

**FIVE**

# *Flacking for the Bureau*

**T**HE FBI'S MAIN THRUST was not investigations but public relations and propaganda to glorify Hoover. Everyone who worked in the bureau, especially those of us in high places around him, bear our share of the blame.

Flacking for the FBI was part of every agent's job from his first day. In fact, "making a good first impression" was a necessary prerequisite for being hired as a special agent in the first place. Bald-headed men, for example, were never hired as agents because Hoover thought a bald head made a bad impression. No matter if the man involved was a member of Phi Beta Kappa or a much-decorated marine, or both. Appearances were terribly important to Hoover, and special agents had to have the right look and wear the right clothes.

One day Hoover was going up to his office in the elevator when a young man, a clerk, wearing a red vest under his suit jacket got on with him. And as if the red vest wasn't bad enough, the poor fellow's face was broken out. As soon as Hoover got to his office, the order went out to find the young man with pimples wearing a red vest, fire him, and discipline the man who recommended him for employment. Though a bald-headed man wouldn't be hired as an agent, an employee who later lost his hair wasn't fired but was kept out of the public eye.

Nathan Ferris, who came from the family that invented the Ferris Wheel, began his long career with the FBI with a full head of hair but was bald by the time he worked for me at headquarters as the man in charge of all our foreign offices. One day in the early 1960s, Nate came to me to say that his fondest wish was to close out his FBI career in our Mexico City office where he had once worked. Nate and his wife, who was Latin, both loved Mexico so much that he

was willing to accept a subordinate position just to go back.

It was fine with me and I told him so, but there was one problem. The men in our foreign offices were always on display, meeting people, speaking in public—in short, spreading Hoover's public relations message abroad. "Nate," I said to him, "you know what the policy is on bald heads. How am I going to get you a job in Mexico?" Ferris admitted that he had a problem, but he wanted to try anyway, so I okayed Ferris's request and sent it on to Al Belmont, who was the number three man at the time. Belmont called me as soon as he got my memo.

"Why the hell," he wanted to know, "did you send me this memorandum on Ferris? He's bald; Hoover will never approve him." When I explained to Al how much the job meant to Ferris, he agreed to try to push the transfer through, but we both knew the odds were against Nate.

Al called me a day or two later, laughing like hell. "I finally put something over on that no-good bastard Tolson," he said. Tolson, who was Hoover's closest aide as well as his closest, indeed only, friend, saw everything that went to Hoover and he met with Belmont when he received Nate's request for a transfer to Mexico.

"Belmont," Tolson said to Al, "I seem to remember that Nate Ferris is bald."

"Oh, no, Mr. Tolson," Al told me he said, "you're thinking of another fellow," and named another agent who was totally bald, even balder, than Nate was.

Tolson looked hard at Belmont, and then his face lit up. "You're right," he said, "that is who I'm thinking of," and he approved the transfer and passed the request on to Hoover, who was the last hurdle. Hoover had a rule that no man was to be sent out to a foreign office without a personal interview with the director. But Ferris was requesting his transfer at the director's busiest time of the year, just before his annual testimony before the House Appropriations Committee. As this appearance determined the FBI's budget, Hoover prepared for it very carefully. So Nate and I decided to try to get around the personal interview by writing Hoover a letter. We flattered him for about a page and a half, saying Nate knew how busy he



was and felt he couldn't possibly take up any of his valuable time and was willing to forgo his interview because of that, crossed our fingers, and sent it off.

To our amazement, Hoover agreed and approved Nate's transfer to Mexico without seeing him. It was the first time he ever did that. But Nate still had one more thing to worry about. He had to come back to see Hoover and Tolson after two years in Mexico for a review. But he had two years to think of a way to get around that situation.

Two years after his transfer, Nate showed up in Washington. His head was still bald but he was loaded down with silver gifts from Mexico. When he went in to see Tolson, he spread about seventy-five dollars worth of silver on his desk. When he went in to see Hoover, he spread about a hundred dollars worth of silver trinkets on his desk. Both Hoover and Tolson were so busy looking at all their presents that they never noticed his bald head, and Nate returned to Mexico a happy man.

Hoover's insistence on good appearances was a ridiculous policy. One of my former students from the days when I taught school in Bolton, a man called Randall, decided that he wanted to join the FBI and asked if I could help. He was a smart young man with a fine character and I was delighted to recommend him. But he was turned down. The man who interviewed him thought that he was too much of a farm boy for the FBI, that he wasn't "polished" enough, that he lacked the maniacal gleam in the eye that FBI recruiters seem to value so highly. I was furious when I heard and I went right to Hoover with it. He agreed to give the young man another chance with a new interviewer.

