



School of Law
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

Digital Commons @ Georgia Law

Popular Media

Faculty Scholarship

12-27-2017

Did J. Edgar Hoover Kill JFK?

Donald E. Wilkes Jr.

University of Georgia School of Law, wilkes@uga.edu

Repository Citation

Wilkes, Donald E. Jr., "Did J. Edgar Hoover Kill JFK?" (2017). *Popular Media*. 283.
https://digitalcommons.law.uga.edu/fac_pm/283

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Scholarship at Digital Commons @ Georgia Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in Popular Media by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Georgia Law. [Please share how you have benefited from this access](#)
For more information, please contact tstriepe@uga.edu.

Did J. Edgar Hoover Kill JFK?

By [Donald E. Wilkes, Jr.](#)

***National Enquirer* Conspiracy Theories**

The tabloid newspaper *National Enquirer* cannot make up its mind about who was responsible for the Nov. 22, 1963, assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

On Apr. 20, 2016, it published an article which referred to Lee Harvey Oswald as “the man who murdered America’s 35th president,” and excitedly screamed it was Oswald who “blew President John F. Kennedy’s brains out!” That article, “Ted Cruz’s Father Linked to JFK Assassination,” infamously and falsely accused Texas U.S. Senator Ted Cruz’s father of being a “pal” of Oswald.

Seven months later, on Dec. 19, 2016, the *Enquirer* published another article on the JFK assassination, “Dying Castro Admits Killing JFK!” This article claimed that JFK had been slain by a team of hired assassins sent to Dallas by Cuban communist dictator Fidel Castro. The fatal shots, the article asserted, had been fired from the grassy knoll by a named Cuban-born mercenary who eluded detection and made his way back to Cuba. As for Lee Harvey Oswald, he had been “framed” and “was in fact a patsy!”

The December 2016 article obviously is wildly at odds with the April 2016 article but makes no mention of it. And now the *Enquirer* has put out a third JFK assassination article, which itself is wildly inconsistent with the first two articles but pretends they never existed.

The headline on the front page of the Nov. 27, 2017, *Enquirer* is “J. EDGAR HOOVER ORDERED JFK MURDER!,” referencing an article that begins on page 30 of the issue, “Hoover Masterminded JFK Killing!”

J. Edgar Hoover was the Director of the FBI for 48 years, from 1924 until his death in 1972.

***National Enquirer’s* Accusations Against J. Edgar Hoover**

The Nov. 27 *Enquirer* article makes these claims:

“Hoover ran the deep-cover conspiracy that killed President John F. Kennedy in Dallas,” and the *Enquirer* “has obtained a shocking top-secret document that proves it!”

The document is a telex—a printed message transmitted via a teletype machine—consisting of a memo authored by Hoover. The telex, “now in the possession of the *National Enquirer*,” has “never before [been] seen.”

“According to an expert who’s spent decades investigating JFK’s murder, Hoover’s memo proves the FBI czar led the plot to kill Kennedy.”

“The telex was sent [from FBI headquarters to FBI field offices across the nation] on Nov. 17, 1963, at 1:45 a.m.” (This was the Sunday before the Friday assassination.)

The telex (which the article quotes in its entirety) warned of a “threat to assassinate President Kennedy in Dallas, Texas Nov. 22-23, 1963...Bureau has determined that a militant revolutionary group may attempt to assassinate President Kennedy on his proposed trip to Dallas, Texas.” [Author’s note: In this and the following paragraph numerous spelling and grammatical errors in the telex have been corrected.]

The telex directed all receiving offices to “immediately contact” informants and determine “if [there was] any basis for the threat,” and instructed that the “Bureau should be kept advised of all developments by teletype.”

According to the *Enquirer’s* assassination expert, the telex “proves [that] J. Edgar Hoover “not only was part of a cabal to kill Kennedy but led it,” because, the expert claims, “the telex was sent [by Hoover] to cover himself after the fact!”

