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Power portrait of Hoover emerges

WASHINGTON (AP) — The late FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover "worked directly under me," the former attorney general said. "I'm not sure he worked directly for me."

So spoke John N. Mitchell, once regarded as the most powerful member of President Richard M. Nixon's Cabinet but, by his own admission, unable to control the man whose name is synonymous with the FBI, which he headed from its creation in 1935 until his death in 1972.

Mitchell's observation last Friday before the Senate intelligence committee drew a laugh, as he intended. But, at the same time, it filled in a portrait of Hoover that has been emerging piece by piece during the committee's hearings on illegal activities of the FBI, CIA and other intelligence agencies.

It is a portrait of a man who, at the peak of his power, was perhaps the most

feared man in Washington, an absolute monarch subordinates dared not cross and presidents were reluctant to fire.

Charles Brennan, an FBI agent for 26 years and a highranking official for many of those years, said Hoover "at no time really hesitated to tell anybody in town exactly what he felt, including the president."

Brennan, who once had been placed on indefinite probation for disagreeing with Hoover over whether Daniel Ellsberg's father-in-law should be questioned in connection with the Pentagon papers case, gave a rather unflattering portrait of his former boss.

Testifying under oath, Brennan said he believed that Hoover had ordered a halt to all FBI break-ins and mail-openings in 1966 not because they were illegal, but because their continuing existence might be used to remove him from office.

As Brennan explained it, Hoover became 70 years old in 1965, becoming subject to the government's mandatory retirement rules. Although he managed to maneuver himself out of a forced retirement, Hoover had to fight an annual battle to keep his job, Brennan said.

Therefore, Brennan continued, any operation that could provide his critics in Congress and elsewhere with ammunition if it were exposed had to be cut out.

Without an embarrassing incident, Brennan contended, Hoover could never be forced to retire. Presidents feared that firing him would cost them votes among people to whom the name J. Edgar Hoover meant law enforcement, according to Brennan.

Brennan also said there was the fear that "Mr. Hoover might have some information to embarrass them."