I made it damn clear to the interviewer that he'd better not turn Randall down. He was accepted and graduated high in his class. I followed Randall's career and noted that he was getting high performance ratings from his superiors. After a few years in the bureau Randall called to say that he wanted to speak with me in person. The next morning he came to my office and said he wanted to quit. He had been assigned to the bureau in Cincinnati and told me that they had so many men there that they were falling over each other. Randall said that when the office there put a man under surveillance that

needed just one or even two agents, as many as five men were stuffed into one car and their subjects very quickly caught on that they were being followed. Randall said, "I want to work. I want to do something. What I don't want is to be superfluous and waste a lot of time and the rest of it doing P. R. for the bureau." I told Randall, "I can do two things. I can clean that office out and reassign you, or I can accept your resignation." I added, "Don't worry, it won't hurt my position if you resign." And he did. It was just one more case of losing good men to inefficiency.

Most SACs overstock their offices because Hoover kept the FBI expanding. A teletype would come into an SAC asking "How many new agents will your office take?" The SAC would look over his office and think, "I could probably get rid of three men and not miss them and now they want to know how many more I need." And he'd take what he was sent.

At the heart of Hoover's massive public relations operation were the fifty-nine FBI field offices whose territory took in every village, town, city, and county in America. Each day, out of these field offices streamed eight thousand agents going into every state, city, and town, talking to and becoming friendly with ordinary citizens from all walks of life. People working in the judiciary system on local, state, and federal levels were especially singled out by agents for the establishment of close, influential relationships. Judges, district attorneys, special prosecutors, and even supporting office personnel were developed as allies of the bureau. Important organizations—patriotic, civic, fraternal, and others—were also treated for development by our men. Some people became our informants, others our apologists and supporters of influence.

The real job of the special agent in charge of each of these field offices was public relations. The SAC was out of the office a lot, visiting the "right" people, those who molded public opinion in his territory: newspaper publishers and editors, owners and managers of radio and television stations, corporate executives, and church officials, to name a few. The SAC also plugged the bureau line day in and day out at police headquarters, City Hall, Masonic Lodge meetings, Jaycee luncheons, even at the local college or university.



In the 1940s and 1950s everyone at the FBI knew that Hoover had a desire to get honorary degrees from colleges and universities. It turned into quite a racket because whoever would get Hoover, say, an honorary doctor of law degree would get a favored post or at least a letter of commendation with a \$250 cash bonus. For example, the agent would go to his own college, speak with the dean or president, arrange it if he could, and then make sure Hoover knew, by means of a letter, something like:

Dear Mr. Hoover:

Yesterday afternoon I stopped by at my college to discuss an FBI applicant with the President. While I was discussing this applicant the President said to me, "I have long thought that your director, J. Edgar Hoover, is undoubtedly one of the greatest men that this country ever turned out, and I've been thinking that the very least we could do is to confer on him an honorary degree, and would you please convey to him my view."

Hoover always accepted, and the agent always got the post he wanted, a letter of commendation, and a cash award. But after about fifteen years of this, Hoover began to lose interest in degrees and the racket stopped.

Because of this network of field offices, and thanks to the scores of contacts made and maintained by the special agents in charge, Hoover was able to place "news" stories—invented and written in the bureau, really nothing more than press releases, puff pieces for the FBI—in newspapers all over the country. Our strength was in the small dailies and weeklies, and with hundreds of these papers behind him, Hoover didn't give a damn about papers like the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*. Most of the men who run small local papers are used to printing stories about grange suppers on the front page; imagine how grateful they are for a story from the FBI. Of course, scores of Washington-based reporters printed stories we gave them too, and they usually printed them under their own bylines. Some of them lived off us. It was an easy way to make a living. They were our press prostitutes.

We also planted stories critical of some of Hoover's favorite targets, the CIA for instance. And of course we placed stories about Hoover's congressional critics. A negative story which appears in a

newspaper published in a congressman's home district hurts him more than any article in the *Washington Post*. I remember that the FBI helped to defeat Governor Sawyer of Nevada by giving some damaging information on Sawyer to his opponent, who saw to it that the stories made the local papers. What sin had Sawyer committed? He hadn't cooperated with one of Hoover's investigations. But whether the articles were negative or positive, Hoover always remembered the local editor who printed them, and thanked him for his "support" in a personal letter.

Personal letters were one of Hoover's favorite weapons in his public relations arsenal. Over Hoover's signature, we wrote "personal" letters to everybody from children in the sixth grade to members of senior citizens' clubs. We were the greatest letter-writing bureau in the history of the United States. Letters went by the thousands to the Jaycees, the newspaper editors, the movers and shakers so carefully cultivated as FBI contacts by our agents out in the field. These field agents were also responsible for reading all the newspapers published in their territory and clipping any article or letter to the editor that mentioned the FBI or Hoover. Any favorable mention of either in any newspaper in America meant a personal letter of thanks from Hoover.

Letters were also sent to people who wrote to the bureau asking questions about the FBI, and especially about J. Edgar Hoover. Did the director take cream in his coffee or did he drink it black? How does he like his steak cooked? What kind of ties does he prefer? Shoes? Suits? The American public wanted to know.

We had two full-time desks operating this correspondence mill. They were made up of supervisors, regular agents, assistants, clerks, and secretaries. For every letter received, the sender, the organization, and its members were checked out in the FBI's central files before the letter was answered. Thousands and thousands of man-hours spent. Untold millions of the taxpayers' money squandered.

