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# Life With A Tyrant

**J. Edgar Hoover ruled the FBI as  
his personal kingdom. Presidents  
and private citizens alike were not  
spared his scheming**

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## BY WILLIAM C. SULLIVAN with BILL BROWN

Charlie Winstead, the agent whose bullets killed gangster John Dillinger, told me at the start of my career with the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 1942: "Never initiate a meeting with J. Edgar Hoover for any reason," because if the FBI director was less than impressed for any reason, "your career would end that very day. If Hoover ever calls you in," he went on, "dress like a dandy, carry a notebook and write in it furiously whenever Hoover opens his mouth. You can throw the notes away afterward if you like. And flatter him." Charlie added, "Everyone at headquarters knows Hoover is an egomaniac and they flatter him constantly. If you don't, you'll be noticed."

Hoover had always used the bureau for his own political purposes, Charlie said, and in 1936 Hoover got the idea that he should run for president against Franklin Delano Roosevelt. In the early 1930s, after a num-

ber of well-publicized FBI victories against colorful criminals like "Baby Face" Nelson, "Pretty Boy" Floyd, John Dillinger and Ma Barker, Hoover believed he had become a major national figure. He thought that if he had the support of the entire law enforcement community—federal, state, city and county—he could run as a Republican and turn Roosevelt and his crew of liberals out of office.

In early 1936, Hoover sent out some of his most trusted veteran agents on a top-secret mission to test the political waters in the South and the Southwest, where the director thought his support was strongest.

Much to Hoover's surprise, response to his presidential ambitions was overwhelmingly negative. Not only did the local police not want him to be chief executive, many didn't even want him to continue as director. When Hoover learned the results of his informal poll, he never again mentioned running for president.

When Thomas Dewey entered the Republican primaries in 1948, Hoover and two of

his closest aides, Clyde Tolson and Louis Nichols, secretly agreed to put the resources of the FBI at Dewey's disposal. The director believed that when Dewey became president he would name Hoover as his attorney general.

Hoover's ambitions didn't stop at the Justice Department. If he couldn't be president, Hoover thought it would be fitting if he were named to the Supreme Court, and he planned to make his term as attorney general a stepping stone to that end. With visions of long, black robes in his head, Hoover made sure the bureau was there to help Dewey.

The morning after Harry Truman's election victory over Dewey, Hoover sent out a memo blaming Nichols. He

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wrote, "Nichols pushed me out on a limb which got sawed off. I wouldn't be in this mess if it weren't for Nichols."

Hoover never involved either himself or the bureau that deeply in a presidential election again. He started beating the drums to help Gen. Douglas MacArthur win the Republican nomination in 1952, but MacArthur's campaign fell as flat as Hoover's had, and when the director saw there was no chance for his man, he dropped him and supported Dwight Eisenhower.

Soon after Eisenhower was elected, Hoover found out that a White House aide, the son of a senator who was one of Ike's close friends, was homosexual. The director rushed over to the White House with the news, which he only repeated to Ike to save him "possible embarrassment." Eisenhower was grateful for the tip and fired his friend's son quickly and quietly.

From then on, Hoover inundated the president with gossip and with more serious information about the dangers of communism. Unlike Truman, who was skeptical of anything Hoover offered and who never made any requests for political investigations, Eisenhower blindly believed everything the director told him and made requests.

During the Eisenhower years the FBI kept Joe McCarthy in business. Sen. McCarthy stated publicly that there were communists working for the State Department. We gave McCarthy all we had, but all we had were fragments, nothing that could prove his accusations. For a while, though, the accusations were enough to keep McCarthy in the headlines.

Hoover mistrusted and disliked all three Kennedy brothers. "Goddamn the Kennedys," I heard Clyde Tolson say

to Hoover. "First there was Jack, now there's Bobby, and then Teddy. We'll have them on our necks until the year 2000." And the director nodded in agreement.

