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John Mohr, 86, Hoover Confidant and Ally at F.B.I., Dies

By ROBERT McG. THOMAS Jr.

John P. Mohr, the crusty, poker-playing F.B.I. official who became a member of J. Edgar Hoover's inner circle and later played a central role in the mysterious disappearance of Hoover's legendary files on politicians, died last Saturday at a hospital near his home in Arlington, Va. He was 86 and had retired in 1972 as assistant to the director.

His wife, Stella, said the cause was renal failure.

In the last dozen years of Hoover's almost half-century reign as Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Mr. Mohr was one of a handful of bureau officials who had his ear and trust.

Mr. Mohr was occasionally identified as the bureau's No. 3 man, behind Hoover's inseparable companion, the associate director, Clyde Tolson. But in an organization that had room for only one overweening ego, Mr. Mohr was shrewd enough to remain in the shadows.

It was not until after Hoover's death, in May 1972, that the full dimension of his position began to be known beyond the bureau's fifth-floor headquarters at the Department of Justice. It was Mr. Mohr, for example, who was chosen by Mr. Tolson to notify the acting Attorney General, Richard Kleindienst, of Hoover's death. It was Mr. Mohr who was given the responsibility of sealing the Director's personal office, and it was he who supervised the funeral arrangements.

To those who had known him it was hardly surprising that Mr. Mohr carried out each of the duties with the same scrupulous efficiency and discretion that had marked his rise through the F.B.I.

Mr. Mohr was a plumber's son who was born in West New York, N.J., and grew up in Kingston, N.Y. He went to Washington as a football hero, won a scholarship to American University there and later earned a law degree at night school.



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John P. Mohr

A crucial figure in the disappearance of secret files after Hoover's death.

Along the way, he became so smitten with a Government secretary, Stella Morris, that when he could not wangle an introduction, he introduced himself and promptly asked her to a dance. "I knew the answer was yes, but I made him wait a few days," she said yesterday, recalling that the dance was on Nov. 3, 1934.

After their marriage four months later, Mrs. Mohr continued working to put her husband through law school, but he never practiced. In 1939, while working at a low-level job in the Justice Department, he learned that the F.B.I. was desperate for qualified agents in the opening months of World War II and promptly

signed up to be a G-man, as he told his friends.

If Mr. Mohr had dreamed of a career tracking down desperadoes, he was soon disappointed. After just a few months in the San Francisco and Los Angeles field offices, he was summoned back to headquarters.

In an era when a casual criticism of bureau operations could lead to banishment to a remote field office, it was a tribute to Mr. Mohr's instincts for survival and his aptitude for flattery, as well as to his proficiency, that he not only remained in Washington for two decades but also advanced steadily.

He might be brusque at times and give vent to sudden anger, but partly through the camaraderie of regular poker parties at the Blue Ridge Club near Harper's Ferry, W.Va., Mr. Mohr cemented relations with many of his colleagues and powerful outsiders, like James Jesus Angleton of the Central Intelligence Agency.

A budget specialist who frequently accompanied Hoover to Congressional hearings and who was a master at hiding secret bureau expenditures, Mr. Mohr was considered a logical successor to the Director. But Hoover had created such fear during his long and autocratic reign that President Richard M. Nixon deliberately passed over insiders to pick L. Patrick Gray, a Justice Department official, to head the bureau.

Mr. Mohr and his colleagues succeeded in driving Mr. Gray out within a few months, but not before the new Director had forced Mr. Mohr to resign.

Even then, as later investigations concluded, Mr. Mohr continued to receive an array of illicit favors that he had enjoyed as a high bureau official, including regular servicing of his car.

And no wonder. In the wave of investigations that followed Hoover's death, Mr. Mohr's tight-lipped loyalty became manifest. When Mr. Kleindienst, for example, concerned about preserving Hoover's secret

files, ordered Mr. Mohr to seal the Director's personal office, Mr. Mohr did so, without mentioning that the Director, who had eight other offices crammed with files, kept none in his personal office. (He also repeatedly insisted there were no secret files, blithely explaining later that the files on politicians were not "secret," because he knew all about them.)

By the time the truth became apparent, truckloads of files had been taken to the basement recreation room of Hoover's 30th Street house. There, various witnesses have said, Hoover's longtime secretary, Helen Gandy, spent weeks poring over them under Mr. Mohr's supervision. She insisted the files were all personal papers with no relevance to the F.B.I., but her account was given little credence, especially after neighbors told of seeing Mr. Mohr and others, including a man a neighbor recognized as Mr. Angleton, carting many boxes away before the remainder of the files were shipped off for shredding.

Mr. Mohr later testified that he had taken only some cases of "spoiled wine."

Within days of Hoover's death, Mr. Mohr obtained power of attorney from Mr. Tolson, who had suffered a series of strokes and resigned after a day as acting director, moving into the 30th Street house he had inherited along with the bulk of the Hoover estate. When Mr. Tolson died three years later, Mr. Mohr was his executor. That became a matter of some embarrassment after the will, which left \$20,000 to Mr. Mohr, was challenged by relatives of Mr. Tolson. After an F.B.I. secretary testified that she had forged Mr. Tolson's signature at Mr. Mohr's behest, the matter was settled out of court.

In addition to his wife, he is survived by a son, Richard, of Herndon, Va.; a daughter, Jeanne Scott of Clifton, Va.; three brothers, Phillip, of Cincinnati, Paul, of Bellevue, Wash., and Chester, of Ocala, Fla., and four grandchildren.