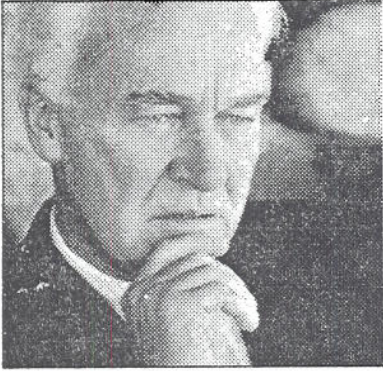


Jim Bishop



J. Edgar Hoover's faults and virtues

It is a tribute to the power of J. Edgar Hoover to note that the press waited two years after his death before attacking him. Adulation changed to fury. The sainted abbot of the world's largest monastery became a dictator, a homosexual, a Peeping Tom who whispered sexy secrets.

I knew Hoover for 30 years. He invited me onstage to share FBI graduation exercises. He sent my father a birthday card every year. He never asked for a favor.

My testimony should not be given undue weight. However, I observed this man over the years. The old bachelor, I am certain, was not a homosexual. He was asexual,

married to his own Federal Bureau of Investigation. He required nothing more of life, and could endure nothing less.

From 1924 onward he created the most elite police department in history. His men were the best. They are the best. They solved scores of thousands of crimes, many of which had been muddled by local police departments.

In a sense, Hoover had more power than the president. Each chief executive moved on to anonymity after eight years. He endured from one administration to another. The irony of his half-century tenure is that J. Edgar Hoover extended less mercy to an erring Special Agent than to a gangster.

He organized a department called the Crime Records Division. Actually, this was his "press assistance" group. When I asked for FBI information, I had to see Lou Nichols in the old days; then the ascetic Cartha DeLoach; recently Tom Bishop. The only time I was refused help was when I asked for a Xerox of the atom bomb device stolen by David Greenglass and given to Julius Rosenberg.

The drawing had been impounded by a Federal court. Other reporters — Don Whitehead, Walter Trohan, Jerry O'Leary, James McCartney — depended upon Hoover's indulgence for inside information they could not get by digging.

The FBI helped in the investigation of the Watergate burglary, even though the bureau realized that their involvement would be exposed. The problem with Hoover was that he lived too long. His head

became excitable and addled.

He began to order certain Special Agents-in-Charge to execute illegal assignments. Whenever he read something critical of the Bureau his blood pressure rose to an alarming height and he swore that certain writers and editors "are out to get me." He determined to get them first by ordering intensive, time-wasting investigations of private lives.

His searing contempt for Dr. Martin Luther King was based on miscegenation and Dr. King's public criticism of the FBI. In anger, Hoover had the tenacity of an overage bulldog. Right or wrong, he hung on.

By late 1971, J. Edgar Hoover became erratic. He devoted more time to being vengeful toward his enemies than to cultivating friends.

He punished certain newspapers and magazines by shutting off the sources of information. He denounced certain congressmen as sex fiends. He transferred FBI agents to Montana for minor infractions. He wanted most of all to live to see the huge J. Edgar Hoover Building completed on Pennsylvania Avenue.

His judgment failed. The giant tree had been struck by lightning and was toppling in slow motion. He's gone. His mistakes will live on. So should his virtues, one of which is that he fashioned with his hands the finest law enforcement agency in history.

Presidents Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon were afraid to retire the old man. Some of the fault for what happened lies in the White House.