



The FBI Oral History Project

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**Interview of Former Special Agent of the FBI
Lane M. Bonner, Jr. (1957 – 1988)
Brian R. Hollstein, Interviewer
Interviewed on July 9, 2008**

Edited for spelling, repetitions, etc. by Sandra Robinette on August 16, 2008. Edited with Mr. Bonner's corrections by Sandra Robinette on October 4, 2008.

Hollstein/

(H): L-a-n-e M, as in Mike, Bonner, B-o-n-n-e-r, Jr. Today's date is the ninth of July, 2008. Mr. Bonner was on duty with the FBI from 1957 to 1988.

Before we get started, I just wanted to cover a couple of little things in terms of some ground rules. This material, the copyright is owned by the Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI and I'll be sending you a Copyright Release Form that, if you'd please, fill it out and send it back to me.

Bonner/

(B): I'd be delighted to that.

H: Great. That doesn't mean that you can't write a book, or can't ever be interviewed concerning this material. It just means that the material in this particular interview, the Society holds the copyright.

Some other little ground rules - we don't want to have the names of informants mentioned or their identification numbers or other things which might possibly identify them even if they are no longer alive. We also want to avoid discussion of sensitive investigative techniques which might still be in use.

B: Absolutely.

H: We also, naturally want to avoid libel, and so we want to make sure (laughing) that what we're saying is as accurate as we can recall it.

B: Very adroitly avoided that over the years ...

H: (Laughing) Good.

B: With my strident remarks.

H: Well, you're an expert at it, so no worry on that.

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H: So I think that pretty much covers the background there and let's get started in terms of would you tell me first where you come from and where you had your basic education.

B: I'm a native of Florida, born in West Palm Beach, raised in Lakeland, Florida and my home of record is Miami, Florida. I attended the University of Florida at Gainesville. I attended the University of Virginia, northern Virginia campus up in Alexandria, Virginia, and I have an Accounting Degree from Miami Dade Junior College in Miami, Florida.

H: Good, that's a lot of education.

B: Well, notice I said attended

H: (Laughing) Okay.

B: I was a football water-boy at the University of Florida and I spent too much time on the football field and not enough time in the study hall.

H: Well it seems to me you made out all right anyway, so that's good. After you graduated from college, did you have any military service or work elsewhere?

B: Actually I joined the Florida National Guard when I was a senior in high school in 1953, and I also belonged to the District of Columbia National Guard in Washington, D.C. after I started working for the FBI as a clerk in Washington, D.C., in 1957. Then I completed my twelve year military career in the Army Reserve in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. I also graduated from the Army's top Non-Commissioned Officers School, Fort Benning, GA.

H: Uh hmm.

B: Basically Infantry and Military Police.

H: Uh huh. So you joined the Bureau in 1957 as a clerk, where in D.C.?

B: Washington, D.C., that's correct.

H: What did you do as a clerk there?

B: I was assigned to the Files and Communications Division and I was also a full-time tour leader.

H: Uh huh.

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B: And I met my wife in Washington, D.C. She too was a clerk reporting in from West Virginia and at same time that I was entering on duty from Miami, Florida.

H: Uh hmm.

B: And I met my wife fifteen minutes after I arrived in Washington, D.C., as a matter of fact.

H: Didn't waste any time, then. How did you happen to find out about the FBI?

B: Well, I was visiting relatives in Georgia and my uncle who just happened to be the president of a bank there and a Resident Agent had been in the bank on FBI business and mentioned career opportunities. That evening my uncle mentioned the possibility of working for the FBI as a support employee, continuing my education, and perhaps becoming an Agent.

So when I got back to Miami off my vacation I went to the Miami Field Office of the FBI, applied, was interviewed by Vince Antell.

H: Uh hmm.

B: And reported to Washington in November, of 1957.

H: Uh hmm, great so then you, you were in Files and Communications and also doing tours. That would seem to be one of the ways to move forward, wasn't it into the Agent ranks, yeah?

B: It was required in those days.

H: Oh, is that right?

B: Oh yes. It was required at that time that if you intended to become an Agent or seek an appointment as a Special Agent that you had to be a tour leader.

H: Oh okay. Well how long were you then clerking in Washington, long enough to get married at least right?

