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## **Reflections On The Director: AN ORAL BIOGRAPHY OF J. EDGAR HOOVER**

**BY OVID DEMARIS**

**F**ew men have observed the Director at work as closely and for a longer period of time than William C. Sullivan, who was the Bureau's number-three man before he was forced to retire in October, 1971. Sullivan spent twenty-eight of his thirty

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years with the Bureau in Washington, moving up through the ranks, from Special Agent to Supervisor, Unit Chief, Section Chief, Inspector, Chief Inspector, Assistant Director in charge of Domestic Intelligence and Foreign Operations, and finally, Assistant to the Director in charge of all Investigations, Criminal and Security, and Foreign Operations. He had a long and distinguished career until, as he says, "I got into a controversy with God." Sullivan's viewpoint may be biased, but then whose viewpoint is not?

*What was it like working with Hoover on a day-to-day basis?*



SULLIVAN: "If he liked you, you could do no wrong; if he didn't like you, you could do no right. That's the way he thought, in terms of black and white. Professionally, he was a charmer. He'd charm anybody that came in there: ambassadors, admirals, generals. He could be all things to all people. If a liberal came in, the liberal would leave thinking that 'My God, Hoover is a real liberal!' If a John Birchler came in an hour later, he'd go out saying, 'I'm convinced that Hoover is a member of the John Birch Society at heart.' He was a brilliant chameleon. Make no mistake now. I'm not underestimating the man's mental capacity. He wasn't intellectual, or academic; he was suspicious of the academic community, of any intellectual—Henry Steele Commager, Dr. Robert Maynard Hutchins—of any scholar. He disliked them instinctively. But he had a very cunning, crafty, shrewd mind and he could make fools out of some of these people that I alluded to, he could make fools out of some Senators and Congressmen. He'd wrap them right around his little finger. He was a master con man, let me put it that way. He was one of the greatest con men the country ever produced, and that takes intelligence of a certain kind, an astuteness, a shrewdness.

"When a man went in to talk with him, he did all the talking because always he was conscious of his own limitations in the field of knowledge, and so he'd keep talking. He didn't want the man to ask him any questions, particularly if he was an educated man, because he might not know the answers and that would upset him terribly. He had to have the answers to all questions. . . .

"Oh, he was wonderful at small talk. And very engaging, you know, and very, very interesting, and every once in a while he'd get quite witty. One time years ago he sent me out to speak in the Midwest and he said, 'Now, we're under attack for tapping phones, and when you're called upon to speak at this conference, I want you to be extremely careful not to say anything that's going to cause us any trouble in the press.' I said, 'Mr. Hoover, the only thing I'll talk about if I'm called upon is the weather, the weather conditions.' And he looked at me and he said, 'Oh, no, no, no, don't talk about the weather conditions. They'll accuse us of having a tap on the Weather Bureau.' Now that was a clever response. He was very good at light talk.

"Hoover was very conscious of the fact that he was not educated. He never read anything except the memos and investigative reports that passed over his desk. He had no interest in any kind of culture. He was not interested in plays, not interested in poetry, not interested in political science or history or biography. He never read anything that would broaden his mind or give depth to his thinking. He went into government out of high school and then went on to law school, and his whole background was narrow. He lived with his mother until she died, never traveled abroad, and I never knew him to have an intellectual or educated friend. Neither did Tolson [Hoover's right-hand man]. They had nothing in common with anybody who was cultured. They lived in their own strange little world."

*Was there a time in your life when you*

*admired Hoover and wanted to emulate him?*

SULLIVAN: "When I was a starry-eyed young agent, I came off a farm and I had been teaching school for eight hundred dollars a year out in the country. I had hardly been forty miles away from home and I wound up in the halls of the Justice Department. I was all eyes. Then we were subjected to the terrific propaganda that the instructors gave out: 'This is the greatest organization ever devised by a human mind.' They kept quoting Emerson: 'An institution is the lengthened shadow of one man.' They hit us with that almost every day. They drilled that into us. I don't know whether you grew up on a farm or not, but when you grow up on a farm, you chop wood, you shovel manure, you milk cows in the sub-zero weather of the morning, you pitch hay, and you sort of get a grasp of realism. After about four or five weeks of this, I used to sit there and ask myself: 'How much of this is true and how much of it is fiction?' . . .

"I was told by a Bureau friend to keep my mouth shut in training and to not criti-

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cize Hoover or the Bureau because there were spies in every classroom, made up mostly of Bureau clerks who had gone to night school for their law or accounting degree and were now going to become agents. They deliberately put them in every class to spy on the rest of us. A word to the wise was sufficient, and I kept my mouth shut. These guys would walk up, you know, but you could spot them, and, boy, I gave that type of person a wide berth, and everybody else did.

"Before I ever left training school, it was told to me by people who knew their way around the Bureau, and particularly by a couple of friends I had in the Bureau, 'Hoover is an egomaniac and when you go out in the field by very careful. Don't write any letters criticizing the FBI, because he considers himself to be the FBI, and therefore you'd be criticizing him.'

