quick passage is predicted.

The resolution is being delayed to provide time for Rep. Louis Stokes, D-Ohio, a key sponsor, to win the approval of all affected agencies.

There is no deadline in the resolution for opening the documents but agencies are expected to comply "as quickly as they can," said Sen. David Boren, D-Okla., Senate Intelligence Committee chairman.

The resolution will set broad guidelines requiring release of almost all documents related to the assassination. Agencies would have to justify withholding documents to a three-member panel to be created by the resolution.

While Florida officials said de Mohrenschildt's death at 65 was a suicide, others say it was murder. At least 32 people linked to the assassination have died suspiciously.

"He is the key to the conspiracy," claims Michael Levy, a conspiracy advocate who has obtained scores of files under the Freedom of Information Act. "If he didn't have a firsthand involvement, at the very least he was in the midst of all the players."

Levy and others theorize de Mohrenschildt was used by rogue intelligence operatives to set up Oswald — then sent to



OSWALD

What's in files

After John F. Kennedy and Lee Harvey Oswald were killed, the FBI's Dallas bureau ordered a probe of George de Mohrenschildt, with "preferred and expeditious handling."

Why? Was he a good guy or villain?

Documents obtained by USA TODAY show:

► De Mohrenschildt sought work with U.S. intelligence in 1942 but was rejected because "he was alleged to be a Nazi espionage agent." His brother was an associate of Adolf Hitler.

► He took a 1957 trip to Yugoslavia and provided the CIA with "intelligence which was promptly disseminated to other federal agencies." He also filed long reports to the CIA after trips through Mexico and Panama in 1958.

► His address book listed the home phone number of "George H.W. Bush," as a oil man in Midland, Texas.

► A Dallas County Hospital report of Nov. 9, 1976, notes de Mohrenschildt had been sick for five months.

The hospital said he had been injected with some kind of drug. De Mohrenschildt said the injections were linked to the assassination.

— Tom Squitieri

Haiti at the time of the assassination.

Stone says de Mohrenschildt is among about 12 people whose roles he was unable to develop for his movie. He says he hopes new documents would clarify their possible roles in the assassination.

Next week the movie *Ruby* — about Oswald's killer, Jack Ruby — hits theaters. Set in Dallas, Havana and Las Vegas, it explores the possibility that the CIA and Mafia conspired to kill Kennedy.