B: Absolutely. Marie and I married a year and a half after we entered on duty. Then in 1962 I was fortunate enough to be transferred back to Miami, Florida as a Technical Surveillance Clerk, assisting the Organized Crime Program and my wife was fortunate enough to be transferred to the Miami Field Office in the Chief Clerk's Office.

H: Uh hmm.

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B: I served there from 1962 until 1968 when I got my appointment as a Special Agent through the accounting program

H: Uh hmm.

B: But I also, the last two years in Miami I served as the Complaint Clerk in the Miami Division. The Complaint Clerk position was, of course, the initial point of contact for citizens that had need to contact the FBI in non-emergency situations.

H: Uh hmm, okay. Going back just a moment, Technical Surveillance Clerk, what was that?

B: The FBI in those days used support employees or clerks to monitor the technical installations, telephone taps and microphone surveillances, that they had on organized crime figures and others.

H: Uh huh.

B: And we would type transcripts, prepared transcripts of the conversations that we overheard and turn them over to the case Agents to assist them with their investigations.

H: Uh huh.

B: And as a result of that I had, pretty much, as much testifying experience as a clerk, as many Agents do as Agents.

H: (Laughing).

B: Initially, the first time I was ever in a Federal courtroom in my life I was testifying in the post-conviction disclosure hearing for Bobby Baker who was the Secretary of the United States Senate. He was under investigation by the FBI. He was subsequently convicted and I, well the FBI had to disclose, was required to disclose the fact that his name had been mentioned on the techs we had done in Miami.

H: Uh huh.

B: The Defense Attorney was Edward Bennett Williams, the trial Judge was Oliver Gash, the Prosecuting Attorney from the Department of Justice was William O. Bittman and that was my introduction to testifying in court.

H: Oh boy, how did they get you ready?

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B: Oh yes, briefings similar to moot court training, in fact I was written up very well.

H: Uh hmm.

B: [By] Special Agent Pennypacker of the Washington Field Office who was monitoring the trial, and I think that helped me become an Agent, but I was well into my twenties by then.

H: Uh hmm.

B: It wasn't like being a rookie.

H: No, no.

B: Was I nervous? Yes. (laughing).

H: Yeah, everybody is. Everybody's up, no matter what the case is but certainly when you've got a bunch of famous people involved here. How did they get you prepared for giving testimony in such a situation?

B: Well, they explained to us the circumstances for having the post-conviction disclosure hearing. Of course it was brand new to the defense attorneys also so they were trying to learn, to glean as much information as they could about FBI operations.

So all I did was testify as to my role, my requirements, job requirements, and how we went about doing that and the preparation of the transcripts and that sort of thing.

H: Uh hmm.

B: There was a humorous incident in the course of that hearing if you're interested.

H: Yeah sure.

B: Of course the transcripts ran on for multiple pages and we may not complete a transcript on a given night or it might take two or three days to do a transcript. And we could not testify as to which pages of the transcripts that we had typed or transcribed because the next shift might pick up doing the same transcript.

H: Uh huh.

B: Well we were on page eleven of a particular transcript and Mr. Williams, a very well known Defense Attorney in those days...

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H: Sure.

B: He asked, "Well, who typed this page?" because there was some information of importance to his, his I guess examination of things

H: Uh hmm.

B: I said, "Well I did" and he said, "Well, you've already testified that you couldn't determine who typed each page" and I said, "Well I know I typed this page because if you will look halfway down you'll see the word jeopardy misspelled and that's the way I used to spell the word jeopardy."

H: (Laughing).

B: And Mr. Williams turned his back on me, walked over to the rail, sat down, leaned back on the rail and started laughing big, deep belly laughs and everybody in the court room enjoyed it.

H: (Laughing) Great. Well

B: Well then he asked me, he asked me, "Well Mr. Bonner have you since learned how to spell the word jeopardy?"

H: (Laughing).

B: Of course I replied, "Yes, sir."

H: Yeah, you'll never forget the spelling of jeopardy now. I got off what I said I was going to do, which was ask, was to walk you through the, quickly through the, your career. So, let's just run through that then, so from Miami then you went up to the Bureau for training?

