

Karpis Hits Hero Role Of Hoover

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By Ken W. Clawson

Washington Post Staff Writer

Alvin Karpis, a depression-era gangster whose arrest in 1936 made J. Edgar Hoover a national hero, claims his capture created a phony legend.

A former Public Enemy No. 1, Karpis said in a newly published autobiography, "The Alvin Karpis Story," that Hoover remained behind a building while 24 FBI agents got the drop on him and gangster Freddi Barker.

Hoover "waited until he was told the coast was clear," Karpis wrote. "Then he came out to reap the glory . . . I made Hoover's reputation as a fearless lawman. It's a reputation he doesn't deserve."

The FBI responded that Karpis was bidding for public attention to promote book sales.

An FBI spokesman said, "J. Edgar Hoover's record for honesty speaks for itself and Alvin Karpis' record for dishonesty is equally clear."

"Whose word would you trust? That of Mr. Hoover and the FBI agents who were with him when the FBI director personally arrested Karpis in New Orleans in 1936, or the word of this notorious gangster and convicted felon?"

Karpis, 64, was paroled in 1969 after 33 years in prison. He said in his book that Hoover's version of the arrest "grated on me" during his prison years.

The official FBI version of the incident is that Karpis made a move for a rifle lying on the back seat of his car as Hoover and his agents approached the vehicle. Hoover is alleged to have jerked open the door and grabbed Karpis.

But Karpis said he was in a 1936 Plymouth coupe that had no back seat. The closest rifle, he said, was locked in the car trunk.

After agents covered him with rifles and machine guns, Karpis said, an FBI agent called to Hoover — who was behind an apartment building — "We've got him. We've got him. It's all clear, chief."

Hoover then made his appearance, Karpis said.