The existence of the telex was first disclosed to persons outside the FBI in 1968, “by William Walter, a former FBI agent in New Orleans.” The “night after JFK was shot, [Walter] looked for the telex in the New Orleans field offices and found that it was missing!” Then, after Walter discovered that the folder in which the telex had been filed also had vanished, and proceeded to mention the telex to a superior, “he was immediately fired by the FBI.”

Both the telex and the folder disappeared because Lee Harvey Oswald “was a confidential informant for the FBI, [and] Hoover...didn’t want any reports kept that might embarrass the FBI...”

Although the original telex is unavailable, we know its contents because Walter “reproduced [it] from memory.”

What *National Enquirer* Got Right and What it Got Wrong

Some of what the *Enquirer* alleges is true. The Nov. 17, 1963 telex did exist and it did warn that JFK might be assassinated in Dallas on Nov. 22 or 23. William Walter (whose full name was William S. Walter) did discover, shortly after the assassination, that the telex and its folder had gone missing. We do know the contents of the telex only because Walter, using notes he had taken, reproduced them from his memory. The telex did first come to the attention of JFK assassination researchers in 1968. And Lee Harvey Oswald was an FBI informant.

But the *Enquirer* article gets many facts wrong. William S. Walter did work for the FBI but was never an actual FBI agent. From 1961 to 1966 he was the night security patrol clerk in the FBI’s New Orleans field office. He was the only employee on duty at the

office from midnight to 8 a.m. His responsibilities included handling incoming and outgoing telephone calls; receiving and answering teletype messages; and communicating the activities of his shift to his supervisors. Walter discovered the telex and folder were missing not the night after the assassination, but about a week or so later. The FBI did not fire Walter in 1963; he retired amicably and with a clean record to pursue other business opportunities in 1966.

The article is wrong in asserting that the Walter telex vanished because the FBI did not want the public to know that Oswald was one of its informants. The telex did not even mention Oswald, much less indicate he informed for the FBI.

The article is also wrong in claiming that the telex has never been seen before. In his 1988 book *On the Trail of the Assassins*, former New Orleans district attorney Jim Garrison quoted in full the telex as reconstructed by Walter.

The *Enquirer* article omits important facts. It fails to note that it was William S. Walter who while on duty that Sunday night became the first New Orleans FBI employee to see the telex, or that Walter immediately notified the local special agent in charge. The article does not mention the fact that Walter also discovered other FBI documents which indicated that Oswald was an FBI informant.

The article also fails to mention that on Mar. 23, 1978, William S. Walter voluntarily gave a lengthy deposition under oath before staff members of the U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on Assassinations, which conducted a two-year reinvestigation of the JFK assassination (and concluded that the assassination resulted from a conspiracy).

William S. Walter's deposition testimony was forthright and believable. He had a credible answer to almost every question put to him. He had nothing to gain by testifying. In fact, as Walter told assassination researcher Mark Lane, "he feared for his life since many key witnesses in the JFK investigation had died of 'unnatural causes.'" Walter's testimony shows that he was not an embittered or hostile ex-FBI employee; he was proud of and still admired the Bureau. Nor was he some sort of "conspiracy kook." He testified: "I still feel Oswald was alone as far as I am concerned... [and] that there was no conspiracy either domestic or international..."

However, in its 1979 Final Report the House Assassinations Committee rejected Walter's testimony, concluding that his "allegations were unfounded."

Today, nearly 40 years later, we can say with confidence that the Assassinations Committee erred in disbelieving Walter. There is now so much information (much of it previously unavailable) about the inadequate protection given JFK during his Dallas visit, about the actual assassination itself (which is now recognizable as a military-style ambush), and about the substandard investigations carried out by the FBI, the CIA, and the Warren Commission, that William S. Walter's testimony now has the clear ring of truth. This is why, in the JFK assassination research community, Walter's account has gained widespread acceptance.

The Assassinations Committee gave two basic explanations for rejecting Walter's testimony: (1) it was not corroborated by anything in official FBI files, and (2) the various FBI agents and employees who would have seen or been aware of the telex all denied knowing anything about it. In light of what we now know about the performance of law enforcement and intelligence agencies before and after the 1963 assassination, these explanations are pathetically unpersuasive.