B: Most of the training in those days, of course as you know, was in the Washington, D.C., area with a few weeks spent at Quantico.

H: Uh hmm.

B: Then my first office was Oklahoma City.

H: Uh hmm.

B: For one year. After that I reported to Baltimore which in those days was considered one of the top twelve field offices. I spent most of my street time as a Special Agent in Baltimore and as a Field Supervisor in Baltimore.

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H: Uh huh.

B: 1969 until my transfer to FBI Headquarters in 1981. I worked principally white collar crime, fraud and public corruption.

H: Uh hmm.

B: I supervised the white collar crime squad for a period of time. I supervised the fugitive squad and all background investigations done by the FBI, other than FBI applicant investigations. Concurrent with all of that I was also the Media Representative for the Baltimore Division from 1978 until 1981.

H: Okay.

B: Both as a Special Agent and as a Supervisor.

H: Uh huh, then from Baltimore in '81, you went to?

B: The Press Office at FBI Headquarters where I was a national spokesman for the FBI.

H: Uh huh, okay.

B: And I became Chief of the Press Office in 1986 and retired from the FBI in June of 1988.

I was one of several spokesmen for the FBI. Of course the principal spokesman for the FBI was the Assistant Director in Charge of the Office of Congressional and Public Affairs in those days, initially Roger Young, Bill Baker, later Milt Aldrich, all during my tenure in the Press Office.

H: Uh hmm, okay. Yeah we've had some time with Bill Baker on some other matters and he's also done an interview for us with Judge Webster. So we've gotten to know Bill pretty well.

Going back now to Oklahoma City. That was your first office was it typical first office car cases and fugitives and what have you?

B: No. I was assigned to the Accounting Squad.

H: Uh huh.

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B: We had a whole host of issues. We had Interstate Transportation of Stolen Property. We had crimes on U.S. Government reservations so I spent a lot of time at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, Tinker Air Force Base, and other military bases investigating crimes that occurred on U.S. Government reservations.

H: Uh hmm.

B: For my first three weeks in that division I was transferred temporarily down to the Durant, Oklahoma Resident Agency to fill in for the two Agents assigned to that office who had been in a very bad automobile accident. They were both hospitalized.

H: Oh my.

B: So for three, my first three weeks in the Oklahoma City Division were down in the southeastern corner of Oklahoma. It was like walking back into history two hundred years.

H: I'll bet, (laughing). Well you, you had sufficient experience by this time to just step in there and go right to work.

B: Oh yes, when I was a Complaint Clerk in Miami, I learned how to prepare FBI communications.

H: Uh hmm.

B: You know in those days' airtels, teletypes, and that sort of thing.

H: Okay, hang on just a moment here now we're using a term that people in the future may not know about. Well two terms actually, airtels and teletypes. What was an airtel?

B: An airtel was a document, a report of investigation that was usually transmitted to FBI Headquarters or a field office through the mail. It was used to set out leads to other field offices.

H: Uh huh.

B: Teletypes of course were used to expedite fast moving type situations to get the word quickly to FBI Headquarters.

H: Uh hmm, it's interesting cause I don't think either one of them are used anymore and they had to do with airtels, if I remember correctly you had to respond within a brief period of time when you received one?

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B: Oh absolutely.

H: Yeah.

B: It required immediate attention, the teletype.

H: Right and then the teletype was something you had to turn around almost immediately.

B: And the letterhead memorandum of course was a document that went outside of the FBI and it was prepared in a unique format to be shared with other agencies.

H: Right. Now they were referred to as LHMs in my time if I remember correctly, right?

B: Absolutely correct.

H: Yeah, yeah. It's getting to be a long time ago now, (laughing).

B: (Laughing), I hear they now communicate by e-mail mostly.

H: Yeah, yeah the whole world has changed. Out of Oklahoma, so how long were you in Oklahoma City, just a year?

B: Exactly one year.

H: Uh huh, and then into Baltimore. It sounds like it suited you; you stayed there for quite awhile?

B: Baltimore was a, I got credit for being in one of the top twelve field offices. Generally it was my experience the accountants weren't transferred as much as some of the other Agents, as frequently as some of the other Agents.

H: Uh huh.