The agents who actually answered these questions and wrote the personal letters for Hoover worked for a small division of the FBI misleadingly called Crime Records. This division handled public relations for the bureau, and in doing so dealt with the press and with congressmen and senators. As Hoover didn't believe in form letters,



any agent assigned to Crime Records had a full-time job. Generally, the letters were fairly innocuous: "It has come to my attention that you wrote a letter praising the FBI . . ." followed closely by "I hope I continue to deserve your confidence," and Hoover's signature. But some of them could be tricky.

The director must have once mentioned that he liked popovers, because he got quite a few letters asking for his popover recipe. An agent named Russell Asch, with whom I used to go fishing in Virginia, was in charge of the correspondence desk when one of the popover letters came in. He had already answered so many routine popover letters that he knew the recipe by heart, or so he thought, and he dictated it from memory. Before it was sent out, the letter with the popover recipe was checked by Asch's section chief, by Assistant Director Nichols's assistant, by Nichols himself, and finally by Helen Gandy, one of Hoover's secretaries. Miss Gandy called Asch after reading his letter to ask if he had gone to the file for the recipe. Asch, who felt a sudden sinking feeling in his stomach when he heard her question, had to admit that he had dictated the recipe from memory. Miss Gandy told Asch to get the file with the recipe and bring it to her. When Asch located the file (which took an hour or two), Miss Gandy pointed out that the recipe called for five *teaspoons* of baking powder, not five *tablespoons* as Asch had written.

Asch knew he was in for it then. Miss Gandy reported his mistake to Hoover, who sent him a letter of censure which became part of his permanent record. A letter of censure from Hoover meant that Asch's pending promotion, and the additional income that went with it, was held up. Asch told me that when he got home that night, his wife said that she had been reading stories about the FBI in the *Washington Post* in connection with some espionage cases and some big bank robberies. Was he working on these cases, she asked. "Good God," he said to me later, "what could I tell Polly? Could I tell her I was sending out popover recipes?"

The name of everyone who wrote a letter to the FBI, whether it was a request for a popover recipe or a serious statement on law enforcement, was thoroughly checked out. Hoover relied on his files absolutely, and he also checked the file of everyone who came to visit him in his office. Because of this, Hoover was able to flatter his guests

by making personal remarks to them, or bringing up subjects about which they had some expertise. He would mention golf if his visitor was a golfer or football if the visitor had played in college. The public relations never stopped.

Hoover once got a letter from a minister who said that he had been praising Hoover in his sermons for fourteen years until he heard that Hoover spent a lot of time at the racetrack and actually bet on the horses. The agent in Crime Records who answered the letter started by thanking the minister for his support over the years, and then he wrote that it was true that "I" (Hoover) do go to the racetrack. I've loved horses since I was a boy, the agent wrote, and I love to watch them run. A few paragraphs later, the agent slipped in a sentence or two explaining that Hoover did place an occasional two-dollar bet so as not to embarrass his companions, but that his primary interest was the improvement of the breed. The letter must have worked because we didn't hear from the minister again, but it was pure invention. Hoover did make a few bets at the two-dollar window, but that was just for show. He had agents assigned to accompany him to the track place his real bets at the hundred-dollar window, and when he won he was a pleasure to work with for days. He and Tolson used to be driven from the courtyard of the Department of Justice to the track in a black bullet-proof car. Although Hoover always told people that he and Tolson were going off to work on a case, it was common knowledge that they were actually rushing to make the first race.

With all these letters coming in and going out, Hoover had a huge mailing list and he sent out thousands of Christmas cards every year. To Hoover, taking a man's name off the mailing list was dire punishment indeed. When Hoover got a letter from a doctor in Baltimore who had been an active supporter of the FBI for years complaining that the John Dillinger exhibit at bureau headquarters hadn't been changed in twelve years and needed modernizing, Hoover retaliated by taking the doctor off his mailing list. I'm sure he believed that he was ruining the doctor's life by doing so.

Aside from writing letters and handling the press, the other main function of the Crime Records Division was dealing with Congress. There were two ways we could help senators and congressmen: we could give them useful information and we could cater to their needs,



