

Things Start to Go Wrong

In the early 1950's there emerged the phenomenon of the Bureau clerk. These were young men without the education prerequisites brought in to the Identification Division for the most part and sent off to earn an accounting degree from such dubious institutions as Southeastern University in Washington, D.C. They then became Special Agents and earned a salary they could not hope to approach outside the FBI. Reached at an early age, they became true believers in the cult of Hoover.⁷ Jealous of the more competent professionals, and unwilling to disagree with Hoover on anything,⁸ as they rose administratively by currying favor through flattery, the Bureau started to decline.

Hoover's assets, however, continued to increase. The Crime Records Division of the FBI is without doubt one of the finest public relations organizations ever put together.⁹ It has a legitimate purpose. The extraordinary reputation of the FBI and its agents, fostered by the Crime Records Division with its motion pictures, books, magazine articles, television and radio shows, special program, press and Congressional contacts, mean that an FBI agent will be given information by a citizen that the citizen would not entrust to any other agency. When the FBI agent says the information will be kept in confidence, he is believed. The media impact is such that when a citizen is confronted with a real FBI agent, the agent is at a tremendous psychological advantage.

But here, too, things started to go wrong. More and more the Crime Records Division spent its time building up and protecting the reputation of Hoover. Hoover and the Bureau became anonymous. To attack one was to attack the other. So long as the Crime Records Division could keep Hoover away from the press, it could work wonders. But, contrary to the widely held impression, Hoover is not a reticent man. In recent years he has become even more of a hip-shooter; lately even departing the carefully prepared scripts for his Congressional appearances. Thus, the Legion

⁷ And competitive ritual sycophants, baking cakes for Hoover's birthday; soliciting ever more flowery service club testimonials, etc.

⁸ The most absurd manifestation of which led to a rewriting of the history of the Trojan War. For a speech on communism, a draft sent to Hoover for approval compared the U.S. Communist Party with the legendary Trojan Horse. The draft came back with the marginal notation in blue ink, "They're not horses, they're snakes!—H." The draft was "corrected" and it was born the Trojan Snake.

⁹ By Louie B. Nichols, who went on to become Vice President of Sweeney Industries. After Nichols left the FBI, Hoover remarked, "I never want another man to have such power in this organization again."

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