

J. Edgar Hoover's Friend, Aide

FBI's Clyde A. Tolson, 74, Dies

By Richard M. Cohen
Washington Post Staff Writer

Clyde Anderson Tolson, for years both the number two man in the FBI and J. Edgar Hoover's alter ego, died yesterday of heart failure—until the last a steadfast defender of the FBI he had helped build and its director who once called him "my strong right arm."

The former associate director, 74, had been in ill-health for about the last 10 years since suffering a stroke in 1964. He was admitted to Doctors Hospital here last Thursday and died at the hospital yesterday morning.

For nearly 20 years, Mr. Tolson and Hoover were inseparable friends. They took turns dining at each others' homes, went to the race track together and even vacationed together—usually near a race track. In the morning's, Hoover's bullet-proof limousine would stop at Tolson's apartment to pick him up and often the two men would get out on Constitution Avenue, NW to walk part of the way to the Justice Department together.

So close were the two that the grief-stricken Mr. Tolson submitted his resignation the same day Hoover died, May 2, 1972, and refused to accept a condolence call from the man appointed as Hoover's temporary replacement, then assistant attorney general L. Patrick Gray III. Gray later was appointed acting director of the FBI.

Mr. Tolson lived out his retirement in the house Hoover had willed to him at 4936 30th Pl., NW, among the antiques and paintings Hoover had collected. In all, he was willed the bulk of Hoover's \$551,500 estate—yet another reflection of the relationship between the two men.

But while Hoover was the out-front—and frequently outspoken—FBI director, Mr. Tolson was the seldom-seen and nearly anonymous alter-ego. His name surfaced in the press only rarely, and then frequently in letters to the editor in which he defended either Hoover or the bureau. He kept at it even after the death of Hoover and his own retirement. In 1973, for instance, he wrote The Washington Post saying there was "not the slightest truth" to a statement by former FBI Assistant Director William Sullivan that Hoover "was not of sound mind" in his later years.

In some of his letters, Mr. Tolson reflected his and Hoover's



CLYDE TOLSON

er's deep-seated views on what they said were the dangers of the international Communist conspiracy and the threat it posed to American institutions.

Mr. Tolson's contemporaries in the bureau credit him with an acute sense of "public relations timing," as former FBI assistant director Cartha DeLoach put it yesterday.

DeLoach recalled that Mr. Tolson possessed a photographic memory, and was able to read a memorandum in a flash and virtually recall its contents word for word.

As a result of his ability to speed-read and remember everything he read, DeLoach said, Mr. Tolson's desk was always clean—never a paper on it.

But while Mr. Tolson and Hoover were close friends and alike in many ways, a close friend of both said they had strikingly different personalities.

"He had more warmth than Mr. Hoover," said an old associate of both men. "I think he enjoyed life a great deal more. He had a twinkle in his eye for the girls and Mr. Hoover never condescended to that."

But essentially, Tolson was a shy man—in many

ways the perfect civil servant. He was born in Missouri and grew up in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. At the age of 18, he accepted a position in the old War Department where he eventually used his stenographic skills to become confidential secretary to Secretary of War Newton D. Baker.

Mr. Tolson remained to serve two other secretaries of War, but in the meantime put himself through college and law school at night. He received both degrees from George Washington University.

It was about that time that he met Hoover, a native Washingtonian, and struck up what became a life-long friendship. In 1928—four years after Hoover became FBI director—Mr. Tolson joined the Bureau, and was assigned to the Boston field office where his work caught Hoover's attention. With that came a transfer to Washington and a close association with Hoover.

Although later a pre-eminent Washington bureaucrat and Bureau in-fighter who retained his short hand skills, Mr. Tolson was no slouch with a gun. In 1936 he accompanied Hoover when he personally arrested Alvin "Creepy" Karpis, a murderer and bank robber. The case made headlines coast to coast and did much to enhance the G-Man image of the FBI.

Later that same year, Mr. Tolson shot it out in New York City with Harry Brunette, a gangster and bank robber. In addition, Mr. Tolson played what the FBI later called "a prominent part" in the investigation and apprehension of eight Nazi saboteurs who landed in 1942 on Long Island and Florida.

It was on such exploits—later grist for countless radio and television shows—that the FBI built its image and Mr. Tolson his career. By 1947, Hoover created a special title for Mr. Tolson—associate director.

In that capacity he was number two to one of the most powerful men in Washington—the keeper of the files. Yet Mr. Tolson's associates found him soft-spoken and self-effacing, a man, they recall, who never lost his temper. And for all his closeness to Hoover, it was understood that Mr. Tolson

could never succeed him. He was too old.

In 1970, Mr. Tolson reached the mandatory retirement age of 70, in too poor health to remain with the Bureau and get an exception to the retirement policy. Hoover retired his friend—and then rehired him, saying he was needed to complete work already under way.

In the end, Mr. Tolson became Hoover's principal heir, receiving the house stocks, bonds and Hoover's personal belongings. But according to John P. Mohr, the now retired assistant to Hoover, Mr. Tolson received none of the celebrated personal files that Hoover reportedly kept.

"He had no files from the Bureau," Mohr said. "I can't think of anyone who was less inclined to have Bureau files than Mr. Tolson."

While his associates describe Mr. Tolson as a man dedicated to the FBI, he somehow found time to tinker with inventing. He sought and received a patent, for instance, on a bottle cap after he cut his finger on one. In addition, he invented—and had installed—electrically operated windows, one of which was used by Lyndon Johnson in the White House and one by Hoover himself. The device automatically shut the window at a certain time so a person could go to sleep in a cool room but wake up in warm comfort.

Mr. Tolson, who like Hoover never married, is survived by his brother, Hilory, the executive director of the White House Historical Association. A friend said yesterday it is likely that Hoover's former house would be put up for sale.

In a statement, FBI Director Clarence M. Kelley, said the death of Mr. Tolson left a "great void in the law enforcement field . . ."

"As the close associate and confidant of former FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, Mr. Tolson devoted his life to the service of the American people and to effective law enforcement throughout the country."

The FBI announced that services will be conducted Wednesday at the Joseph Gawler's Son Funeral Home, 5130 Wisconsin Ave. N.W. with burial later at the Congressional Cemetery.