B: Also I had an interesting assignment to temporary duty to the Hill. The House Appropriations Committee surveys and investigations staff. They needed an accountant in a matter and so I was temporarily assigned there for about six months.

H: And that was while you were in Baltimore, huh?

B: Yes.

H: Uh huh. Can you talk about that at all?

B: Oh yes. The one study that I was assigned to was a Planning Assistance Grant Program. Congress wanted to know if the states and local governments were acquiring the capacity to plan to use the resources provided to them by the Federal Government. There was several millions of dollars in grants that were going out to the various law enforcement agencies in the states, but in order to qualify the states and the local governments had to prepare plans and had to indicate how they intended to use that money.

H: Uh hmm.

B: And of course FBI Agents were assigned in the event that fraud was detected during the course of those surveys, and Congress liked FBI report writing skills.

H: Okay.

B: And also because of my unique ability as an accountant.

H: Now that's kind of interesting then. So the actual, the job was to review these programs, but you weren't specifically assigned to investigate a fraud that was known?

B: Exactly.

H: Uh huh. So this was more of an audit type of thing and, if fraud was found, then you would conduct an investigation?

B: Well, actually, I did detect fraud but it wasn't through the study. I was having dinner one evening at the L'Enfant Plaza Hotel and happen to overhear a conversation between a lawyer involved in the oil industry and an administrative law judge wherein they were discussing how they had certain public figures in their pockets. One name mentioned was Wilbur Mills, then a powerful figure in Congress, later disgraced in the tidal basin episode.

H: Oh boy.

B: And I mentally recorded as much of the conversation as I could, wrote it up and turned it over to my Supervisor, Lefty Anderson, the next day. But I also got the license number off the car that one of them went to. I have no idea what happened to my report.

H: (Laughing). Well it was interesting though. Much of the details and people were sent details or something like one of these committees then was not necessarily a specific investigation. It would be just monitoring of a variety of programs, whatever they might be.

B: Well I was, one trip that I made was to Aiken, South Carolina to monitor a program that had been set up for law enforcement agencies in that area.

H: Uh hmm.

B: I had one other trip that I made and I can't recall where I went. It's been too far back (laughing).

H: Laughing, thirty years. What do you mean you can't remember something from thirty-five years ago, right, or more forty years ago. (laughing).

B: (**unintel**) Brian. Basically, I just reviewed, I followed the money.

H: Uh hmm.

B: To make sure that the money went where it was supposed to go.

H: Uh hmm, good. So then back to the white collar crime and public disorder, not disorder, what do I want to say?

B: Public Corruption.

H: Corruption, yes and fugitives. Any particularly interesting cases?

B: Well I was involved, I was the lead Agent on the investigation of U.S. Congressman John Dowdy of Texas who was accepting bribes from a Maryland businessman and I was involved in the totality of that investigation as a lead Agent. I did all of the recording of conversations, court authorized I might say, and surveillances, and interviews of key witnesses.

H: Uh hmm.

B Or authorized by the U.S. Attorney.

H: Uh hmm.

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B: Between the cooperating businessman and the Congressman, surveilled the Congressman over to Washington and actually took him right into the Sam Rayburn Building, myself and Marion Wright, and Paul Grider...

H: Uh hmm.

B: ... took him right to the Congressman's office. He had a body recorder on, watched him go in the door, watched him come out a half-hour, forty-five minutes later, recovered the taped conversation and the Congressman was subsequently convicted.

But the most interesting part, and I must point out that the case Agent in that was Hugh Barnhart who was my mentor when I first reported to Baltimore and he was a class guy. He was a very, very capable investigator and I learned a lot from him; plus I had the privilege of working with one of the IRS's top money tracers in the business in those days, Pete Twardowicz, and that gave me a great deal of experience. But I was principally responsible for recording the telephone conversations and the in-person conversations in that investigation.

H: Uh hmm.

B: The Congressman was convicted. He did go to jail and the sad part of that case is that his two children to this day, both lawyers, believe that we set up their dad.

H: Yeah, that is too bad. You know, reality doesn't, can't intrude for some reason or another.

B: We had him cold and then he, of course, went before the Grand Jury and lied so we got him for perjury also.