As to the first reason, we now know for certain that in regard to its JFK assassination investigation the FBI repeatedly destroyed or denied the existence of files and documents it thought might compromise or embarrass the FBI. One notorious example was the destruction of the allegedly threatening note Lee Harvey Oswald wrote and delivered to the Dallas FBI field office approximately two or three weeks before the assassination. Shortly after the assassination the note, it is now firmly established, was secretly destroyed by a Dallas FBI agent acting on instructions from his superiors.

The absence of anything in the FBI files confirming William S. Walter's statements about the telex, therefore, is meaningless. It is ridiculous to think that J. Edgar Hoover's FBI would not have purged its files of documents (including the telex) that might confirm Walter's account, which was highly embarrassing to the FBI since it had failed to alert the Secret Service of a dangerous threat against JFK, or to take investigatory actions that might have saved JFK's life.

No one has explained how gigantically embarrassing a revelation of the contents of the telex would have been for the FBI than Jim Garrison, who wrote: "The telex had been most explicit, naming both a place and dates for the attempt to assassinate the President. It was addressed to all special agents in charge, which meant everyone in the country, including Dallas. Yet the FBI did nothing. There is no record that it notified anyone..."

We now know, for similar reasons, that the fact that the FBI agents and employees asked about the telex by the Committee denied its existence is also meaningless. J. Edgar Hoover ran the FBI with an iron fist and regarded any action or inaction by FBI personnel that would embarrass the Bureau as practically felonious. In that toxic atmosphere FBI people were willing to and would commit perjury to cover up FBI blunders and prevent criticism of the Bureau. To avoid Hoover's wrath, and out of loyalty to the FBI (a fierce devotion to the FBI was part of the Bureau's institutional culture), FBI people would deny the truth whenever they thought it necessary to protect the Bureau's reputation.

When Mark Lane once asked Walter whether the other FBI people who had seen or heard of the telex would confirm his story, his reply was, according to the *Enquirer*, "Not a chance."

It is thus almost comical when we read that (in its own words) the Assassinations Committee "found it difficult to believe that such a message could have been sent without someone 15 years later—a special agent in charge, or an employee who might have seen the teletype—coming forward in support of Walter's claim," and that the

Committee “declined to believe that many employees of the FBI would have remained silent for such a long time.”

What a disturbing display of naiveté by a Committee inquiring into the murder of a President!

Space limitations make it impossible to set forth here the numerous additional reasons we now have for concluding that William S. Walter told the truth. that the telex did exist, and that Walter accurately reconstructed its contents.

But one of those reasons does deserve brief mention.

Vincent Michael Palamara is one of the most respected JFK assassination researchers. In his excellent, eye-opening book *Survivor's Guilt: The Secret Service and the Failure to Protect President Kennedy* (2013), he expresses no doubt that William S. Walter “received a memo via telex warning of a plot to kill JFK [by] ‘a militant revolutionary group [which] may attempt to assassinate President Kennedy on his proposed trip to Dallas...”

Palamara has come across an obscure official Secret Service document, dated only two days before the Walter telex, and published by the Warren Commission in 1964, which seems to substantiate Walter’s testimony about the telex. The document states on its face that it is based on “[i]nformation received telephonically from FBI Headquarters, Washington, D.C.” It also says that the FBI acquired its information from an individual “interviewed by the FBI on November 14, 1963...”

On page 65 of his book Palamara writes:

“Some have tried to discredit the authenticity of this telex, but a document ignored by the Warren Commission, and since discovered by the author, appears to corroborate it. Originating from the San Antonio, Texas field office [of the Secret Service] and dated 11/15/63, here is the pertinent part of the text: ‘... a militant group of the National States Rights Party plans to assassinate the President and other high-level officials.’”

(For anyone interested in crosschecking, a photocopy of the Secret Service document Palamera refers to is on page 566 of volume 17 of the *Hearings Before the President’s Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy*.)

William S. Walter could not have known of this Secret Service document.

Was J. Edgar Hoover Behind the JFK Assassination?

No, he was not.

