

filed Surveillance

THE HEAT ON THE F.B.I.

by Tom Wicker

Washington, April 14 - When a man bites a dog, that's news; but when a front-running Presidential candidate bites J. Edgar Hoover, that's big news. So the most important thing about Senator Edmund Muskie's charges against the F.B.I. may be that the fabled Director at last has lost the special immunity from criticism that for so long characterized him, mother and the flag.

Mr. Muskie disclosed documents that indicate F.B.I. surveillance of Earth Day rallies last spring - a classic case of overkill, if true. Coming on top of the even more sensational wiretap charges of House Majority Leader Hale Boggs, the distribution of stolen F.B.I. spying records, the Berrigan case and the arbitrary dismissal of agent Jack Shaw for mildly criticizing the Director, the Muskie charges are a substantial addition to the worst period of controversy Mr. Hoover has encountered in his 47-year career.

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Finally, it is obvious that Mr. Hoover cannot for many more years (as Harry Truman no doubt said to Tom Clark) continue to serve as Director of the F.B.I.