In 1942 the FBI was watching a beautiful young Scandinavian woman we suspected of spying for the Nazis in Washington. We had a microphone planted in her apartment and

a tap on her telephone. Hoover could hardly contain his delight when he saw Lt. John F. Kennedy's voice reported on our tapes. Hoover immediately reported Lt. Kennedy's liaison to the White House, along with a suggestion that Kennedy be transferred "for security reasons." Kennedy never knew what hit him. One day he was dating glamorous women in Washington, the next day he was on his way to command a PT boat in the middle of the Pacific. But the transfer Hoover suggested backfired when Kennedy became a war hero. The PT boat helped make Kennedy president.

While Hoover was trying to sabotage Jack Kennedy's presidential campaign, he was quietly helping Richard Nixon. Hoover couldn't be as blatant as he had been when he openly put the bureau to work for Thomas Dewey because the complexion of the bureau had changed. Until the 1940s, Catholics were kept out of the bureau along with blacks, Jews and Hispanics. But when Hoover needed more agents in a hurry to work in the newly opened field of national security in World War II, the bar on Catholics was lowered and hundreds joined. As most of these Catholic agents supported Kennedy, Hoover had to curtail his overt support of Nixon.

Jack Kennedy disliked Hoover in return and wanted to replace him as director, but he had won the election by such a narrow margin that he felt he couldn't afford to alienate Hoover's considerable conservative following by getting rid of him.

### Hoover, the Kennedys and LBJ

President Kennedy's death did nothing to soften Hoover's attitude toward Robert Kennedy.

When Bobby Kennedy was campaigning for the presidential nomination in 1968, his name came up at a top-level FBI meeting. Hoover was not present, and Clyde Tolson, Hoover's close friend and No. 2 man,



was presiding in his absence. I was one of eight men who heard Tolson respond to the mention of Kennedy's name by saying, "I hope someone shoots and kills the son of a bitch." This was five or six weeks before the California primary.

Hoover's dislike of Robert Kennedy continued even after Kennedy's

death. We had a positive identification on James Earl Ray, the killer of Martin Luther King Jr., a full day before Hoover released the news to the world that he had been caught in London. He purposely held up the report of Ray's capture so that he could interrupt TV coverage of Bobby's burial.

Hoover was as fond of Ted Kennedy as he had been of his brothers. It was the FBI that circulated the story that Teddy Kennedy was a poor student and had cheated on an exam. By rights the FBI should have had nothing to do with the Chappaquiddick affair, but the Boston office was put on the case right away. Although

Hoover was delighted to cooperate, the order did not originate with him. It came from President Lyndon Johnson.

Johnson and Hoover had their mutual fear and hatred of the Kennedys in common—and more. As neighbors in Washington since the days when Johnson was a senator from Texas, they had been frequent dinner guests in each other's homes. They remained close when Johnson served as vice president, but there was a change in their relationship when LBJ became president.

The director was over 65 by that time, past retirement age for federal employes, and he stayed in office only because of a special waiver that required the president's signature each year.

With that leverage Johnson began to take advantage of Hoover, using the bureau as his personal investigative arm. There was absolutely nothing LBJ wouldn't ask of the FBI, whether or not it fell within the bureau's jurisdiction.

When LBJ's closest aide, Walter Jenkins, was arrested for making homosexual advances to a man in the basement of the Washington YMCA, the president immediately and publicly ordered an FBI investigation of the incident. Privately, he told the FBI how to run the investigation and what its results should reveal. Johnson wanted the bureau to prove that the object of Jenkins' attention was being paid by the Republican National Committee and that the whole incident was a frame-up, a Republican plot.

LBJ wanted agents to bear down on the complainant about his knowledge of Republican National Committee members, as well as once again question him about a possible frame-up. Bear down we did, but the man wouldn't budge an inch. Why should he? There was no frame-up and there were no Republicans involved.

(Our investigation actually showed that Jenkins had a previous record of arrest for the same offense. Johnson may well have known all along, but he just didn't seem to care about a man's sexuality; there were at least two other homosexuals serving on Johnson's White House staff when Jenkins was arrested.)

Hoover managed to keep his agents out of many early racial confrontations in the South, but the disappearance of three young civil rights workers in Mississippi in June 1964 became a major national scandal, and President Johnson forced Hoover to get the bureau involved.

