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Television



Senior aide Clyde Tolson and J. Edgar Hoover: A rumored homosexual relationship

J. Edgar Hoover: Married to the Mob?

Documentary suggests FBI director
was blackmailed homosexual

BY JOHN STANLEY

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WILLIAM CRAN, one of the leading investigators for the "Frontline" series on PBS, had wondered for a long time about J. Edgar Hoover. Why had the FBI director of nearly 50 years never conducted a fight against organized crime during his tenure in office?

Why, in fact, had Hoover publicly denied the existence of the Mafia at a time when his field agents had given him a report that the criminal underworld was eating away at the fabric of American society? Why had the director exploded even at the mere mention of the word "Mafia"?

"It appeared to me that perhaps Hoover had somehow compromised himself and was being blackmailed by the underworld not to act," the British reporter-turned-producer said. "So I started digging around."

He struck pay dirt. In conjunction with Anthony Summers, the Irish investigative reporter whose previous books have included exhaustive studies of Marilyn Monroe's death and the John F. Kennedy assassination, Cran has produced a hard-hitting one-hour "Frontline" documentary: "The Secret File on J. Edgar Hoover," airing at 10 p.m. Tuesday on Channel 9.

The exposé is being broadcast simultaneously with the publication of Summers' new study of Hoover, "Official and Confidential," by G.P. Putnam. Rather than become territorial about the independent material they were uncovering, the two investigators decided to cooperate and share information, having been friends since the early 1970s when they worked together for the BBC as an investigative unit.

While Hoover has come under critical fire in recent years, and it was proved by a Justice Department probe in 1976 that the chief had misused government funds and accepted favors no FBI man should have accepted, the Cran-Summers investigation is the first to unearth new material that concludes what before has always been conjecture: that Hoover was a closet homosexual whose lifelong lover was the bureau's deputy director, Clyde Tolson, and that this secret was known to the Mafia, which had incriminating photographs of the pair.

"So this would definitely explain why Hoover refused to challenge the mob for nearly two decades," Cran said from his office at station KGBH in Boston. "Instead of using his power to protect the United States against organized crime at a time when it was just taking root, he did nothing. His own personal corruption got in the way of the most important job he could have been doing."

Cran said he was compelled to pursue the Hoover story because "I find it wicked when people aren't true to their own set of beliefs. It's one thing to say that Hoover was a

staunch anti-Communist and got carried away as a zealot fighting civil rights, environmentalists and the women's movement, but for him to turn away from fighting

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'Frontline'
investigator
William Cran

organized crime — that is unforgivable."

The most damaging evidence about Hoover's secret sex life comes from two sources unearthed by Summers. One is Susan Rosensteel, wife of Louis Rosensteel, a bookie who worked for gangster Meyer Lansky and was considered the mob's financial genius. She tells "Frontline" that her husband was bisexual and one night in the late '50s took her to the Plaza Hotel to an all-male orgy that was attended by Hoover wearing women's clothing. Her description is specifically graphic, and under Summers' intense questioning she holds to her story, certain that the man in "a black chiffon dress, very short with ruffles and black lace stockings" was Hoover.

The second is Louisa Stuart, a leading fashion model of the 1930s, who describes New Year's Eve 1936, when she accompanied Hoover and Tolson on a drinking binge and saw them in the back seat of the limousine, holding hands like lovers.

According to Cran, another man saw Hoover and Tolson holding hands at a race track: Sy Pollack, a onetime associate of Lansky. Pollack also claims that Lansky possessed incriminating photos of Hoover and Tolson and used them to keep Hoover inactive against the mob.

In his investigations, Cran said, "I kept coming across former FBI agents who were disillusioned and extremely critical of Hoover. Bill Turner of San Francisco, for example, has written a book against Hoover. Others who had been upstanding agents, and who talked about the gap between what was happening in the field and behavior in

Washington, admitted that they could never understand why Hoover behaved the way he did toward the mob."

One former FBI man who stands up for Hoover is William Roemer, who calls Hoover "a patriot," yet in the next breath admits that Hoover's refusal to acknowledge existence of the rackets is "inconceivable to me."

Another supporter is Hoover's onetime assistant Cartha DeLoach, who says, "Despite what many scurrilous individuals claim today, there was no homosexual relationship between [Hoover and Tolson]."

"The Secret File on J. Edgar Hoover" chronicles the FBI director's penchant for betting on the horses and draws a connection between the men he placed bets with and the Mafia. According to Herman Klurflud, onetime assistant to New York columnist Walter Winchell, "Hoover received some of his tips on horses through Winchell, who received them through [Mafia boss] Frank Costello." So, "the head of the FBI would bet on horses with a tip from one of the heads of the underworld."

The program details how Hoover used wiretapping — an authorization granted him for security reasons during World War II by President Roosevelt and then never officially rescinded — to gather information against any person whose political views differed from his own. Says Cran, "He snooped on the sexual secrets of Eleanor Roosevelt, Charlie Chaplin, John Kennedy, Martin Luther King and many others.... Rumor, fact and innuendo — everything was cross-indexed and filed away. He became more powerful as he gathered more information. Politicians feared him. He became untouchable."

Cran and Summers also have come to the conclusion that Hoover used his blackmailing powers to force Kennedy to choose Lyndon Johnson as his vice president. Hoover had amassed file after file on Kennedy's womanizing and through innuendo threatened to release the information to the public unless Johnson was invited by Kennedy to become part of the Democratic ticket in 1960.

Hank Messick, described by "Frontline" as "a doyen of American investigative reporters" who has chronicled the rise of the Mafia, believes "it would be a very helpful, healthy thing for this nation to strike Hoover's name from the FBI building... Hoover's greatest public service... came with his death. He was a disaster."

Cran, whose study of the oil business, "The Prize," was the third-highest-rated PBS special last month, acknowledged that there have been two good books about Hoover in

recent years: Curt Gentry's "J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and the Secrets" and Richard Gid Powers' "Secrecy and Power: The Life of J. Edgar Hoover." But Summers' book, he said, "represents heavy-duty investigative reporting, the burning of shoe leather as never before."

WHILE he thinks it's good that there is now a federal law that prevents an FBI chief from holding office for more than 10 years, Cran said, "I can't help but ask myself the classic question: Who will guard the guards? No public servant should hold office without overseeing. We must have some way to measure a man's ability."

And, finally, there is the story told by John Dowd, chief of the Organized Crime Strike Force during the 1970s, which investigated Hoover's misappropriations after his death. "One day Hoover found a turd on his patio and requested it be investigated to find out what had crapped on his patio." The offending feces was rushed to FBI headquarters, "where the resources of the crime lab were diverted to trace the guilty party — a raccoon."

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