"I went out in the field and worked with Charlie B. Winstead, the fellow who shot and killed John Dillinger, an old Texan, and we became fast friends. Charlie told me the same thing. He said, 'Bill, are you going to stay in the Bureau or are you just going to be here for the duration?' This was during the war and there were an aw-

ful lot of draft-dodgers in the Bureau. There was a great exodus out of the Bureau when the war was over. I said, 'I'm going to stay.' Charlie said, 'Then remember we've got an unusual man heading the Bureau in J. Edgar Hoover.' And he took off on Hoover's ego, his conceit, his vanity, his love of receiving gifts, his penuriousness, and he said, 'Be extremely careful how you approach him. When you go back to Washington, if I was you, I'd never ask to see him, because you can't win. You go in and if he doesn't like you, if he doesn't like the suit or tie you're wearing, you're done. If he likes you and you make a good impression, it really doesn't mean a hell of a lot, because those bureaucrats back there are the ones who make the recommendations for pulling people in from the field and not Hoover, and they'll color things the way they want. So my advice is don't ever ask to see him.' And by God I didn't. I never did see Hoover until I was pulled back as a supervisor when I came back from Europe. I didn't go in to see him until he called me.

"Charlie said, 'Write on his birthday and at Christmas and every other day, always write flattering letters to him. You may not like this—and I had never written a letter like that in my life and probably you never have even now—but he said, 'Let me tell you, if you don't do this when everyone else is doing it you're going to stand out like a sore thumb. It's up to you. If you want to progress in the Bureau, if you want a good assignment instead of being bounced around from one office to the other, you better do what the others do and write these flattering letters.'

"I followed his advice and when I got back to the Bureau, I discovered that Charlie was right. Everyone was writing him these goddamn flowery letters. He must have had file cabinet after file cabinet full of this stuff. I remember an Assistant Director called me one day. 'Say,' he said, 'the Boss just came back from the Appropriations Committee.' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'You know,' and he mentioned a certain Assistant Director's name, 'he's got a flattering letter in, telling the Boss what a marvelous job he must have done up there on the Hill. I'm calling you because I'm writing one now, right now, and every Assistant Director is going to write him one. You better get yours in right away or you'll be the only one that didn't.'

I stopped, no matter what it was, whether it was a hijacking case or a bank robbery, and dictated a damn flattering letter, and this is the way it went. He just loved to get these letters. You just couldn't praise him too much, you couldn't be too lavish in telling him what a great job he was doing for the country. . . .

"I remember the time McGovern criticized Hoover and said he ought to retire. That was in *Life* magazine. So orders went out for all officials of the Bureau to rally to the cause and to write critical letters to McGovern. Well, I didn't think it was a good idea and I said so in two or three places. I said McGovern would know right off that this was a command performance, that we'd been told to do this, and what good would the letters do? Well, it didn't matter. The Boss said these letters have got to be written, defending him and saying that he's got to go on for the sake



of the country. Somehow this bothered me a little bit more than it should have and I delayed in writing my letter. Finally, I got a call from Tolson's office, asking if I had written the letter. I said, no, I hadn't. 'Well,' this guy said, 'we expect you to write the letter. This is a test of loyalty.' So the test of loyalty boiled down to whether I was going to write a letter berating McGovern, whether I was going to give him hell or not. So I sat down and wrote a letter I thought I could live with. I used a lot of words but I didn't say much. I said, 'Nobody needs to defend Hoover, his record speaks for itself.' Well, that doesn't mean anything. And so on. I gave the letter to Jim Gale, one of my Assistant Directors, to mail. And damned if I didn't get another call, wanting to know whether the letter had been mailed. I said yes and I was asked if I had mailed it myself, and I said I had given it to Jim Gale to mail. I'll be damned if Gale wasn't called to see if I had given him the letter and whether he had mailed it."

*Did the FBI have special squads collecting the information on celebrities?*

SULLIVAN: "No. What was done—it was understood out in the field that Hoover wanted to get derogatory information on celebrities, and so Agents in charge would be on the alert. Whenever they developed any derogatory information on celebrities, whether they were entertainers, intellectuals, politicians or educators, no matter who they were, they'd send that information in to Hoover. The Washington Field Office was a great source of information because of the nature of Washington, with all the Congressmen and so forth, and so they'd just send it in to him. The first thing we did when anybody was elected to Congress was to run to the file and see what we had. We shouldn't even have a file on them, they're none of our business, but I don't know of any people being selected specifically to do that type of work."

*What about Tolson; I understand he was very sharp?*

SULLIVAN: "In the beginning, yes. I'd say the last eight or nine years, a big change came over Tolson. And in the last two or three years, he didn't amount to anything. He just wasn't able to—he'd call me up and start saying something and all of a sudden he'd stop and say, 'What's the next word I want?' Maybe twice out of fifteen times I might guess the right word, and if I did, then he'd go on. If I didn't guess it, he'd get mad and slam the receiver. The poor old guy. He should have retired years ago and it would have saved us a lot of trouble. He got terribly sour. He seemed to have a grudge against mankind, against human beings, particularly agents. He used to make the charge, 'Agents are no damn good, all they do is work three hours a day,' and that's just not so. . . ."

"As you know, Hoover and Tolson were a real twosome. When Lee Boardman was made Assistant to the Director on the investigative side, he made a fatal mistake. I don't understand how a man who had been around the Bureau that many years could make this mistake. After he was in his new position a few weeks, he called Tolson one morning and said, 'Say, you folks got any luncheon commitment

today?' Tolson said, 'Well, I'm having lunch with the Director.' 'Well,' Boardman said, 'I thought I'd join you, make it a threesome.' My God, what a fatal statement.

