

Oswald Letter Destruction Is Blamed on FBI Officials

By Martin Waldron

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Top officials of the FBI — probably including former Director J. Edgar Hoover — ordered the destruction of a letter in which Lee Harvey Oswald, assassin of President John F. Kennedy, conveyed violent threats about 10 days before he killed the president, according to a source familiar with the meeting where this decision was made.

The source said that the decision to destroy the letter, which made threats against the Dallas police, was taken at a meeting of top FBI officials in Washington on the weekend after Kennedy was murdered in Dallas on Friday, Nov. 22, 1963.

The FBI has always maintained that it had no reason to believe that Oswald was capable of violence and therefore had not filed reports on him with the Secret Service.

THE SOURCE said that the decision to destroy the letter was made because of potential embarrassment to the FBI and not to hinder the investigation of President Kennedy's death.

The existence and destruction of the letter was first reported two weeks ago by The Dallas Times-Herald.

The letter's destruction was cited by Sen. Richard S. Schweiker, R-Pa., as a prime reason for his introduction of a Senate resolution on Sept. 8, directing the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence to inquire into Kennedy's murder as part of its investigation of the FBI and CIA. The resolution is pending.

Schweiker said in an interview last week that, since he introduced his resolution, his office received information that strengthened his belief that 17 still-secret reports from the FBI and 23 from the CIA to the Warren Commis-

sion might contain information that the public should have.

THE ORDEF, to destroy the letter was relayed to Dallas, where the letter was on file, by one of Hoover's assistants, but the assistant would never have ordered the destruction of possible evidence except on Hoover's expressed order, the source said.

Both Hoover and James P. Hosty Jr., the FBI agent who received the Oswald letter, told the Warren Commission that they had no reason to believe that

Oswald was capable of violence.

When he testified in April 1964 before the commission, which investigated the assassination and found that Oswald was the lone assassin, Hosty said:

"Prior to the assassination of the president of the United States, I had no information indicating violence on the part of Lee Harvey Oswald. I wish the record to so read."

Clarence M. Kelley, who became FBI director in 1973 after Hoover's death, has said that there is evidence that the letter was received and destroyed.

THE FBI refused last week to direct Hosty to break his silence and discuss the destruction of the letter, an action that has prompted a growing demand to reopen the investigation of the assassination. Hosty, now working in the FBI office at Kansas City, Mo., has refused to be interviewed.

An FBI spokesman said that any comment would be "inappropriate" at this time, because an internal FBI investigation of the incident was under way.

The Oswald letter contained a threat to "blow up" the Dallas Police Department, said the source familiar with the meeting

that ordered the destruction of the letter.

Early reports said that the letter threatened violence to the FBI office as well as to the police department. But the source said that the letter threatened only the Dallas police, although it also told the FBI to stop trying to interview Oswald's wife, Marina.

SEVERAL days later, Oswald hand-carried the letter to the FBI office in downtown Dallas. The FBI office was about a quarter of a mile from the Texas Schoolbook Depository — a textbook warehouse — where Oswald was working as a laborer.

In presenting the basic outline of the circumstances surrounding the letter, the source said that when the letter was given a file and item number in November 1963 it became an official document and that destruction of it might have violated federal law.

In testimony and affidavits given to the Warren Commission some months after the assassination, Hoover and Hosty said that they had no reason to believe that Oswald was capable of violent action.

SHORTLY AFTER the assassination, the FBI's Dallas office notified its headquarters in Washington of the existence of the letter. The meeting to discuss what to do about the letter ensued.

Some time later, Hoover sent out letters of censure to 17 agents and FBI officials because of the incident, and Hosty was suspended without pay for 30 days and transferred to his present post in Kansas City.

The source said that Hoover "was madder than hell."