Hoover called me one morning to ask what progress we were making in our search for the three bodies. I told him how many agents we had brought

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in on the case, and about the 200 sailors who were helping us look for the bodies. Later I read that President Johnson had announced that he had ordered 200 Marines to help the FBI find the missing civil rights workers. Where the hell, I asked myself, did he get the 200 Marines?

Hoover buzzed on the direct line to my office: "I thought you told me it was 200 sailors. Do we have any Marines down there?"

"None," I told him.

Hoover called back 10 minutes later. He was so upset that his voice was shaking. "I told President Johnson that we had 200 sailors in Mississippi, not 200 Marines. He told me if that was the case to get 200 Marines down there right away."

The president held Hoover responsible for the mistake, and he said it was up to the director to correct it. And Hoover said he wanted me to give the bizarre order to Robert McNamara, the secretary of defense.

I called McNamara, an intelligent man but a real cold fish, and told him the story. "Well, it doesn't make any sense," McNamara said, "but if they want 200 Marines down there, I'll have Joe Califano (then under secretary of defense) handle it."

Califano called me 30 minutes later to say that he had been in contact with Fort Bragg and Parris Island and that one helicopter carrying 20 or 30 Marines was already in the air, a second was ready to take off, and the rest were being lined up. I told Hoover.

Califano had just called again to say the second helicopter was in the air when Hoover buzzed me on the intercom and asked how many helicopters were actually on the way to Mississippi. When I described the situation, he shouted, "Stop them, stop them right away. President Johnson does not want any Marines to land in Mississippi."

Hoover explained that the president had been talking to the governor of Mississippi and Sen. James O.

Eastland (D-Miss.). Both were furious and were threatening to tell the press that Marines were invading the state of Mississippi against the will of its people. The last thing Johnson wanted was this kind of publicity. The Marines had to be stopped.

The first helicopter had almost landed when Califano reached the pilot, but he did reach him in time and it, along with all the other helicopters, had to turn around to fly back. I couldn't help wondering what the Marines in those helicopters were thinking. They probably were never told the story behind their strange, abortive trip.

### A Soviet Mole

When it came to the realities of espionage, Hoover was a head-in-the-clouds amateur. He didn't believe that an agent of the FBI would ever defect or sell information to the enemy. I knew that the men in the FBI were human, though, and I always worried that their personal or financial problems could leave them vulnerable to our enemies.

The situation that disturbed me most during my 30 years in the bureau was Hoover's refusal to allow me to act on what I am convinced were Soviet intelligence operations that directly affected the FBI and the security of the United States.

I learned that the Washington field office was missing three top-secret documents that were connected with naval operations. A Soviet defector told us that an FBI agent had sold the files to the Soviet Embassy. We asked the Russian for his name but he said he never knew it. But he knew that

the agent had gone to the Soviet Embassy, to their naval attache, and asked for \$10,000 for the three documents. For the first time my worst fears seemed to come true; the Russians had bought one of our men.

The next time the Soviets had an FBI defector on their hands it was a put-up job. I instructed one of the agents in the New York office to ostensibly defect to the head of Russian intelligence, a man who worked out of their United Nations Mission. It took our man about three years, but he finally convinced the Russians that he was the genuine article: an FBI man who wanted money in return for secrets.

His one caveat was that although he'd try to give them what they wanted, he would never reveal his real name. He told them that he was a "watcher," a person who conducts surveillances. Men like that usually have a limited knowledge of highly sensitive information, so the Russians were content to let him give them what he could. He gave them a lot over the next two years, and he was very successful in convincing them that it was important.

One evening the Russian intelligence chief asked our man to meet him in Riverside Park in New York City—at 1 a.m. They met and walked in silence for about 10 minutes until the Russian said, "In case anything goes wrong we have set up this escape route for you through Canada to Russia and I've got to have your right name." For the first time in two years our man slipped and gave the Russian his real name. The next day the whole operation was dead. The Russians

wouldn't have any contact with him again, although he tried and tried to reach them.

This is what happened: The Russians learned that our man was not a "watcher" at all, but the No. 3 man in our espionage squad in the New York office, and that he was indeed a very important counterespionage agent

who would never defect and who was operating against them all the time. There was no doubt in my mind that the Russians could learn our man's real job just by knowing his name only if there was a Russian spy in our New York office.

