

FBI's Hoover let oil man pick up his hotel bill

WASHINGTON — Inspired by the government's peephole practices, we decided to turn the tables on J. Edgar Hoover and to conduct an FBI-style investigation into his private life.

We used some of the FBI's more offensive prying techniques such as watching his house, inspecting his trash, questioning his neighbors and checking his movements.

As evidence that no one's private life is unassailable, we discovered that even the scrupulous Hoover used to spend his summer vacations at La Jolla, Calif., as the guest of an oil millionaire. The late Clint Murchison picked up Hoover's tab year after year at the Hotel Del Charro near their favorite race track.

The durable old G-man, who will be 76 on New Year's Day, has built a formidable reputation upon nearly 47 years of planted press notices. He has carefully publicized human strengths, carefully hidden human failings.

His public relations wizardry has produced the image of a man of action, prepared for any encounter anywhere with public enemies, Communist spies and other forces of evil. He isn't always able to separate himself from his image. In private, say intimates, he sometimes relapses into the staccato speech and stern mannerisms that are expected of him.

Nor have the years appreciably softened the bulldog visage, nor rusted the steel-trap mind, nor mellowed the roaring temper. But he can also be a boon companion who relishes a good joke, a lively conversationalist who can discourse on an astonishing range of topics, a genial host who personally attends to the wants of his guests.

Hoover's home

John Edgar Hoover, the man and the image, is enshrined in a jewelbox home in a sedate Washington, D.C., neighborhood of large houses and old trees. Two doormats with the initials JEH in white lettering against a black background provide the only clue to the identity of the eminent occupant. A small eagle roosts on the letterbox left of the door.

The foyer, scattered with oriental rugs, is dominated by a bronze, lifesize bust of a grim Hoover. The walls are covered with photos and other mementos of his exploits. Intimates say he never discards a gift. Among the oddities he has accumulated, recalls a visitor, is one of the earliest stereos with a color-sound lightshow attachment.

The presence of the nation's top cop in the neighborhood, say residents, hasn't intimidated criminals who have burglarized at least six homes, stolen an auto, and made off with other loose valuables over the past several months.

A next-door neighbor has so little confidence in Hoover's ability to deter crime that

he keeps his house spotlighted at night. Indeed, the chief G-man started hanging a simple Christmas decoration on his door a couple of years ago, according to a woman across the street, after vandals ripped down his Christmas lights.

Hoover is so mindful of his image, say neighbors, that he never keeps his bullet-proof government limousine parked on the premises. Instead, he sends his chauffeur by personal Cadillac to pick up the official car. The driver then drives back to fetch Hoover, who would rather stick the taxpayers for the chauffeur's extra time than give the appearance of using a government limousine for personal purposes.

As a measure of Hoover's circumspection, he dropped all but the initial of his first name in 1933 when he learned that another man named John Edgar Hoover owed a Washington store \$900. The FBI chief has always paid his bills promptly on the first of the month.

FBI chief's freeloading

Yet our investigation turned up the startling fact that Hoover, on his annual pilgrimages to the Del Mar race track at La Jolla, permitted oil millionaire Clint Murchison to pick up his bills. We have seen indisputable documentation that Hoover stayed in \$100-a-day suites as Murchison's guest.

The hotel was owned by Murchison, whose son, Clint Jr., acknowledged to us that the FBI director was never billed. "If he had offered to pay," said young Clint, "Dad wouldn't have accepted it."

At home, Hoover avoids parties, say intimates, unless he is sure of the guest list. He doesn't want to be seen with insavory characters. Yet he has stayed at the Hotel Del Charro at the same time some of the nation's most notorious gamblers and racketeers have been registered there, attracted like Hoover by the races.

The old G-man hasn't been able to hide the fact that he plays the horses. But he has sought to mitigate any damage this may do to his square-jawed image by spreading the word he is strictly a \$2 bettor. This is faithfully confirmed by those who go to the track with him.

But at least one racing companion told us confidentially that the \$2 betting is a myth. He asserts Hoover, though he may make occasional appearances at the \$2 window to bolster the legend, also sends secret bets by messengers to the \$100 window.

Once at the Del Mar track, Hoover commented to Clint Murchison and Sid Richardson, both late Texas oil millionaires, that it was too bad the profits from the track couldn't be used for some worthy purpose such as combatting juvenile delinquency. The two oilmen promptly formed Boys, Inc., which purchased the track.