There is no doubt that J. Edgar Hoover despised President Kennedy and his brother, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, whom he regarded as lightweight impertinent

upstarts. In fact, he hated Robert Kennedy. Nor is there doubt that Hoover feared that if JFK was re-elected in 1964 he would lose his job.

There is no doubt that prior to Nov. 22, 1963, the FBI, because it did not conduct appropriate needed investigations, and because it did not collect and share relevant intelligence information, failed in its solemn obligation to ensure President Kennedy was properly protected. The House Assassinations Committee so found in its Final Report.

And no one was more aware of the FBI's pre-assassination lapses better than J. Edgar Hoover (although of course in public he insisted that the FBI had adequately performed its duties prior to Nov. 22, 1963).

To give just one example, Hoover was outraged to learn that ex-Marine Oswald, who had once defected to and lived in the USSR, had sought Soviet citizenship and offered to turn over military secrets to the Russians, who had engaged in public demonstrations in favor of Fidel Castro's communist Cuba, and who had visited Soviet and Cuban diplomatic compounds in Mexico City only weeks before the assassination, had not been placed on the Security Index, the FBI's list of individuals deemed threats to the national security.

Therefore, less than three weeks after the assassination, 17 FBI officials—five field investigative agents, one field supervisor, three special agents in charge, four headquarters supervisors, two headquarters section chiefs, one inspector and one assistant director—were secretly censured or placed on probation by Hoover for “shortcomings in connection with the investigation of Oswald prior to the assassination.” Hoover was so appalled by the pleas of lower FBI officials that Oswald did not meet the criteria for inclusion on the Security Index that in a handwritten notation on a memo he stated: “Certainly no one in possession of all his faculties can claim Oswald didn't fall within this criteria.” The American public did not learn of these disciplinary actions for over a decade.

There is no doubt that 48 hours after the assassination J. Edgar Hoover had already rushed to judgment and made up his mind that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone assassin and there was no conspiracy. Nor can it be doubted that the entire FBI organization endorsed and adhered to Hoover's Oswald-did-it-alone position. As a result, after Nov. 22, 1963, the FBI, as the House Assassinations Committee confirmed, failed to adequately investigate the possibility of conspiracy and in other respects was seriously deficient in its investigation of the murder of President Kennedy.

Nonetheless, there never has been any evidence that J. Edgar Hoover was the leader of or participated in a conspiracy to assassinate JFK. Nor are there any good reasons for believing such evidence ever existed. And given what we know about Hoover, it is unimaginable that this legendary, high-ranking law enforcement official—who admittedly was a terribly flawed man willing to trample on the constitutional rights of Americans when he deemed it appropriate—would ever intentionally allow the President of the United States to be murdered on his watch.

Nor is there any reliable evidence that, as some have claimed, J. Edgar Hoover knew in advance that the Mafia was planning to kill JFK but did nothing to stop it.

The Assassinations Committee was surely right when it concluded that the FBI—which certainly would include J. Edgar Hoover personally—was not involved in the JFK assassination.

The *National Enquirer's* assassination expert offers not a shred of evidence in support of his allegations that J. Edgar Hoover masterminded a plot to murder President Kennedy and that Hoover sent the Walter telex for the purpose of covering himself once the murder had taken place.

The truth is that the telex reflects well on Hoover. It shows that he did take some steps to try to prevent JFK from being assassinated. If, as the expert claims, Hoover sent the telex to protect himself from criticism, why did he not make sure it was kept on file and made available to the public? It cannot have been to prevent the public from knowing Oswald was secretly an FBI informant, because nothing in the telex indicated that.

In overview, the Walter telex most definitely is not proof that J. Edgar Hoover was behind the JFK assassination, and the claim that Hoover sent it to protect his reputation if and when JFK was murdered is speculative fantasy unsupported by facts.

But profound mystery still surrounds the Walter telex: Why didn't the FBI notify the Secret Service of the threat to President Kennedy, and why did the FBI do nothing to investigate the threat?

Donald E. Wilkes, Jr. is a Professor of Law Emeritus at the University of Georgia School of Law, where he taught for 40 years. He has published more than 100 articles in Flagpole. This is his 51st article on the JFK assassination.