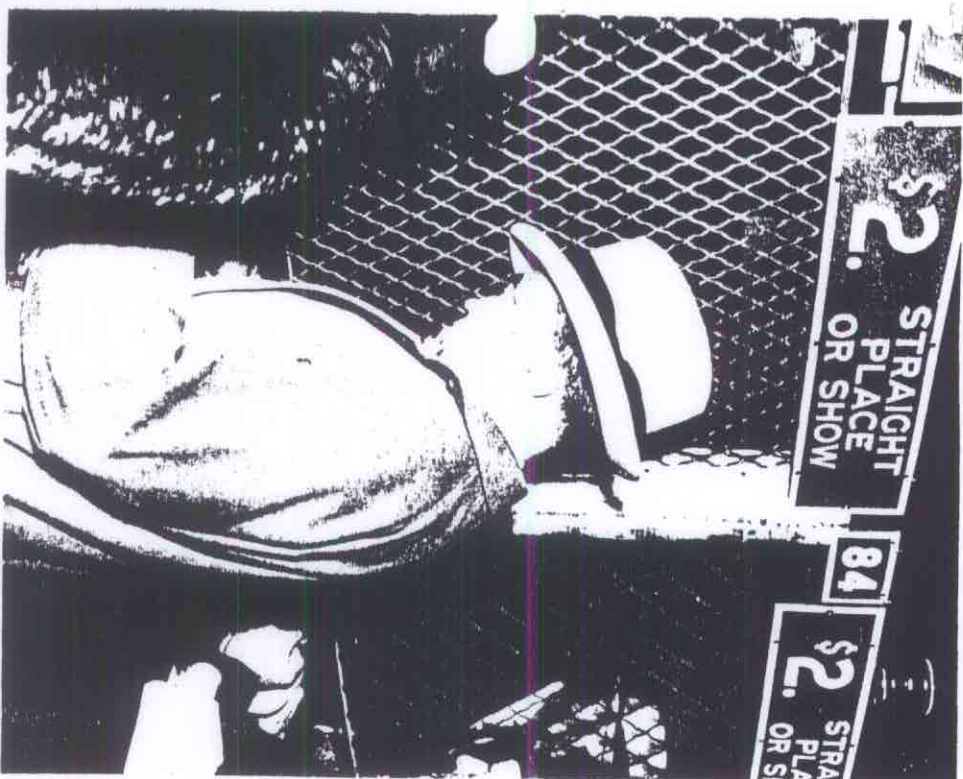
5 or small. We gave them information on their opponents, of course, and thanks to the FBI network of field offices which blanketed the country we were sometimes able to tell an incumbent who was running to run against him before his own people knew. We dealt in more personal information, too. If a senator heard about a son's drug problem from us before the story got into the papers, he'd be mighty grateful. It was unlikely that that senator would ever stand up in the Senate to criticize the FBI. In fact, if the FBI was being criticized, we'd probably get up and defend it. It gave Hoover his leverage.

Crime Records also dealt in services to congressmen and senators, especially when they were traveling abroad. Some of these services were minimal, providing limousines, for instance, complete with an agent behind the wheel to do the driving, or arranging discounts in the local shops. But some were of considerable importance and delicacy. We set up introductions and interviews with key members of foreign governments for many a senator. After a few trips to Europe, a senator could develop a nice warm feeling for the Bureau, which is just what Hoover had in mind.

What did Hoover get in exchange from some of these grateful men? In his maiden speech in Congress, Gerald Ford, who had run for his seat with the blessing of the local FBI, recommended that Hoover get a raise. When Congressman John J. Rooney of Brooklyn, New York, was asked to vote for a raise for the director, he tried to increase the amount. Once a year there was an event called the Congressional Dinner at which former FBI men who were serving in the House of Representatives gave speeches honoring their former boss.

On occasion, Hoover would extend the services of the FBI to business executives. We helped some of the top men from Warner Brothers by setting up meetings for them with foreign political leaders and businessmen; they got the same treatment that some elected officials did. All courtesy of the FBI, all paid for by the taxpayer. Hoover bragged that he had the motion picture studio under his thumb.

When Hoover's book *Masters of Deceit* came out, the agents in our field offices were put to work drumming up sales. Of course, just as Hoover didn't write the thousands of letters that went out under



Hoover, a regular racetrack habitué, would be seen making two-dollar bets while FBI agents placed other bets for him at the hundred-dollar window. Acme Photo

his name, he didn't write the book either. As a matter of fact, I was the one who suggested the book to Hoover in the first place, and the research and the writing were done by five or six of us at the bureau. Once the book was published, the real work began. Every office



n each state was expected to sell it. Agents all over the country made public appearances promoting it at bookstores and on local television and radio programs. Agents who were responsible for big book sales received bonuses, and agents who sold an exceptionally large number of books got raises. Our men in the field also placed reviews of the book which had been written by agents at FBI headquarters with their contacts at local newspapers and magazines. Needless to say, the reviews were excellent. We used to joke in the bureau, "*Masters of Deceit*, written by the Master of Deceit who never even read it."

I was assigned by Hoover to make a speech to boost the book to a group called the Citizens' Committee of Cincinnati. We used to talk a lot about Communist front groups in the 1950s—the Citizens' Committee of Cincinnati was an FBI front group. Its sole purpose was to sell Hoover's book. When I arrived to give my speech, I noticed some panel trucks parked outside the building. An agent with the Cincinnati office told me that the trucks were filled with copies of *Masters of Deceit* and that every member of the audience would get a free copy of the book just for showing up. The purchase of the books had been financed by a millionaire named Evan Rhodes, a well-meaning man who was being used by Hoover as the committee's figurehead.