"I suppose because he was the number three man he thought he was in the inner family, but nobody ever got in that inner family—there was just two people living in that family. Within four or five weeks, Boardman got a letter advising him that his position was unnecessary and it was being dissolved. He was transferred as Special Agent in Charge of the Washington Field Office. There was no number three man for about eight or nine months. I think Boardman resigned and then Al Belmont was moved up to that spot. That number-three man spot has been a hot seat. Many have left under a cloud. I did and so have Belmont, Deke DeLoach, Quinn Tamm, Mickey Ladd and Boardman, to name a few."

*Was the FBI a good organization?*

SULLIVAN: "The men in the field—I have the highest regard for the average Special Agent. He is a fine human being, but he never knew what went on at headquarters, and to this day he might fight vigorously for the Bureau because he still doesn't know. That's no criticism of him. The strength of the FBI, and I'd like to make this point with you, was always in the Special Agent in the Field Offices. He is a good man. Most of them are selected by the men in the field. Applicants apply at Field Offices, where they are interviewed, and it is field supervisors who make recommendations to the Bureau. So, actually, they are hired out in the field, and they work in the field, and few ever get to know what goes on at headquarters. And what goes on there would make a hell of a story if the truth was ever told, and it wouldn't be a pleasant story."

*Can you give me some specifics?*

SULLIVAN: "Well, for example, Hoover was always hitting us for gifts, and we'd have to buy him extremely expensive gifts. His anniversary with the Justice Department, his anniversary with the Bureau, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, his birthday, we were always pitching in on a collection for a gift. They handled it very cleverly. It would always come out of Tolson's office to us. For example, May 10, 1971, I was told that he wanted a garbage masher. And I had to chase around to find one. It happens that I have a very close friend with Whirlpool out in Chicago, and I explained my problem to him. I said, 'Look, I don't want any unusual favor but do you ever sell any of these damn things for cost?' He said, 'Oh, yes, we do that all the time.' But 'Hell,' he said, 'we'll give you one.' I said, 'No, no, absolutely not. I won't take anything like that but if it's ethical and proper, I'll buy one from you for cost.' So we got him a garbage masher. Us Bureau officials paid for it out of our own pocket. It cost each of us about ten or fifteen dollars."

"We used to collect from the supervisors but they got very angry. One supervisor absolutely refused to contribute. He said, 'The only time you need to come to me for a collection is when you have to buy flowers for his funeral, but don't come for any other occasion.' We kicked in his share because they kept a count. For ex-

ample, I used to have a hundred and thirty-three men working for me in the Domestic Intelligence Division, and if you took up a collection of two dollars each, they'd add it up and make damn sure it totaled two hundred and sixty-six dollars. So when somebody didn't contribute, then I would have to throw in extra money to have it come out even. Every year we had a whole series of anniversaries that required gifts, year after year after year, and now that Tolson has inherited everything, he's selling this stuff at auction for good money.

"He never bought a thing. All Hoover had either belonged to the government or was given to him. The guy was a miser. He wouldn't spend a penny on anything. He put many thousands of dollars of that book 'Masters of Deceit' into his own pocket, and so did Tolson, and so did Lou Nichols. They had absolutely—and I think this is a criminal offense—no right to put this in their pockets because we wrote the book. I'm only talking now about 'Masters of De-

**"Every year, Hoover bought a new automobile that cost thirty-thousand dollars, all armor-plated."**

ceit," which was a best-seller. I was in charge of the research to write that book. This meant that every day I had men and women doing research and submitting rough drafts to me. I started the whole thing when I recommended in a memorandum that we write a book on the subject of Communism. My idea was to give the proceeds to the Damon Runyon fund or the American Heart Association. I never dreamed they were going to keep the money. When he agreed to the book, he said, 'Put all the men you need on it.' At one time I must have had eight people writing every day on the damn thing. It took months. It was a tremendous research job. We wrote what we thought was a good, solid, scholarly book, but Nichols, in particular, and Hoover, didn't like the quiet tone of the book. They wanted something that was jazzed up, more sensational. Nichols said, 'You can't sell any serious study like this.' I argued with him, and we had quite a session over it, but I lost. Nichols turned it over to a Ph.D in the Crime Records Division, Fern Stukenbroeker, to jazz it up, put in what



Nichols called anecdotal material, and it was jazzed up. If you read it now, you have to admit that it is a pretty light, frothy damn book.

"The FBI spent millions and millions of dollars on public relations. Reams of stuff came out of the Crime Records Division, which was really a propaganda mill set up by Nichols, and we used to have an inside joke in the FBI. Every time that Hoover received his paycheck, we said he ought to run over to Nichols and say, 'Here, Lou, I'm going to give you half of it because of the wonderful propaganda job you've done for me.'

**"M**asters of Deceit" was published by Henry Holt and Company which was owned by Clint Murchison. It sold 250,000 copies in hardback and two million in paperback. Holt also published Hoover's "A Study of Communism," selling 125,000, for total earnings of close to \$500,000. His last book, "On Communism," published by Random House, sold



around 40,000 copies. I asked Lou Nichols if Hoover had kept the income from the sales of "Masters of Deceit:"

NICHOLS: "Uh [long pause], I don't know the specific details. I know that he gave me some money on it, but I swear to goodness, I just don't remember the amount. I don't want to give you a figure unless it's absolutely accurate."