The leaks continued to vex us. I told Hoover what had been happen-

ing and recommended that we begin gradually transferring people out of the espionage section in New York. I wanted to replace them with all new men. It was the only way we could hope to get rid of the fellow on the Soviet payroll, a man we had been unable to discover.

Hoover said, "Some smart newspa-

perman is bound to find out that we are transferring people out of the New York office." I told him, "Mr. Hoover, your reputation is going to be severely tarnished if the public ever learns that we have been penetrated by the Russian KGB." Hoover said, "I know that, but no transfers."

Hoover never asked me a question about it after that. He never asked, "How is it going?" Nothing. He never again brought it up.

At the time I left the FBI in 1971, the Russians still had a man in our New York office and none of us knew who he was.

### King, Nixon and Hoover

**M**artin Luther King Jr. had been the subject of FBI scrutiny as far back as 1957. In my initial talk with Hoover after he appointed me to the job of assistant director, he told me he felt that King was, or could become, a serious threat to the security of the country. He pointed out that King was an instrument of the Communist Party, and he wanted it proved. Hoover also made it clear that he wanted evidence developed that would prove that King was embezzling or misusing large sums of money contributed to him and his organization.

Hoover's hate overcame his judg-

ment during a press conference he agreed to hold in 1964 with a group of women reporters headed by Washington veteran Sarah McClendon. When one of the reporters asked Hoover about King's allegations that the FBI wasn't effectively enforcing the law in the South, Hoover called King the most notorious liar in America.

We were on King night and day. Because of this constant surveillance, we got every aspect of his life on tape, including his love life. Hoover had always been fascinated by pornography, and if any of the compromising photographs that came to the bureau during the course of an investigation were kept from him, he'd raise hell.

When we raided the apartment of Angela Davis during her fugitive days, the agents found a series of photographs of her and her boyfriend taken while they were making love, and word of the pictures got around—to everyone but Hoover.

Hoover called the New York office about a hijacking case, and when the conversation was almost over the special agent in charge said, "What did you think of those photographs of Angela Davis and her boyfriend?" Hoover said, "What pictures? I haven't seen any pictures!"

The buzzer in my office rang. It was Hoover on the phone. He asked,

"Have you seen the pictures of Angela Davis and her boyfriend? I want to see them immediately and I want to know why I haven't been sent those pictures before." I called the agent who had them and he brought them into Hoover's office and received a scorching letter of censure. He was unable to get the promotion that was due him for six months.

I was convinced that James Earl Ray killed Martin Luther King, but I doubt if he acted alone. Someone, I feel sure, taught Ray how to get a false Canadian passport, how to get out of the country, and how to travel to Europe, because he could never have managed it alone.

Richard Nixon and J. Edgar Hoover had been political allies since Nixon served in the House of Representatives. Hoover had done a remarkable favor for Nixon when he was first elected president. When Nixon asked the director to suspend the usual FBI investigation of nominees for Cabinet posts and approve John Mitchell's nomination without any investigation at all, Hoover agreed. By merely making the request of Hoover, however, Nixon put himself right in the director's pocket.

Even friendship didn't keep Nixon from joining the ranks of Hoover's potential blackmail victims. Before Nixon

was elected president, I got a letter from our legal attaché in Hong Kong informing me that Nixon and his friend Bebe Rebozo had taken two trips to Hong Kong, once in 1966 and again in 1968. These trips, our agent in Hong Kong wrote, were brightened for Nixon by his friendship with a Chinese girl named Marianna Liu.

Hoover took the letter to the White House immediately. "I know there's no truth to this," he told the president. "Someone must be misleading our legal attaché. I'll never speak of it to anyone." It was one of his favorite speeches.

About a year after Nixon became president, one of our agents on the West Coast sent me a newspaper clipping—a picture of President Nixon shaking hands with a good-looking Chinese woman who was standing next to a Chinese man. The accompanying article explained that the woman and her husband were emigrating to the United States; in fact, they were moving to Whittier, Calif., Nixon's hometown.

The agent attached a short note that explained that the woman in the picture was Marianna Liu, the Chinese man was her husband, and that their admission to the United States was helped because Richard Nixon indicated an interest in her case. ■