



The Deflating of J. Edgar Hoover

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SOMETHING of a writer himself ("Masters of Deceit," "A Study of Communism"), the late J. Edgar Hoover must be spinning in Washington's Congregational Cemetery (he had rejected Arlington). A funny book about the FBI? And by an FBI agent, who retired in 1971 after 23 years in the Bureau, who refers to his late director as a pompous "dinosaur in the nation's back yard"?

The former agent, a Texan named Joseph L. Scott, has done just that in "No Left Turns: The FBI in Peace and War." This is an informal set of recollections that concentrates on the eccentricities of America's No. 1 G-Man who presided over a personal fiefdom for 48 years, an egomaniac who of course fought crime, but also "bums, rats, kooks, pinkos, Commies, bleeding-heart judges, liberals, enemies of law-and-order" and similar labels Hoover pinned on the citizenry he didn't like.

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SCOTT DOES NOT feel bitter about his FBI years. It's just that he never adopted the director as his father, which many other FBI employees did. You had to work on the premise that the director was infallible, or pay lip service to the idea to survive.

Hoover is portrayed as a petty tyrant. Visiting his office, an agent sat in a chair with a pneumatic cushion and a slow leak. "As you sat there," Scott

recalls, "you felt yourself slowly, slowly sinking until he seemed to tower over you."

Hoover kept a long "laundry list" of thou-shalt-not actions which, if committed by an FBI person, meant punishment. He would not wait for elevators; his people had to have an elevator waiting every time he entered a hotel lobby or left a suite.

On a drive from Dallas to Austin, a 200-mile straight line of highway, Hoover commanded his driver, "No left turns." It seems in California his driver had made such a turn, the car was struck from behind and the director was shaken up.

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ALL IN ALL, "No Left Turns" shows the FBI to be nothing like its PR-sponsored movie and television images. Presumably, under Clarence M. Kelley, the Bureau is a different place, with emphasis on efficiency instead of autocracy.

With all its goofy detail, this should have been a funnier book. Scott appears to be just too amiable a fellow to get overly caustic. In reading it one feels there must be more to the J. Edgar Hoover story than meets the eye here. And in the end, Scott's catalogue of absurdities in the Hoover years are more chilling than funny (Praeger; \$7.95).