Were you involved in the writing of the book?

NICHOLS: "Yes, uh, I would say that I did a tremendous amount of work on it. Stukenbroeker did a lot of work on it, too, but I did the finished writing with the help of another chap."

Did Stukenbroeker get any money?

NICHOLS: "No, he did not."

Did the money go to the J. Edgar Hoover Foundation or other charities?

NICHOLS: "No, but I do know that Mr. Hoover used a lot of money that nobody knew anything about for doing things for different people. And a—things have happened to a lot of people in the Bureau, uh, uh, and nobody knew about it, knew where the money was coming from. But

I know where some of it was coming from and it was coming right out of Mr. Hoover's pocket. He was a very generous man."

SULLIVAN: "Hoover had a deal with Murchison where he invested in oil wells and if they hit oil, he got his share of the profits, but if they didn't hit oil, he didn't share in the costs. I was told that by somebody who handled his income tax returns.

"If anybody ever gets into it, I think he was worth at least a cool million when he died. He had extensive—unless they've gotten rid of them very surreptitiously—holdings in Center and Snyder, Texas, and Farmington, New Mexico. I don't know what they've done with this. There's a lot of hanky-panky that went on for years. This is all, at least subconsciously, a part of my break with him. One time he got into serious trouble on his income tax manipulations, and we had to send an accountant from New York, who unfortunately is dead now, to Houston, Texas, where apparently the operations existed. He told me afterward, 'Good God Almighty! If the truth was known, Hoover would be in serious trouble, he was in clear violation of the law, but I think I got the whole thing straightened out.' This man was supposed to be the best accountant in the Bureau—better than any we had in Washington. Apparently, he did straighten it out. But he did say that Hoover had done something that was a serious violation of the law.

"My God, the things that went on! I hope you'll pardon my bluntness, but after thirty years I happen to know a little bit of what went on.

"Take that right-wing Freedoms Foundation up at Valley Forge. This guy W. C. Sawyer, who was in charge of the awards, and Nichols would get together every so often and Nichols would say, 'Isn't it about time you gave the Boss a five-thousand-dollar award for his patriotism or outstanding work or some damn thing.' So five thousand dollars would come in to Hoover and it would get into the press that he had been given the George Washington award and the money would go into his bank account. Nichols hit Sawyer twice for the award, so by the third time Sawyer was getting a little tired of this, but he gave Hoover another five thousand dollars. Then he went to Nichols, who will lie his soul away on it, but I know this is true, and said, 'Now, look, we've given Mr. Hoover three five-thousand-dollar awards, and he's gotten a lot of publicity, and we're not over-endowed, would you mind returning that last five thousand dollars back to us?' When the question was raised with Hoover, he said, in effect, 'Hell, no! They gave it to me and I'm going to keep it.' And he did. . . .

I've seen millions upon millions of public dollars squandered in the Bureau for nothing. I'll give you a small example. Every year Hoover bought a new automobile that cost thirty thousand dollars, all armored. Look at the good that would do in medical research. He kept two of the cars in Washington—they were always working on them—in case one wasn't running right. He kept one in Miami, one in New York and, as I remember, one in Los Angeles.

"Every time he went away on vacation, the boys would overhaul the cars. They were always breaking down, and when-

ever he went anywhere, like to the airport, for example, they'd take it out on test runs first to be sure everything was right. You see, one time when they were rushing him out to the airport—the car had just been overhauled—a radiator hose broke. Something was always going wrong. After that incident, they didn't take any more chances. They always had a backup car following that big limousine. If anything went wrong, why all they had to do was say, 'Mr. Hoover, just step into this car and we can go right on our way.'"

Was Hoover powerful, and if so, what was the source of his power?

SULLIVAN: "Oh, yes. He was very, very powerful, unbelievably powerful. We don't ever want another man in that position of power again. He was in there such a long time, and he gathered all the dirt that was present on people in high-ranking positions, all the irregularities, not necessarily sex alone, but financial irregularities or political chicanery. It doesn't have to be something of a sexual nature, although that would be included. He was a genius at implying that he knew all this information, and sometimes he didn't know as much as he implied, but it didn't matter. Once it reached them that this implication had been made, damn it, they had a guilty conscience, and they may have done something that even Hoover didn't know about, but they assumed that he did know. That placed him in a position of power, and they were all afraid to get rid of him. I know Nixon was actually afraid of him. Knowledge is powerful, and he had knowledge of the most damaging kind, knowledge of people's misbehavior.

"Next you have services. He was in a position to render all kinds of special services, simple things like meeting celebrities at the airport in Paris and getting them a discount at their hotel, or if their wives wanted to buy expensive items, take them shopping where they could get it at cost. He was rendering services all the time, every day of the year. The main reason we opened up the office in Bern was to entertain his high-ranking friends who vacationed in Switzerland. . . .

What about performance?

SULLIVAN: "We did a reasonably good job. I know the kind of work the other agencies do and we presented ourselves as the elite, as being almost superhuman. Well, if it was ever made public how many fugitives we never caught, that certainly would dull the edge of that argument. If it was ever made public how many bank robberies we never solved, that would dull the edge of that argument. Now, when I say that, I'm not saying that we didn't do a reasonably good job. The strength of the Bureau was always in the Field Offices, and I can't say enough fine things about the average Special Agent who doesn't know anything at all about what you and I are talking about. Whenever possible, we buried our failures and publicized only our successes, and, hell, anybody can look gigantic if they can get away with doing this."

