

MEMORANDUM

May 10, 1996

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cc: Joe Freeman

From: Robert Skwirot, Michelle Seguin, Christopher Barger, Manuel
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Subject: Review of JFK Collection

As earlier memos have indicated, the CIA team has examined approximately 1/3 of the 63 boxes of the JFK collection. In addition, Michelle and other team members have viewed a number of files from the microfilm portion of the collection. This survey permits us to offer an overview of the collection and suggestions for review strategies.

OVERVIEW

- **COMPOSITION.** As Mary's April 26 memo outlines, the 63 boxes of the JFK collection contain records that CIA considered part of the investigation of the assassination, including, but not limited to, all records requested by or related to the HSCA and the various Committees and other investigative bodies. The microfilm on the other hand contains the complete files from which the HSCA extracted portions they considered of possible relevance to their investigation. The records from the 63 boxes fall within the time frame spanning the years from the Warren Commission through the HSCA. As we know, the collection is huge: one "box" may fill 6 or more grey archival boxes, and the microfilm part of the collection is even larger than the 63 boxes.
- **INDICES.** A number of aides are available which may help in our review of these documents:
 - A box by box survey of the JFK collection was done by CIA history staff in 1992. Though sketchy, this can help outline the contents of the JFK boxes.
 - A NARA index for the microfilm lists, by folder, the subject matter on the microfilm reels 1-71 that went to NARA. This should be helpful.
 - A CIA index for the microfilm, organized by reel and by subject is described by Barry as incomplete, inaccurate, and undependable. However, it is much more detailed than the NARA index, and it fills the gaps left by classified information that is not included in the Archive's list. CIA's index can be a valuable tool if its

limitations are understood.

ISSUES

- No organization can easily be discerned in the 63 boxes. The wide variety of subjects scattered throughout the collection will make an organized review strategy difficult to implement. Some broad issues jump out of this morass:
 - Easy issues for the Board. The JFK collection contains much Mexico City related material, material which can easily be addressed by the Board.
 - Duplicates present an opportunity and a challenge. Many duplicates of documents already reviewed by the Board can be found in JFK. Also, a document might appear a dozen times or more in throughout collection. Duplicates may be an easy issue that can allow the Board to clear a lot of documents if the staff can identify them.
 - Issues not yet addressed by the Board: Cuba is the most prominent but there are many others, such as the Garrison investigation and the CIA's U-2 detachment at Atsugi.
 - Documents needing coordination with other agencies.
 - “Bombs”: In boxes which are filled with documents that should be easily handled by the board, one extremely difficult document may lie hidden. Examples of such “bombs” include a long list of defectors to the Soviet Union and a history of a tap operation in Mexico City. (Note that the monthly operational reports still await us.)
- The microfilm presents special problems, since it contains much material which is not at all related to the assassination as well as files which may be particularly challenging for the Board.
 - 80 to 100 entire 201 files
 - approximately 20 personnel files
 - approximately 20 security files.
 - Cuba organization expense reports.

CIA's index to the microfilm offers some statistical information concerning their interpretation of the relevance issue. Though HRG considers this index inaccurate and would not want it to become part of the collection, the data from it provides a notion of how someone at the Agency at one time considered the relevance issue. Note the following entries:

- reel 51: 2242 total pages; 2127 released; 2242 relevant.
- reel 52: 2224 total pages; 1168 released; 1307 relevant; 1017 non-related.
- reel 54: 2164 total pages; 324 released; 145 relevant; 2019 non-related.

Though these numbers will probably not be the same after the Board's decisions, they demonstrate that, first, the number of pages at issue is daunting, and second, that the ratio of relevant to non-relevant pages may vary widely through the collection.

CIA'S CURRENT REVIEW

- CIA has begun to transfer the JFK collection to grey archival boxes. As of the end of April they had done the first thirty boxes.
- CIA has also begun to re-review (blue highlight) these documents. Approximately half

dozen boxes were re-reviewed by late April.

-The blue-highlighted documents have been pulled and readied for ARRB review. Documents in these early boxes now have NARA identification aides attached to them. Barry promises to send us the disks for the first five boxes soon.

-Documents have been "green banded" in the folders for consent release. In the two boxes seen at this stage of the process, 30-40% were so identified.

-Documents have been "white banded" to identify issues which need further internal CIA review. These appear to be the more difficult documents.

This review procedure appears to be the same one that was applied to the Oswald 201 file. We can conclude that CIA is proceeding with their re-review under the assumption that we will review the JFK collection in the same manner as the Oswald file. We can also see that the CIA's review process is selective. It skims the easy documents for consent releases and delays the more difficult documents from reaching the board. While this is probably just an issue of internal CIA coordination it should be considered in our review, as the more difficult documents may be those of highest public interest.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Our preview of the JFK collection has been useful, but continuing it would not be productive unless our work is directed toward goals more specific than becoming acquainted with the collection. A survey might uncover more "bombs," but such mine-sweeping is a duplication of the effort that CIA is doing internally. On the other hand, identifying the especially challenging documents could allow us to track CIA's review of these documents and insure that these documents are not missed in the review process. We might also identify documents of high public interest.
- The 63 boxes and the microfilm are different beasts requiring different treatments.
 - The boxes for the most part lend themselves to review similar to that applied to the Oswald 201 file; that is a box by box review. As noted, CIA is proceeding in this manner. However, the great size and the wide range of issues present an even greater challenge than the Oswald file.
 - Duplicates within the JFK collection and duplicates of documents in the Oswald 201 must be tracked and treated in the same manner. Barry has proposed a procedure by which the CIA will identify multiple copies of the same document so that the Board can handle all of these together.
 - New issues will present a challenge to the Board and to the staff. Staff members with expertise in specific topic areas will be extremely valuable. Briefing papers or staff briefings of the Board may be necessary.
 - Difficult issues whenever possible, should not be set aside but handled as they are

encountered in the collection and the staff should draw the Board's attention to those documents which are most sensitive and which might hold potential for appeal. Our hope is that the review process will continue to become more streamlined and that the easy issues will not occupy the Board's time thus allowing the Board to focus on the more challenging and interesting documents.

-The microfilm and its large blocks of material unrelated to the assassination requires different treatment. We hope that unrelated material can be identified and addressed in bulk. We suggest bringing two or three representative 201 files to the Board to acquaint the Board members with the issues and to allow the staff to get an impression of how the Board is inclined to approach the relevance question. Some staff members cling to the hope that a uniform policy can be developed which can be applied to all 201 files; others are concerned that the uniqueness of each file precludes this possibility.

- As a review strategy, we recommend tackling the boxes and the microfilm simultaneously. For example, in our review of the boxes, if we encounter documents from a 201 file, a security file, or a personnel file, we review related materials in the microfilm at the same time. CIA may not be prepared for this approach since there are no RIFs for the microfilm and HRG is currently devoting its efforts to the boxes. But simultaneous review offers the hope that both parts of this huge collection can be addressed during the life of the Board. Thus we hope that CIA will be persuaded of the need to implement this method.