On the stage were two American flags blowing wildly in the wind created by offstage fans. The mayor of Cincinnati, members of the council and a former Miss America were on stage too. The mayor got up and thanked everyone for coming and then went into a long, praising speech about how wonderful it was that one of the greatest citizens of Ohio had financed at great personal expense the purchase of the book *Masters of Deceit*, written by one of the greatest men in the country, J. Edgar Hoover. The audience jumped to their feet and applauded. When the noise died down I gave my required speech on national security and was about to leave the platform when one of the writers of the Scripps-Howard newspapers came up to me, all taken up by the moment, and said, "I'd like to do something for Mr. Hoover, too. What should I do?" Mason, the Cincinnati SAC who was standing next to me, didn't miss a beat: Mason said, "If I were you I'd write a personal letter to Mr. Hoover telling him that you were here today and what a wonderful day it was and that you and your newspa-

per want to be of assistance to him in every possible way." The fellow from Scripps-Howard stopped and said, "Fine, but what do I do—just send it to Washington?" Mason grabbed the ball again. He said, "I'll tell you what to do. Tomorrow morning I'll come over to your office and dictate a letter for you and all you'll have to do is sign it." By God, when I got back to Washington I found the letter that Mason dictated and it was signed by the Scripps-Howard executive. It was an incredible operation and it took place all over the country.

Naturally, with the awesome power of the FBI behind it, *Masters of Deceit* became a bestseller. The FBI could make a bestseller out of a calculus textbook. Being somewhat naive at the time, as one of the six men who worked like hell to put the book together I wrote a memo recommending that the considerable proceeds go to the Damon Runyon Fund or to the American Heart Association or to some charity of that nature. In response, I got a call from an agent assigned to Tolson's office saying that my memo had not been "favorably received," and I was told that the director alone would decide how best to use the royalties. I was even more astonished a few years later when I found out that Hoover had kept most of the book's profits himself. I also learned that he was annoyed when he found himself in a higher tax bracket because of those royalties.

In its first draft, *Masters of Deceit* was a serious study of communism. It had been watered down and jazzed up prior to publication, however, and I suggested to Hoover that his next book be more substantial. I suggested it be called "A Study of Communism" and that the proceeds of that book go to a J. Edgar Hoover scholarship fund at George Washington University. But Hoover, who knew a lot more about royalties and the tax law by then, set it up so that all future royalties would go into the FBI Recreation Fund instead. Although agents were supposed to share the money in the Recreation Fund, it was actually nothing more than a tax dodge. The money in the fund was available to Hoover, at all times, and he used it.

All of these special projects of Hoover's put a severe drain on the manpower in the bureau. For example, toward the end of 1962, another of Hoover's books written by the agents was at the publishers awaiting the preparation of a glossary. Assistant Director DeLoach



wanted to send two of our espionage specialists to New York City to aid in the task. I got into an argument with DeLoach over this and wrote to Clyde Tolson:

Dear Mr. Tolson:

October 4, 1962  
PERSONAL

It has been called to my attention that a vigorous disagreement I had with Mr. DeLoach early this week over the need to send two men to the publishers in New York to prepare a glossary, etc., for the Director's book, "A Study of Communism," seems to have caused some comment. I was somewhat more than mildly surprised to learn of this. In order that I may be certain you have all the facts, I wish to very respectfully advise you as follows:

1. When I was told that both F. C. Stukenbroeker and A. W. Gray were to spend one or two days in New York for discussions of a glossary, I stated what I believed thoroughly to be true, that there is no need for both going. As you know, we are badly in need of manpower. I told Mr. DeLoach that in my view, either one or the other should go.
2. No doubt there are some who believe I should not get involved in controversy; that such harms our operations. In all sincerity, I must say, rightly or wrongly, that I have always believed most strongly in controversy as a legitimate means for obtaining legitimate ends. On some occasions there seems to be no other recourse but controversy, and I do think that it should be sharp, vigorous and penetrating without any consideration as to whether one will be liked or disliked for it. I cannot help but think that on occasions this Bureau has suffered from a lack of open, direct controversy. Whenever men "scratch each other's backs" and blink at each other's shortcomings for self-protective reasons, it impairs our efficiency. Life is essentially composed of unrelenting competition—often rough, bruising, and fierce competition. Isn't it so that men will clash and, if they have any convictions at all, must clash over ideas, principles, values, means, interests and ends. I cannot help but think that such competition is good for the Bureau and it makes for progress. Whereas the superficial bowing, scraping, smiling and namby-pamby self-protective agreements that so often exist may result in harm to anything to which they are related.

Sincerely,  
[signed] W. C. Sullivan

The book was finally completed. Another bestseller. Those of us who wrote it received letters of commendation that said, "I have followed your record very closely and am favorably impressed by the superior work done by you over a long period of time. I have included

an incentive reward to you in the amount of \$250.00. Sincerely, J. Edgar Hoover."

At times Hoover tended to overestimate the power of public relations. In 1965, ~~Joseph L.~~ Rauh, Jr., vice-president of Americans for Democratic Action, a liberal group, made some critical remarks about Hoover in a speech he gave to a meeting of the National Students Association. Rauh accused the FBI of not enforcing the law when it came to the area of civil rights. He wanted the federal government to take steps to protect civil rights workers in the South and charged that Hoover was "the wrong man" to head civil rights investigations because of his disparaging remarks about Martin Luther King.