Was Hoover suspicious of the Civil Rights movement?

SULLIVAN: "Hoover had something in mind where he wanted to smear the American Negro as being pro-Communist. In the early 1960s, he raised hell be-



cause he requested evidence showing the extent of the infiltration of the Communist Party by the Negro. Well, hell, the Negro never infiltrated the Communist Party; the Party was almost free of Negroes. Then when we came up with an honest report, he was furious. Christ, he wouldn't speak to me for about three or four months, but I stuck by the facts.

I made a test case in the late 1950s and tried to get a fellow by the name of Francis Henderson into the FBI as a Negro Special Agent, and he was turned down. His mother currently works over at Internal Revenue Service. I always wanted to get Negroes into the Bureau. My God, down South they used to hire them in the police departments and we were refusing to hire them. I didn't like that. I didn't like the refusal of the Bureau to hire Jews and after quite a struggle I did finally manage to get a young Jewish man into the Bureau, and he's still in. So I was always sort of an off-beat person and accused of being a troublemaker.

"For example, on October 12, 1970, I gave a speech before UPI editors in Williamsburg—I was part of a panel with President Brewster of Yale and John Kilpatrick, the columnist. We each gave a little talk and then the panel session opened and I got a question: 'Isn't it true that the Communist Party is responsible for racial riots and all the academic violence and upheaval?' I said, 'No, it's absolutely untrue. The Party is weak and is incapable of doing any such thing. We'd have the racial riots if the Communist Party had never existed because the problem is indigenous to this country.' When I got back to Washington, all hell broke loose. There was a note for me to see Tolson, a note for me to see Hoover, and Hoover was furious. He said, 'Why did you give that answer?' And I said, 'Because it's the truth and you know it's the truth.' I put this in a letter to him later on, and I further told him that if I had to go out and see the American public, I wasn't going to give any more speeches for the Bureau. I had three scheduled and I told him, 'You better assign them to somebody else.' So he assigned them to former Assistant Director Thomas Bishop."

*How did the Director feel about enforcing civil rights?*

SULLIVAN: "We never enforced the civil rights law because Hoover was opposed to the whole civil rights program. Bobby Kennedy came in and started putting the pressure on it, and then we kind of had to change our ways, but for years we completely ignored the violation of civil rights on the part of Southern law enforcement. There are several reasons for this. Number one, Hoover wasn't in favor of civil rights; number two, if you went after the sheriffs and if you went after the other men, then they wouldn't cooperate with you on bank robberies, on stolen automobiles, they wouldn't cooperate with you on all the other crimes that the FBI handled, and so you'd be left without support from the whole Southern police force; number three, there was his support in Congress. His strength was with the ultra-conservative, with the Southern and Northern conservatives, conservatives wherever they were; and if he went ahead and started to barge into the civil rights field,

he'd lose his support in Congress. . . .

*What do you think about the remark that it took an Attorney General with a brother in the White House to get Hoover into Organized Crime?*

SULLIVAN: "Hoover refused to tackle organized crime until we wrote a monograph that demonstrated clearly that organized crime existed. . . . It was actually Bobby Kennedy who really put the great stress on it—he gave it the big push. I know because I was in charge of the operation. The man who did more than anybody else in the Bureau to break up organized crime once we got going into it was Jim Gale, Assistant Director of the Special Investigative Division handling organized crime. Gale is an extraordinarily intelligent, able man and he was one of my Assistant Directors when I was the number-three man. Gale got the job done through sheer intelligence and imagination and drive."

**S**ullivan was forced to retire in late 1971. In his front page story, dated October 2, 1971, Ken Clawson of the Washington Post wrote that Sullivan left "after a series of policy disputes" with Hoover. "While Sullivan, 59, was on sick leave yesterday, his name was removed from his office door and the locks changed. Sullivan, once thought to be a likely successor to Hoover, 76, was not officially informed. The FBI . . . said that Sullivan had voluntarily retired, effective next week . . . Sources close to the situation called the FBI explanation 'a lie of the highest Hooverian order.' . . . Sullivan's ouster was foreshadowed about six weeks ago when Hoover appointed W. Mark Felt into a newly created No. 3 post above Sullivan." Clawson said that "Sullivan's progressive attitude and efforts to modernize the FBI was making Hoover furious." According to Clawson, Sullivan, who was the only top FBI executive in recent years that "Hoover addressed by his first name," had been a "favorite of Hoover's for years because of his intellectual approach to his duties."

"That was his forte and also his downfall," an FBI source told Clawson. "He gained a broader perspective and with it came a more progressive attitude. I'm not saying everything he wanted to do was great; it wasn't. The point is, he wanted to change things; he wondered out loud why we did things the way we did; why it couldn't be done with more effective results. In the FBI, that is like pouring gasoline over your own head. The Director is the only one with a match."

Behind the scenes in the top ranks of the FBI, a power struggle between Hoover and Sullivan was quietly reaching a climax. Sullivan, an Assistant to the Director, with responsibility for all investigative and intelligence operations, domestic and foreign, was the Bureau's No. 3 man. John P. Mohr, who held a similar title on the administrative side, was in the No. 4 slot. At the height of the feud, Hoover suddenly promoted Chief Inspector W. Mark Felt to Deputy Associate Director, a newly created position directly under Tolson, which was interpreted as an effort on his part to insulate himself from Sullivan's abrasive challenge.