H: Oh boy. So did he actually serve time?

B: Oh yes.

H: Uh hmm.

B: But the interesting part of that case is that he manufactured a defense and he got a corrupt Alabama businessman to claim that he, the businessman, was with the Congressman at the Atlanta, Georgia airport where the bribe of \$25,000 was paid. And this man testified in fact that, "I was with the Congressman, I didn't see him get any money from anybody at the airport."

H: Hmm.

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B: But that investigation was interesting because number one they had reconstructed the airport, reconfigured it from the time the two bag men gave the Congressman the money. We had to actually go to the records, historical records and archives of the blueprints to get the original configuration of the airport to show, in fact, that the two guys knew what they were talking about - a ramp going down to the airway that the Congressman came in on to meet the two representatives of the corrupt businessman who was paying the bribe.

H: Interesting. You've got to pay attention to all those details.

B: Not only that, the (laughing) corrupt businessman being somewhat paranoid himself, had recorded the serial numbers on all the bills. But he failed to record the series year. As you well know, serial numbers can be repeated within different denominations.

H: Uh hmm.

B: And, so we had to go to the Treasury Department and we had to get expert testimony from the Treasury Department. "Yes, in fact, those serial numbers did exist at that time period."

H: (Laughing).

B: Then we went to Alabama and we pulled the daily logs of this businessman, the corrupt businessman that had testified on behalf of the Congressman. And we found that on such and such day when he said he was with the Congressman he, in fact, was somewhere in some remote part of Alabama, nowhere near Atlanta, Georgia.

H: Hmm. Interesting in that once they get enmeshed in trying to lie and cover for each other, how badly it goes. We certainly had that happen recently too.

B: So the unusual thing about that case is that our investigation did not end with the trial. It continued through the trial (laughing).

H: (Laughing). Had you had anything to do with Watergate?

B: No.

H: Not at all huh? Okay.

B: Oh wait a minute. Yes, I did. Myself and Barnhart interviewed Charles Colson.

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H: Uh huh. The reason why I asked was that I think it was at that time, was when Fort Holabird, you remember that place in Baltimore, it used to be the Intelligence Center and then it was later, I guess the U.S. Marshals took it over and used it as a holding place for some of the Watergate figures. I happened to bump into an awful crook up in New York who had been there in the Witness Protection Program and knew John Dean and some of the others so I thought maybe there might be some connection there from the Baltimore Office.

B: I had numerous contacts with the Watergate case Agent, Angie Lano.

H: Uh hmm.

B: Who was later assigned to the Wilmington, Delaware Resident Agency of the FBI which fell within the jurisdiction of the Baltimore Division because the Baltimore Division of the FBI covered both Maryland and Delaware.

H: Uh hmm.

B: So I had many, many conversations with Angie.

H: Yeah he had, he was a very busy man. Okay, moving right along, you became involved here and probably one of the highlights of your career I guess was as Media Rep. How did you happen to become the Media Rep there in Baltimore?

B: George Quinn was the Special Agent in Charge at that time. He had worked in the Office of Congressional Public Affairs when I was a clerk temporarily assigned to the, in those days, it was the Crime Records Division.

H: Uh hmm.

B: And I knew him casually when I was a clerk there. He had become SAC, Special Agent in Charge of the Baltimore Division. We had a little (laughing), we had a fifteen minute public interest program on Channel 45 in Baltimore and I hosted a couple of those. He liked my scripts and so he asked me if I wanted to become a Media Rep and I was appointed as the Media Rep for the Baltimore Division.

H: Uh huh.

B: Interesting thing is that, that program came on about 7:45 a.m. on Saturday mornings and on Saturday afternoon I would be refereeing, umpiring little league baseball or football games or whatever. The kids would come up and say, "Hey Mr. Bonner, I saw you on TV this morning ..."

H: (Laughing).

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B: ... between Porky the Pig and Bugs Bunny.”

H: (Laughing). So not only did you write the scripts but you actually delivered the material then on this TV program?

B: Yeah.

H: Talk about an obscure place to have it but any coverage is better than none.

B: Or some of the adults too, of course, would tell us that they had seen the program so that ...

H: Somebody's up at 7:45 in the morning on Saturdays, right?

