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In Defense of the FBI

"Limited responsibility" truly defines the Federal Bureau of Investigation—as against the misconception of a nationwide police force sticking its nose into other people's private lives — says San Francisco's FBI chief.

"The FBI is not a clearance agency," Robert E.

Gebhardt, special agent in charge of the FBI office here, told the Rotary Club yesterday.

"It is not a national police force. It is not a protection agency. It has no authority to guard or protect anyone.

"It's an investigative agency."

Noting the recent rise in

airplane hijackings, Gebhardt said many people keep asking why the FBI doesn't take steps to put a stop to them.

"Our responsibility is limited to investigating a sky-jacking after it takes place, not before," Gebhardt emphasized.

As for the FBI checking

into private lives, he pointed out that the FBI is responsible for internal security and therefore does investigate the background of applicants for jobs that could imperil it.

By way of pinpointing the FBI's limitations, Gebhardt said that although 921,000 cars were stolen last year in the nation, the FBI could be concerned with only 33,000 of them — those that were taken across state lines.

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