Sullivan took the big plunge in July, 1971, when he allegedly approached Rob-

ert Mardian, an Assistant Attorney General with a penchant for ferreting out subversives. A golfing partner of John Mitchell and a close friend of Barry Goldwater, Mardian rejuvenated the Internal Security Division, moribund since the last hurrah of Joe McCarthy.

Once established as head of ISD, Mardian, and two top assistants, Kevin Maroney and Guy Goodwin, went on a subversive manhunt, weaving a whole string of conspiracy cases against antiwar radicals, most of which were ultimately lost in court on the basis of unsound prosecution evidence.

It was Sullivan, according to Mardian, who first approached him about wiretaps ordered by the White House to find out who leaked "classified information to the New York Times. Nixon authorized a specific wiretapping program to discover the source of the leak. Wiretaps were later ordered placed on thirteen government officials, including five of Kissinger's closest aides on the National Security Council



staff: Morton B. Halperin, Winston Lord, Helmut Sonnenfeldt, Daniel I. Davidson and Anthony Lake. Also wiretaps were placed against four newsmen suspected of receiving leaked information: Marvin Kalb of CBS; Henry Brandon, Washington correspondent of the London *Sunday Times*; Hedrick Smith, diplomatic correspondent for the New York *Times*, and William Beecher, the New York *Times* Pentagon correspondent." In an interview with FBI agents on May 10, 1973, Mardian said Sullivan contacted him "and told him that he was in trouble with the Director of the FBI and expected that he might in fact be fired. He did not explain why. He said that he had information that was 'out of channel,' that he wanted to turn over to the president of the United States. He said this was wiretap information and that, in his opinion, Mr. Hoover could not be entrusted with this wiretap information. Mr. Sullivan continued in conversation saying that Mr. Hoover had used wiretap information to blackmail other Presidents of the United States and was afraid that he could blackmail Mr. Nixon with this information."



Mardian consulted Mitchell, who said "he would handle it." A short time later Mardian was directed by John Ehrlichman to "fly immediately to the White House in San Clemente." The "following morning after his arrival in San Clemente, he went directly to the Western White House and spoke with the President of the United States." Asked how the President had reacted, Mardian said, "He directed me to obtain the reports from Sullivan and deliver them to Mr. Ehrlichman."

Nine months after Hoover's death, in February, 1973, *Time* notified the White House that it was going to print the story about the seventeen wiretaps which had been kept secret this whole time, apparently even from John Dean. In his testimony before the Watergate Committee, Dean said he made inquiries as to the source of the *Time* leak. "I called Mr. Mark Felt [Felt, who has since retired, was Associate Director under L. Patrick Gray and Clarence M. Kelley] at the FBI to ask him first what the facts were, and second, how

"He was very, very powerful, unbelievably powerful . . . I know Nixon was actually afraid of him."

such a story could leak. Mr. Felt told me that it was true, that Mr. Sullivan knew all the facts and that he had no idea how it leaked. I then called Mr. Sullivan and requested that he drop by my office, which he did. He explained that after much haggling, that the wiretaps were installed, but as I recall, Mr. Sullivan said they did not have the blessing of Director Hoover. Mr. Sullivan explained to me that all but one set of the logs had been destroyed and all the internal FBI records relating to the wiretaps except one set, had been destroyed and all the material had been delivered to Mr. Mardian."

On February 28, 1973, following his meeting with Sullivan concerning the *Time* leak, John Dean reported to the President.

On this particular morning, Nixon is kindly disposed toward Hoover: "I have seen [Hoover] socially at least a hundred times. He and I were very close friends. . . . He was as close or closer to me than Johnson, actually, although Johnson used him more. But as for Pat Gray, Christ, I never saw him."

Dean can appreciate the irony: "While it

might have been, uh, a lot of blue chips to the late Director, I think we would have been a lot better off during this whole Watergate thing if he'd been alive, 'cause he knew how to handle that Bureau, knew how to keep them in bounds, uh—was a tough cookie."

"Well, if, if Hoover ever fought—He would have fought, that's the point," the President says, forgetting the long bill of particulars the White House, allegedly, had compiled against the Director. "He'd have fired a few people, or he'd have scared them to death. He's got files on everybody, damn it."

Dean laughs. "That's right," he says. "But now, at the present time," Nixon continues, "the Bureau is leaking like a sieve."

Later, of course, John Ehrlichman would paint a different picture of the Director. In an affidavit dated April 26, 1974 Ehrlichman said: "For some months prior to June, 1971, and virtually until his death, J. Edgar Hoover was the object of the President's criticism on a number of grounds: The FBI Director refused to enlist the Bureau in the Administration's efforts to suppress narcotics traffic; the President was known to feel that the FBI effort against domestic sabotage and violence was inadequate; a file containing a complete catalogue of problems, marked 'The Company Director' exists in the possession of the Government. In late June and early July, the FBI effort in the Pentagon Papers case was the subject of Assistant Attorney General Mardian's strong criticism. . . . It is against this background that the Young-Krogh unit [Plumbers] was established by the President and expressly given the job of investigating Ellsberg."

