

# Battle begins over custody of Soviets' files on Oswald

## White House forms panel to review papers on JFK killer

By Karen Gullio

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WASHINGTON — The National Archives, rather than intelligence and defense agencies, should get first crack at KGB files on Lee Harvey Oswald recently turned over to President Clinton, an advocate of public access to government documents says.

The Oswald files — a surprise gift from Boris Yeltsin — will first be reviewed for material sensitive to national security concerns, while also taking into account privacy considerations.

The interagency review panel set up by the White House will consist of officials from the CIA, the National Security Council and the State and Defense departments, NSC spokesman David Leavy said Wednesday.

Kate Martin, a lawyer for the National Security Archive, a private research group and library, believes the papers should go to the National Archives, which oversees assassination records and makes

them publicly available.

"This procedure they are talking about is very troubling to us," she said. "It's very hard to imagine any real national security considerations for withholding these documents from the American public."

While officials said there is no estimate when the public might see the material, Leavy said the White House expects ultimately to make the documents public.

"Our approach would be to declassify and make public as much as possible," he said. He could not specify how long it would take.

About 85 papers, all in Russian, were turned over by Yeltsin on Sunday when he met with Clinton during the Group of Eight summit.

Oswald, a former Marine, defected to the Soviet Union in 1959 and renounced his American citizenship. That attracted the attention of the KGB, which bugged his apartment in the Belarus capital city of Minsk, paid neighbors to inform on him and kept Oswald and his Russian wife Marina under constant surveillance.

The KGB amassed a six-volume file on Oswald's activities in Minsk. It was sent to Moscow after the assassination but returned to Minsk after the breakup of the So-

viet Union.

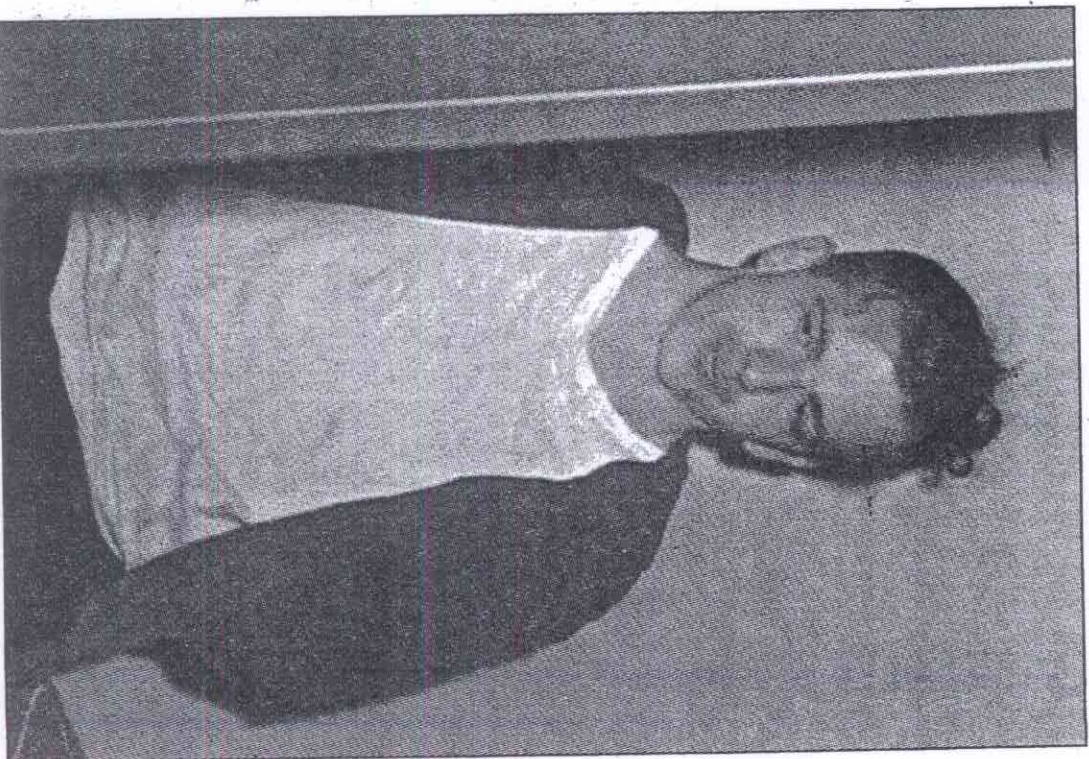
The documents handed over by Yeltsin are thought to be the KGB files compiled in Moscow, said John Tunheim, former chairman of the government's Assassination Records Review Board.

The board, which went out of business last year, was created to locate, gather and eventually make public all known assassination records.

Tunheim said the documents could shed light on what the KGB knew about Oswald and how top-ranking Soviet officials reacted when they learned that Oswald was the suspected gunman.

"The KGB had sophisticated intelligence at the time. They could have uncovered facts that we didn't get," said Tunheim, who was a member of a board delegation that tried but failed to get the documents from Russia in 1996.

A Russian newspaper published three documents from the files on Wednesday, the Washington Post reported. One was a handwritten letter Oswald sent to Soviet authorities seeking asylum in 1959. Another discussed the Soviet reaction to the assassination and the third described plans for attendance at the Kennedy funeral.



Lee Harvey Oswald, shown in custody after his arrest in connection with the JFK assassination, is discussed in files just turned over to President Clinton.

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