

DRAFT -- 3/2/95

ASSASSINATION RECORDS REVIEW BOARD

Secret Service Briefing Paper

March 6, 1995

This paper briefly summarizes the conclusions of official investigations regarding the performance of the Secret Service as to the assassination of President Kennedy, and the present state of the Secret Service's compliance with the President John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act (ARCA).

I. *WARREN COMMISSION CONCLUSIONS*

The Warren Commission directed its most severe criticism of the Secret Service at the agency's methods for gathering intelligence on potential threats to the President. It also identified several specific shortcomings in the Secret Service's planning for, and performance during, President Kennedy's trip to Dallas.

In 1963, the division of the Secret Service responsible for intelligence regarding threats to the President was the Protective Research Section (PRS). Due to limited resources, the PRS largely depended on information provided by state and local law-enforcement agencies and by other federal agencies (chiefly the FBI). The Warren Commission found that the PRS's intelligence-gathering arrangements in 1963 were "seriously deficient."¹

¹Warren Commission Report, p. 429.

Its requests for information from other agencies, as well as its internal procedures, unduly focused on overt -- often "crank" -- threats to the President, to the near-exclusion of other indications of danger.² The failure of the Secret Service to develop practical, specific criteria for persons posing a threat to the President, and insufficient liaison between the Secret Service and the FBI, led to the failure to identify Lee Harvey Oswald as a threat during the President's trip to Dallas.³

²Warren Commission Report, pp. 429-33.

³Warren Commission Report, pp. 443-44.

The Warren Commission found that other aspects of Secret Service protection during the Dallas trip were "in most respects . . . well conceived and ably executed."⁴ In particular, "the Secret Service agents in the motorcade who were immediately responsible for the President's safety reacted promptly at the time the shots were fired."⁵

Despite this positive conclusion, the Warren Commission identified several "shortcomings" of the Secret Service's protection of President Kennedy in his trip to Dallas, including: failure to provide supervision of, and written instructions for, the special agent in charge of advance work;⁶ failure specifically to communicate and document expectations for local law enforcement;⁷ failure to inspect buildings along the motorcade route;⁸ and drinking by special agents in the early morning hours of November 22, in violation of Secret Service regulations.⁹

II. CONCLUSIONS OF THE HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE ON ASSASSINATIONS

The House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA) agreed with

⁴Warren Commission Report, p. 445.

⁵Warren Commission Report, p. 454.

⁶Warren Commission Report, pp. 444-45.

⁷Warren Commission Report, p. 446-47.

⁸Warren Commission Report, pp. 447-49.

⁹Warren Commission Report, pp. 449-52.

the basic conclusions of the Warren Commission regarding the performance of the Secret Service.¹⁰ In addition, it found that the Secret Service had not adequately analyzed and disseminated information already in its possession regarding significant threats to the President during his trip to Miami and proposed trip to Chicago in November 1963. "Consequently, [the information] was not put to use with respect either to a protective investigation or to physical protection of President Kennedy in advance of the trip to Dallas."¹¹ Because these threats in Chicago and Miami involved the use of high-powered rifles, the HSCA believed that relaying this information to the special agents responsible for the Dallas trip may have prompted greater attention to securing multi-story buildings along the motorcade route.¹² The HSCA also criticized the special agents assigned to the motorcade for paying insufficient attention to the risk of sniper fire.¹³

III. SECRET SERVICE COMPLIANCE WITH ARCA

According to the National Archives, the Secret Service turned over some assassination-related documents to the Archives shortly after the HSCA disbanded. These documents are now available to the public, with some redactions and withholdings, as part of the JFK Collection. The Secret Service additionally released to the public a few documents in 1993,

¹⁰HSCA Report, p. 229.

¹¹HSCA Report, p. 230.

¹²HSCA Report, p. 234.

¹³HSCA Report, p. 234.

but apparently none of these documents was originated by the Secret Service.

The Analysis and Review staff has reviewed the publicly available Secret Service documents in the JFK Collection. All of these documents appear to have been produced from the Secret Service's "official case file" on the assassination of President Kennedy. Moreover, they all appear to have been produced from the headquarters file for that case, although the reports clearly suggest that there are (or were) additional pertinent records in many Secret Service field offices. The Review Board staff will pursue the present existence and location of corresponding field office files.

Furthermore, it is evident that the Secret Service possessed many assassination records that did not become part of the "official case file." For example, the HSCA requested from the Secret Service information concerning threats against President Kennedy, documentation concerning other presidential trips, and training and operations manuals regarding presidential protection. A review of correspondence between the HSCA and the Secret Service suggests that the Secret Service provided much of the requested information to the HSCA, while responding that the rest was not "currently maintained" or "presently located" in its files. Pursuant to ARCA, the Archives in 1993 referred more than 400 documents to the Secret Service for its review. The Archives advises Analysis and Review staff members that, to date, the Secret Service has not reviewed and returned any of these materials.

The Analysis and Review staff has reviewed the Legislative Archives's documentation of referrals to the Secret Service. It appears that, although

some of the referred documents have already been published in the HSCA appendices or released as part of the "official case file" in the JFK Collection, many other referred documents have not been made public. The Review Board staff expects to discuss the need to respond to these referrals with appropriate agency personnel.

Members of the Analysis and Review staff have also examined documentation of transfer of Secret Service records to the Federal Records Center in Suitland, Maryland in order to identify transfers potentially involving assassination records. A portion of the documents so identified have been retrieved and preliminarily reviewed. It appears that some of these documents may be responsive to ARCA requirements.

In conclusion, it appears that the Secret Service has failed not only to conduct a thorough search of its records as required by the Act, but also even to review a good percentage of those records identified by others and referred to the Secret Service.