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WASHINGTON — New evidence has come to light that the FBI is trafficking in private information about public figures.

A derogatory report on House Democratic Leader Hale Boggs, including the allegation that he drinks heavily, has been traced to FBI sources.

This was the inspiration, it has been suggested, for Deputy Attorney General Richard Kleindienst's crack on television that Boggs must have been either "sick or...not in possession of his faculties" when he accused the FBI of tapping congressional phones.

Kleindienst told us he had heard the rumors about Boggs's drinking but not from the FBI. The only FBI report he had seen on Boggs, Kleindienst said, concerned the Congressman's alleged role in helping Baltimore contractor Victor Frenkil get the contract for constructing a House garage.

The Deputy Attorney General said he had reviewed this report about 18 months ago and had joined in the decision that "there was no evidence to warrant prosecution."

The FBI rundown on Boggs, according to a competent source who has seen it and is in a position to know its origin, is written on plain paper without any FBI identifying marks. In the past, we have seen similar anonymous reports that we knew came out of the FBI.

TITILLATING TIDBITS — It has been the FBI's practice to collect titillating tidbits about prominent people, which turn up in the course of other investigations.

The FBI learned from its wiretaps at the Soviet Embassy, for instance, that ex-Attorney General Ramsey Clark had telephoned Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin last November about possibly going to Russia to observe the trial of 12 Russian Jews who allegedly had plotted to hijack a plane to fly them to Israel.

J. Edgar Hoover immediately sent a secret message about Clark's plans, quoting a "highly reliable source," on the FBI teletype to the White House, Pentagon, State Department and Central Intelligence Agency.

Perhaps the most notorious FBI report that has come to our

attention was a memo to ex-President Lyndon Johnson on the sex life of the late Dr. Martin Luther King. A White House aide showed us the FBI memo, dated Feb. 20, 1968.

It quoted a "confidential informant" who said Dr. King had been having an "illicit affair" with the "wife of a prominent Negro dentist in Los Angeles."

Continued the memo: "The source related an incident which occurred some time ago in a New York City hotel, where King was intoxicated at a small gathering. King threatened to leap from the 13th floor window of the hotel if this woman would not say she loved him."

The FBI, of course, has no business investigating King's sex life, Boggs's drinking habits, Clark's travel plans or the private lives of any other public figures.

PEANUT BUTTER CAPER — Hidden in secret Pentagon files, among incidents the Army has hushed up, is the story of the peanut butter caper.

It happened a year ago when Maj. Gen. Herron Maples was in charge of peanut butter matters for the Army in Europe.

He was determined to keep his favorite brand, Circus peanut butter, on commissary shelves. But he was overruled by a cost-conscious Pentagon which discovered Piknik peanut butter was cheaper.

(The cost overrun for the Circus brand, it was carefully calculated, came to 21 cents extra for a three-pound jar.)

Maples registered his compliance in a formal message that he sent to the Pentagon over the "front channel." But he put another secret message on the "back channel," which is reserved for general officers.

Only the most sensitive secrets are marked for the "eyes only" of Pentagon insiders. This was how Maples stamped this message, which was hand-carried from the Pentagon communications center to the Army Support Services.

"I will withdraw agreement," the two-star peanut butter epicurean advised. Thus he defied Pentagon directive and continued to stock the more expensive peanut spread, keeping the record a deep military secret.

His "eyes only" message, dated March 12, 1970, offered this addendum: "If after we have tried (other) peanut butter for a period and we see an impact on our sales on peanut butter Circus, we will then reconsider."

At 21 cents more per giant jar, Maples's manipulation has cost peanut butter eaters in the European Command thousands of dollars. The word reaching the Pentagon was that he acted upon the urging of food brokers handling the Circus brand.

Footnote: Maples also informed the Pentagon of his wife's feeling that "Formula 409" cleanser in the half-gallon size should be featured on commissary shelves. With disregard again for the Pentagon's expensive studies, he declared arbitrarily that "great savings to our customers" would result from stocking "Formula 409." We tried unsuccessfully to reach Maples by trans-Pacific phone in Vietnam where he is now handling home-cleanser and peanut-butter problems for Gen. Creighton Abrams.