On March 12, 1973, the President issued a policy statement that members of his staff would invoke executive privilege and not appear before the Senate Watergate Committee. However, the committee voted unanimously to "invite" Dean to testify. The next day, Dean and Nixon took up the matter of introducing information damaging to Democrats, a diversion that apparently hinges entirely on Sullivan's willingness to expose past illegal practices of the FBI:

DEAN: Sullivan said, "John, what bothers me is that you all have been portrayed as politically using [the FBI]."

PRESIDENT: And never did.

DEAN: And we never have. He said the Eisenhower Administration didn't either. The only . . . times that he can recall that there has been a real political use has been during Democratic tenure.

PRESIDENT: The Kennedys, used it, let me say, politically on that steel thing.

DEAN: That's right.

PRESIDENT: That was not, that was not a national security, was it?

DEAN: No. Now I asked, uh, I asked somebody about that and they told me that what happened there is that, uh—they were being defensive of Kennedy, and so that person who would defend Kennedy necessarily—was saying that Kennedy had given Hoover orders and Hoover, being typical in his response, tried to get it yesterday as far as the answer for the President. And that's why he sent people out in the middle of the night and the blame

really fell on Hoover. . . .

PRESIDENT: It's still wrong.

DEAN: That's right. Sure.

PRESIDENT: Good God. Does he know about the bugging of Martin Luther King?

DEAN: Yep.

PRESIDENT: I wonder if he'd tell that, that would be good.

DEAN: I think he would tell everything he knows.

PRESIDENT: You do?

DEAN: Uh-huh. That's why I'm saying he is, he is, he is a trem—he's a bomb. Uh, now the fact is—

PRESIDENT: Let's look at the distant future. Uh, look at the—How bad would it hurt the country, John, to have the FBI so terribly discredited? [unintelligible]

DEAN: [Unintelligible] I've, I've, kicked this around with Dick Moore, these, these broader questions, and, I think it would be damaging to the FBI, uh, but maybe it's time to shake the FBI and rebuild it. I'm not so sure it's everything it's cracked up to be. I, I'm convinced the FBI isn't everything the public thinks it is.

PRESIDENT: No.

DEAN: I know quite well it isn't . . . Another thing is, I don't think Sullivan would give up the White House. Sullivan—as I said, could, there's a liability in Sullivan here, and that's his knowledge of the earlier things that occurred, uh—

PRESIDENT: That we did?

DEAN: That we did.

PRESIDENT: Well, now you should tell them. Oh, you mean he wouldn't, he'd say, he'd say, "I did no political work at all. My, my work in the [unintelligible] Nixon Administration was, was solely in the national security."

DEAN: That's right.

PRESIDENT: And that is totally true.

**W** Mark Felt looks like central casting's idea of the typical FBI executive. He is tall, athletic, with handsome clean-cut features and a full head of silver gray hair. He is soft spoken, extremely courteous, and very low key, exactly the kind of a man you would trust with the family's most sordid secret. At this writing Felt was under FBI investigation to determine whether he had provided Watergate-related information and documents to John M. Crewdson, a New York *Times* reporter. In a press statement, Felt denounced the investigation as "ridiculous" and "astounding."

*You were moved in ahead of Sullivan?*

FELT: "Yes. This was a new position created for that purpose. If you talk to Sullivan, he'll give you a different picture. Sullivan, I think, was probably as close to Hoover as anyone was with the exception of Tolson. Sullivan is an extremely intelligent person. He's more on the academic side than on the investigative side. His background was completely research, an area in which he was excellent. That's what Hoover was trying to do when he moved me into the spot—I was the Chief Inspector for five or six years—and I was supposed to be the disciplinarian and all this sort of thing. I had quite a lot to do with riding herd on Sullivan earlier anyway. I suppose he would have regarded me as a threat at that stage. I was able to slow Sullivan down some. I think I was able to put the lid on certain things."



*Why didn't Hoover personally step on Sullivan? Why did he need you to do it?*

FELT: "If you'd ever worked in the government, you'd understand a little better. You just don't fire somebody in the government, and I think by this time, Sullivan had his contacts with Mardian, he spent half his time at the White House. I think he was becoming too formidable a character for Hoover to take him on. Let's face it, Hoover was past retirement age, he was there at the day-to-day discretion of the President, and I don't think he felt politically strong enough to meet him head on. I think that Sullivan had too much support from the White House. Sullivan is a friend of Haig [General Alexander Haig, White House advisor], was apparently his neighbor at one time, a real close associate. During those last days, Sullivan spent a lot of time down there at the White House. He was the one that gave them all this information and apparently they think it's true about the political abuses of the FBI by prior administrations. This is about ninety percent baloney, it just isn't true, and Sullivan couldn't come up with any specifics.

"I'm referring to the charges that past Presidents had wiretaps put on newspapermen and this sort of thing. The only time Hoover ever commented on Sullivan's allegations that he had blackmailed other Presidents, Hoover told me, 'That's a damn lie of Sullivan's,' and I'm sure it was. I'm sure Hoover didn't have any intention of doing anything like that. He never had."

*Why do you think Sullivan turned the logs over to Mardian?*

FELT: "Sullivan was trying to ingratiate himself with the Administration. . . . He was trying to get the Director's job. There's just no question about that. And this was just a step to ingratiate himself, and I think that Sullivan was becoming, you know, through the last two or three years, was becoming increasingly frustrated with Hoover."