Faced with a real crisis, Hoover turned to his public relations machine to cover it up instead of trying to solve it. A Crime Records memo to Hoover dated 25 August 1965 stated:

Pursuant to Mr. Tolson's instructions, we are making immediate contact with Miriam Ottenberg at the Washington Star so that Rauh's charges can be answered in the press at the earliest possible time. We will prevail on her to get an article out if at all possible this weekend. Previously approved material is being furnished her for use in the article to combat Rauh's charges in accordance with the Director's instructions.

We should also utilize other sources.

By the time Crime Records wrote their next memo on the following day, the public relations operation was in full swing:

We have been working with Miss Ottenberg today and have gotten up considerable material in order that we can effectively refute Rauh's criticisms. Miss Ottenberg says that her story will run either Friday, August 27, or else on Sunday the 29th, in the *Star*.

Additionally, we have sent material today to a number of columnists including Fulton Lewis, Jr., Paul Harvey, Bob Allen of the *Hall Syndicate*, Ray Cromley of Newspaper Enterprise Association, Ed Mowry of General Features and the Newhouse chain, Ed O'Brien of the St. Louis Globe-Democrat, Warren Rogers of Hearst and Ray McHugh of the Copley Press, among others.

We are continuing to work on this to insure that the widest possible coverage can be given to our positive accomplishments in the civil rights field.



Louis B. Nichols, who was then assistant director of the FBI, was in charge of all public relations, press matters, and contacts with Congress for Hoover. Nichols had his own solution to the growing criticism of the FBI's role in the civil rights controversy. Like Hoover's plan, it had nothing to do with real policy change but was pure public relations.

In a misguided effort to cut off the criticism of the FBI at its source, Nichols talked Hoover into hiring Morris Ernst, who was at that time head of the American Civil Liberties Union, as the director's personal lawyer. As the American Civil Liberties Union was even more liberal than Americans for Democratic Action, Ernst and Hoover were a very unlikely combination. However, shortly after he began to represent Hoover, Ernst wrote an article for the *Reader's Digest* praising the FBI. The article was reprinted and we mailed out copies by the thousands.

After that article appeared, the Hoover-Ernst relationship faded away, just as the relationship between Hoover and Walter Winchell once did. Winchell was probably the first nationally known radio commentator developed by the FBI. We sent Winchell information regularly. He was our mouthpiece. Of course, he became so obvious after a while that he finally lost his value, and Hoover lost interest in him. Winchell once had a tremendous audience, though, and he was very valuable to Hoover then, who used him practically every time he wanted to leak a story.

When I hear people talk about a "new" FBI, I know that the changes they talk about are only paper changes. This public relations operation of Hoover's, this massive attempt to control public opinion, continues to this day, and it is at the very heart of what is wrong with the bureau. Unless it is exposed, until every editor of every little weekly newspaper who ever printed an FBI press handout realizes how he has been used, the FBI will do business in the same old way.

A massive, pervasive public relations operation is no substitute for the job of investigating crimes. The FBI should conduct its business quietly and it should earn its respect from the citizens of the United States by the results of its work, not from the results of its propaganda.

In 1976, five years after I left the FBI, I got a telephone call at my home in New Hampshire from Alger Hiss. Still working on his case, he wanted me to tell him whether the typewriter that helped convict him of a perjury charge was a fake which had been put together at the FBI Laboratory.

Although I never worked on the Hiss case myself, I know that we were giving Richard Nixon, who was in charge of the investigation, every possible assistance. Had Nixon asked the FBI to manufacture evidence to prove his case against Hiss, Hoover would have been only too glad to oblige. I told Hiss that the typewriter was not made in the FBI Lab. What I didn't tell him was that even if we had wanted to, we simply would not have been capable of it.

The laboratory, described in an FBI publicity booklet as "the greatest law enforcement laboratory in the world," is the highlight of the public tour of FBI headquarters in Washington, D.C. Over the years, millions of tourists have listened, awestruck, to glowing descriptions of the lab's capabilities and activities. Unfortunately, these descriptions are nothing but a show-business spiel. The FBI Laboratory is in fact a real-life counterpart of the busy workroom of the Wizard of Oz—all illusion. Even the famous laboratory files were maintained for show. They looked impressive, but they were really incomplete and outdated.

I first heard the truth about the lab at the beginning of my career with the FBI when I worked with Charlie Winstead in the Southwest. Charlie took me with him one day when he had to get some handwriting samples from a prisoner, a deserter from the army, being held at an air force base in Albuquerque because he had been charged with assault and battery and attempted murder.

Charlie made the man write for over half an hour, a sentence or two each on twenty or thirty separate pieces of paper, before he had enough. We marked each sample with the case number, the prisoner's name, and the date, and then, before sending the samples out to headquarters in Washington, he removed ten or twelve of the slips of paper and put them in his files. I asked Charlie what he was doing, and though at first he was reluctant to tell me, he finally explained.

