

JFK ASSASSINATION SYSTEM

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TOP SECRET

NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY
FORT GEORGE G. MEADE, MARYLAND 20755-6000

NSP4-033-95
1 June 1995

Mr. David Marwell
Assassination Records Review Board
600 E Street NW, 2nd Floor
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Mr. Marwell:

(FOUO) In response to your letter of March 9, 1995 we tasked appropriate elements of NSA Operations and Archives as well as the Legislative Affairs Office (LAO) and Office of General Counsel (OGC) to search for information responsive to your questions. The following represents the composite response of these elements.

(U) "What technical capabilities did NSA have during the early 1960's for collecting, deciphering, and analyzing communications?"

(TS-CCO) NSA had an excellent capability to meet the SIGINT challenges of the 1960's. We had field sites in position to copy the signals of interest in the USSR, both High Frequency and Line-of-Sight, in Cuba, and those communications exchanged internationally between countries. We accomplished this through a mixture of fixed sites manned by armed forces personnel, airborne and shipborne platforms, exchanges with Second and Third Parties, and clandestine and special sources. We exploited many enciphered communications of interest, but not Soviet diplomatic and agent communications and those of a few other countries that employed very sophisticated cryptosystems. Our analytic capabilities were excellent, both in our civilian and military workforce.

(U) "What COMINT did NSA actually intercept during the early 1960's from the Soviet Union, Cuba, and Mexico, from organized crime or international drug smugglers?"

(TS-CCO) NSA produced COMINT on many facets of the Soviet target, from leadership communications to military command and control, from scientific and technical research and development to international trade and industrial endeavors, exploiting many low-to-medium grade cipher systems on these targets. On the Cuban target, we produced many products on all facets as well, from military command and control to international trade, from domestic industrial and agricultural endeavors to diplomatic and agent communications. We also produced product on Mexican targets, mainly diplomatic and military. There were no reflections in any of these products of any activity that might have been related to the assassination, only post-assassination reflections of U.S. political and protocol developments and Cuban releases of statements denying crime or narcotics smuggling at that time. One organization did follow international arms trade activity and issued product reports, but there was nothing to tie any of their reporting to the assassination.

(U) "What actions did NSA take in the immediate wake of President Kennedy's assassination? For example, did any agency task NSA to perform any functions regarding the assassination? Was any task force, group directorate, or other entity at NSA formed or charged with any responsibilities for collecting information that in any way pertained to the assassination of President Kennedy? Was any traffic analysis performed? Were any product reports produced? Were there any TSRs?"

Released pursuant to Executive Order 14176, DECLASS. OF RECORDS CONC. THE ASSASSINATIONS OF PRES. JFK, SEN. RFK, AND THE REV. DR. MLK, JR.

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~~(TS-CCO)~~ Collectors, based on their personal recollections, were alerted to put greater emphasis on Soviet Bloc and Cuban military targets to look for signs of increased readiness in their force posture. Analysts at NSA were also looking for signs of diplomatic reactions to and foreign intelligence reporting on the assassination. Any voice and cipher traffic were thoroughly processed from the surrounding timeframe. Analysts on targets that were unexploitable from a cryptanalytic standpoint reviewed traffic patterns to ensure that no deviations indicating unusual activity had been overlooked.

(U) "Did NSA ever collect, isolate, or segregate any records relating to the assassination?"

(FOUO) One file, related to Lee Harvey Oswald, was accessioned into the NSA/CSS Archives in 1986. The LAO holds five files that topically relate in some way to the Assassination. In 1993 NSA searched for and collected documents in response to Public Law 102-526. Copies of the records responsive to the law are held in the Office of Policy.

(U) "What actions has NSA taken, since 1964, with respect to the assassination? For example, other than with respect to the House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA), has NSA had any program to collect any data with respect to the assassination?"

(FOUO) Since 1964 NSA has answered queries from various congressional committees. Files about the information provided are held by the LAO and OGC. NSA's only program to collect data related to the assassination was the response to P.L. 102-526.

(U) "What files or records has NSA ever had pertaining to congressional investigations of the assassination or the intelligence community? For example, are there (or were there) NSA files on the Warren Commission, the HSCA, the Church Committee, the Pike Committee, etc."

(FOUO) The LAO, OGC and Archives holds files related to this question covering all of the topics except the Warren Commission.

(U) "What records retention (and records destruction) policies has NSA ever proposed or implemented that might have affected records pertaining to the assassination? You stated, for example, that records identifying Americans were destroyed in the wake of the Church Committee investigation, and you suggested that records identifying Oswald might have been among those destroyed. What were the destruction orders; who implemented them; how many records were destroyed; and how were records identified for destruction?"

(FOUO) NSA has created records disposition schedules for some documents. However, SIGINT records disposition remained predominantly unscheduled during the period in question, and consequently their handling is uncertain. Serialized records (reports) are usually retained intact and are preserved to this day. The retention or destruction of other types of records were not handled systematically. The decision to retain or destroy was made by the originating elements.

(U) "What records from intercepts involving the Soviet Union, the Soviet Bloc, Cuba, and Mexico from the early 1960's are still extant? For example, does NSA have untranscribed Cuban tapes from 1963 (but that may subsequently have been broken)? What records does NSA have from the Bay of Pigs and from the Cuban Missile Crisis?"

~~(S-CCO)~~ There are end-product reports, code books on target communications and cipher traffic available dating from the early 1960's on these targets in the NSA archives. Our records show no instances of codes being broken in which we did not go back and decrypt traffic from

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the period that had been unexploitable at the time. It is our standard practice to do so regardless of the circumstances. When such events occur it is also the SIGINT modus operandi to ensure all voice material having any possible connectivity whatsoever to the event is scanned for intelligence purposes. We found no indications of any SIGINT collection that did not get reviewed. Such records also cover the missile crisis and Bay of Pigs timeframes as well. There has been an historical perspective written in 1984-85 on the SIGINT effort during the Missile Crisis that also touches on the Bay of Pigs, and one is planned on the Assassination (no estimated completion date).

(U) "Does NSA have files on American defectors to Communist countries during the late 1950's and early 1960's?"

~~(TS-CCO)~~ There was one NSA organization which, as part of their mission, tracked the activities of such individuals in the 1960's, first manually and later by machine. However, almost all records of such endeavors and files were destroyed in 1974, and any such activity ceased in the wake of the Church and Pike Committees' reports on such activities and the subsequent Executive Order issued. The two exceptions to this would be files on Martin and Mitchell who were employees of NSA.

(U) "Did any foreign government or intelligence service ever supply NSA with any information pertaining to the assassination?"

(FOUO) We are unaware of any information of this subject ever being passed by any foreign government or intelligence service to NSA.

(FOUO) We have also collected a list of personnel who were working the target at the time or who have contributed to these answers. After you have reviewed these responses, please do not hesitate to contact us to on (301) 688-6798 with any questions which you have.

Claudia C. Collins
CLAUDIA C. COLLINS

Chief
Information Security Policy