I asked Felt and Mohr what they thought of Ehrlichman's statement concerning the poor performance of the FBI:

FELT: "This is just a complete phony. It is the act of a desperate man trying to bail himself out of a bad situation. They know that Hoover is dead and that he can't defend himself. If they had any criticism, if the White House was unhappy with the FBI, there I was sitting for quite a long time as Chief Inspector where I would handle critics and criticism, and I was sitting as the Deputy Associate Director during the period of time they're talking about and I certainly never heard of any criticism. I never saw anything in writing. I never heard anybody say anything about it. I never heard Hoover say anything about it. I think they're making it all up."

MOHR: "I think that if Nixon had asked him about the Plumbers, Hoover would have told him he was crazy, that it was a bad thing. Ehrlichman is trying to justify the creation of the Plumbers.

*Did Hoover know about the Plumbers?*

SULLIVAN: "God, you raise a hell of an interesting question. I've been told he did, but I can't prove it."

**C**ointelpro was the name of the counter-intelligence programs Hoover op-

erated between 1956 and 1971 to sabotage extremist groups. It first came to light when Attorney General William B. Saxbe, complying with a federal court ruling in a suit brought under the Freedom of Information Act, released FBI documents on December 7, 1973, and November 18, 1974.

John Mohr was convinced that William Sullivan was behind Cointelpro:

MOHR: "That was Sullivan, that was engineered by Sullivan. He was behind most of that. You see, that was the investigative side of the Bureau, and the Domestic Intelligence Division would have handled, generally, a lot of that stuff. Principally, it was intelligence gathering, but it also included harassment."

SULLIVAN: "Of course, I was involved in Cointelpro, and I think it was a fine program. I can't understand all the damn misinformation that's been put out about it. I can't go into detail on it, but the essence of it is this: Are you going to spend millions of taxpayers dollars going-around ringing doorbells and asking questions of people

**"He said, 'You know,  
we can resurrect  
[Cointelpro] later . . .  
but right now  
it's time to lay low.'"**

who know nothing, or are you going to very systematically and very carefully penetrate these organizations like the Ku Klux Klan and the Black Panthers and disrupt them from within at a cost of almost nothing, and that's precisely what we did, we disrupted them. I just can't understand all the damn nonsense that's been issued and certainly I'm amazed at Saxbe confusing the matter. . . . He doesn't know what he's talking about."

*But it was not approved by the Attorney General.*

SULLIVAN: "There are any number of operations that the FBI engage in that aren't approved by the Attorney General. We don't have to get everything approved by the Attorney General. We made independent decisions, that's what we are getting paid for, and the fact that the Attorney General didn't know about all of our operations is no criticism of our operations."

*Did Hoover stop the programs after Hale Boggs charged that Hoover was using secret police tactics?*

SULLIVAN: "Yes, but that was just peripheral. Boggs' main charge was that we had a wiretap on him. Hoover was right on that. Now, I'm all on Hoover's side in regard to Boggs. Boggs was completely wrong and Hoover was completely right.

We didn't have any tap on Hale Boggs, or on anybody else up on the Hill. Why, it would be stupid. But others have charged the same thing.

*If Hoover was so preoccupied with preserving his legend, why did he sanction Cointelpro as long as he did?*

SULLIVAN: "The question is whether you're jeopardizing your legend more if you run twenty questionable programs or two or three—it's just a question of cutting down the risk. Let me explain how most good programs begin. Take Cointelpro, for instance, it began by the men in the field suggesting new methods and procedures, which were reviewed by supervisors, who in turn bucked memoranda up the line through Section Chiefs, Branch Inspectors and so on until it finally got to Mohr and me. We'd look it over and send it to Hoover. All ideas come from the working level, because, hell, you've got to understand that the position of people like myself is administrative. We didn't have any time to sit around thinking up counter-intelligence operations.

"Cointelpro goes way back to the 1954 Supreme Court decision that resurrected the Ku Klux Klan. We first tested this program against the Klan and we found it to be damn good and we raised hell with the Klan. . . . Later, we broadened it to include all those organizations Saxbe mentioned in his report. . . .

"My idea was that we ought to use intelligence and security techniques against the Klan and not just criminal investigative methods. When we took it over, the Klan had more than fourteen thousand very active members, and when I left in 1971 it had been reduced to forty-three hundred completely disorganized and impotent individuals. But the problem with the business of law enforcement, and Hoover, of course, knew this very well, is that you can't win. You're damned if you do and damned if you don't."

"I was opposed to Hoover discontinuing Cointelpro. I went over all the programs with him and his reasoning was: 'The climate of public opinion,' and he said, 'You know, we can resurrect this later on. It might be a year, it might be a year and a half, but right now it's time to lay low.' He wasn't opposed to it from the standpoint of invasion of privacy, or anything like that, but purely because of public opinion—lay low because things might break.

*Could it be that since he was getting along in years, he wanted to set his house in order—he didn't want to die and leave these programs on the books for others to discover?*

SULLIVAN: "Yes. He knew he had high blood pressure. Of course, he kept telling us that he was in perfect health, but I learned later on from a very authoritative source that Hoover knew he had high blood pressure and was not in good health. You're right. He might have been cleaning things up, not wanting to leave anything that would be a blemish on his record. Even so, when Ruckelshaus came in, he raised some hell as it was. He said what the FBI needed was another Pope John to open up the windows and let in some fresh air and reform and reorganize everything.

But with Kelley in there now, Hoover's secrets are safe." ■