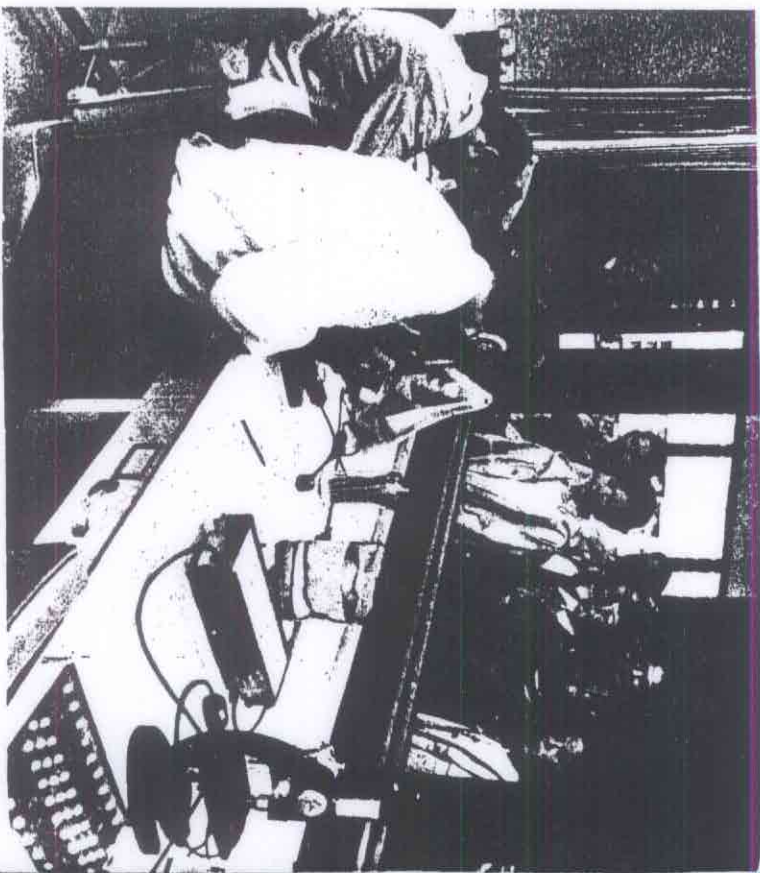
"If you stay with the bureau," Charlie started by saying, "this is a



trick that will save you all kinds of time and trouble in the future. No one at that lab they run in Washington," Charlie continued. "Knows what he's doing. After years of sending handwriting samples to them, I finally learned that no matter how many I send, they always call me a month later to ask for more. When they do, I just pull out the samples I put aside years ago, put a fresh date on them, and send them in."

In the years that followed I learned that Charlie's low opinion of the FBI Laboratory was completely justified. When we asked the boys in the lab to come up with a good wall microphone so that agents

*The FBI Laboratory was the highlight of the public's tour of the bureau's headquarters in Washington, D.C. Wide World Photos*



could hear what was being said in an adjoining room on an espionage case we had, they couldn't do it, and we finally had to turn to the CIA for help. When we were working on the Pentagon Papers case, we wanted to know whether photocopies we were holding as evidence were copied from an original document, from an original photocopy, or from a photocopy of a photocopy. The lab couldn't give us a satisfactory answer so we had to turn to the Xerox Company for help. The FBI Lab couldn't even come up with a simple "peephole"—a device which, when attached to a car under surveillance, would allow us to follow that car electronically when we couldn't follow it visually—that would stick to the bottom of a car. Once again I had to turn to the CIA for help.

Deciphering codes was one of the lab's major functions, but most of my men learned the hard way to take any codes that were giving them problems to the National Security Agency if they wanted results.

An old college friend of mine, a brilliant scientist who became a world-famous microbiologist, once told me that he could develop an unbreakable code by using bacteria. When he explained his theory to me I couldn't understand a word of it, and when he asked me to put him in touch with the head of the FBI Lab I did so, but I doubted whether the FBI scientists could understand my friend either. The men who were working in the FBI Lab as agent-examiners were for the most part former special agents who were chosen for their lab assignments after years in the field because they had once majored in biology or physics in college. Few of them have continued their education or updated their degrees, and therefore very few are aware of recent scientific developments. They are laboratory technicians, not research scientists.

I put my friend, the microbiologist, in touch with Donald Parsons, who headed the lab at the time. After their meeting, my friend told me that he could tell by Parsons's blank expression and by the questions he didn't ask that Parsons had gotten as little out of the theory as I had. "Don't you have a scientist up there?" he asked me. My friend finally gave his code concept to the CIA.

Why was the lab such a disaster? Starting from the top, neither of the two men who held the post of assistant director in charge of the



lab, Donald Parsons or his successor Ivan Conrad, had any field experience, which seriously affected their judgment on cases which came in from the field (lab work also came in from other government agencies and from local police departments), and both men tried to make up for their lack of scientific knowledge and ability by overemphasizing clerical and administrative procedures. Because of this, agent-examiners who worked in the lab spent too much time filling out forms and not enough time doing scientific research.

This is a basic list of the FBI Lab's shortcomings during my time there:

- The document section of the lab conducted no research into optical scanners, photoelectric reading devices, or automatic imagery. Such research could have had significant application in the identification of handwriting.
- No actual research was conducted into holography, although three-dimensional holographic photographs of the scene of a crime would be an invaluable aid to investigation.
- Today, more than seventy-five years after the discovery of different blood groups, very little that has been discovered since about blood has found its way into the FBI Laboratory.
- The bank robbery note file, which, though it is one of the busiest and most productive files in the Lab, is merely a card file which is tedious to work with. The file can only be used by one or at most two people at once. Existing technology should have been utilized to improve the system decades ago.

- Of the 136 agent-examiners employed by the lab when I was with the FBI, 136 were Protestants or Catholics and 136 were white. There wasn't one Jewish, black, or Hispanic American.

- Historically, the lab has maintained a blacklist of police departments euphemistically called the "Restricted List." A law enforcement agency placed on the Restricted List may find itself completely cut off from the services of the FBI Lab. The quickest and surest way for a local department to be placed on the Restricted list was to criticize the efficiency of the FBI or to encourage the establishment of independent regional laboratories. This list still existed in 1976.

With conditions as bad as they were at the FBI Lab, it was no wonder that when I became a supervisor in the research section of the Domestic Intelligence Division in the early 1950s I was visited by the few agent-examiners who were doing good work and who believed they could do better work if there was a shakeup at the lab. These men were the thinking, honest, industrious, and concerned minority who were responsible for whatever good work the lab did turn out. They asked me to take whatever steps I found necessary to persuade Director Hoover that fundamental changes were called for. I agreed to do so, but I told them that I wanted to wait for the right moment, an occasion which would justify my stirring things up. I didn't have to wait long.

Donald Parsons was in charge of the lab at that time. Politically, Parsons was an ultraconservative. Scientifically, he was limited; professionally, he was a highly developed bureaucrat who couldn't do enough to please Hoover and Tolson. Parsons was also a close friend of J. P. Mohr, one of Hoover's closest aides, and they had a well-deserved reputation for promoting and protecting each other, irrespective of the facts involved.

Parsons believed in keeping his agent-examiners close to home. He saw no need for them to take outside courses or attend scientific meetings. After all, Parsons ran "the greatest law enforcement laboratory in the world." What did the rest of the scientific community have to teach his men? To justify keeping a representative of the FBI from attending a convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Science, Parsons wrote a memo criticizing the Association in which he implied that its members were Communists. That was my department, and I felt perfectly justified in sending Mr. Parsons a memo in which I took issue with his position. The controversy that ensued was to last for weeks.

First, Parsons wrote a memo back to me. It was characteristically pompous, authoritarian, and incorrect. He simply had not done his homework, and I proved it when I refuted his claims by using material out of his own files. Then Parsons went to see Al Belmont, my assistant director and at that time my direct boss, and asked Belmont to "keep Sullivan's mouth shut about the Lab." Al Belmont was one of the few who had risen to the top ranks of the FBI without losing his



integrity along the way, and he absolutely refused. "Sullivan has a right to his opinion," he told Parsons.

A few days after Parsons's meeting with Belmont, I got a visit from Parsons's friend J. P. Mohr, then assistant director of the Administrative Division. He came by, he said, to give me some "friendly advice," and went on to tell me that I would hurt my career if I continued to speak out and to write rude memos. "No supervisor should ever criticize or attack an assistant director," he said solemnly as he left. I wrote his advice down in my diary as soon as he was out the door.

The conflict continued to rage until Director Hoover himself established a committee to resolve the issue. The committee was comprised of Parsons's men, however, and the final outcome was not satisfactory either to Parsons or me. It was a typical fence-straddling compromise, the kind Hoover was so good at, made to calm stormy waters but not to solve the problem.

## SIX

### *Life in the Circus*

**A**S DIRECTOR the Federal Bureau of Investigation lived like a king, and the bureau was his kingdom with this regal self-image, his suite of visiting Hoover was an awe-inspiring experience. housed a large glass-topped table, the kind museums hobbits. Hoover's display included a hollowed-out nicodol Abel, the Russian spy, to pass coded messages, from famous criminals like Dillinger and Karpis. The the closest Hoover ever came to a real gun since he to use one. He was with the FBI for forty-eight years made an arrest or conducted an investigation. In fact fondest wish was to be in charge of worldwide intelligence once left the United States.

From the outer office a visitor walked into a sum where one of Hoover's secretaries was positioned. In past the desks of two more secretaries, was Hoover was an enormous room, lined with books, furnished its focal point was the oval table, large enough to center of the room. Naturally, Hoover always sat at table.

Thanks to his loyal subjects at the bureau, Hoovering his hours away from the office, too. He hated to fly. Favorite form of transportation and each trip was a ride. Someone from the Administrative Division was expected the president of the railroad to insure that the temporary's and Tolson's compartments (they always traveled kept at a constant sixty-eight degrees. God forbid it even or sixty-nine. When Hoover arrived at his desti-



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