B: Well the whole idea of those programs and the whole idea of the FBI Media Program in those days was to insure that the media reported accurately FBI operations and jurisdiction, and to encourage citizens' cooperation.

H: Uh hmm.

B: That was the whole purpose of the Media Program, and to provide the members of the media with a point of contact. There were rules that if an Agent not designated by the Special Agent in Charge received a media inquiry that Agent was to immediately refer that inquiry to the Media Rep, or the Assistant Special Agent in Charge or the Special Agent in Charge.

H: Uh hmm. So yeah that would insure that there was one face to the press.

B: Exactly.

H: As best as possible there. I remember in New York there were times when there was more than one face to the press. But that was a different story.

So any interesting nuggets there from that time? You did that for quite awhile, right?

B: Yes. I was a spokesman at FBI Headquarters from 1981 to 1986 when I became Chief of the Press Office and I dealt with some of the heavy weights. I took some calls from Dan Rather when he was with CBS News, *Washington Post*. An interesting situation occurred with the *Washington Post* and one of the TV stations there in the Washington, D.C., area. We had an investigation ongoing with the Mayor at the time, Marion Barry.

H: Uh hmm.

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B: The *Washington Post* and one of the TV stations, I forgot now which station it was, were falsely reporting, inaccurately reporting that the corruption investigation indicated that there was systemic corruption in the D.C. government which was not the case at all.

We were investigating one specific allegation against one specific person that being Marion Barry. And Mary Thornton was the *Washington Post* reporter that was covering the FBI at that time and we were trying to tell her, give her background. Now under certain circumstances we could give a reporter background information on very restricted and approved conditions.

H: Uh hmm.

B: And I was trying to tell her, "Mary, what is being reported is not accurate." They were trying to, I know what was happening. Mr. Barry had enemies in the D.C. government and they were talking to the press. And they of course were making it appear that there was much more to the allegations than there was and that the Mayor's brother who was a top police official was involved in the corruption. And that was not the case at all. So, under those circumstances we could give a reporter guidance or background.

H: Uh hmm. I see.

B: Actually, we actually called the reporter, Mary Thornton, the editor; I can't recall the editor's name now, to FBI Headquarters. I think Bill Baker was the Assistant Director in Charge and we actually let them know, the highest level in the FBI, what you're reporting is not accurate.

H: Uh hmm.

B: Yet, they continued to report it and then of course when the investigation came down, it was just the one allegation against the one individual.

H: That's, it would have to be embarrassing but you wonder why they kept it up after they got the word straight from the top for goodness sake.

Let's go back just a moment and tell me what is the set-up now here? Were you in Crime Records Division? Is that the division?

B: Well it became, it had become the Office of Congressional and Public Affairs under Homer Boynton.

H: Uh huh.

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B: And actually Homer Boynton was instrumental in getting me to Washington, D.C.

H: Okay, so at this point then Homer Boynton and the Office of Congressional Public Affairs were ... that was the face towards the media ...

B: That's correct.

H: and the public in general.

B: That's correct.

H: Okay and what was that under? What division was that under?

B: It was under the Director's Office.

H: Oh.

B: We were part of the Director's Office.

H: Okay.

B: And I was on the Public Affairs side not the Congressional side.

H: Oh okay.

B: Although it was part of my job to monitor all major national news broadcasts. We also had an AP and a UPI wire service ticker coming into FBI Headquarters and then when we had weekend duty we actually had computerized access to national media reports. Anything that dealt with the FBI we had to monitor and if it rose to a certain level we had to report it up the chain, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

One of the sad things that occurred was about eleven o'clock one night I got a call that one of our Agents had been accidentally shot by other Agents and it was getting a lot of media attention.

Then we had the big shoot-out down in Miami where two Agents were killed ...

H: Right.

B: ... and people were wounded I first learned about that about nine thirty in the morning from Rita Braver of CBS News who called and said, "Lane what can you tell me about your two Agents that were just killed down in Miami?" That's how my shop found about it.

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H: Oh boy.

B: Then of course we spent the entire day evolving a press statement. There was a very, very interesting thing that happened with Director Webster, if you would like to hear that?

H: Oh yeah, sure.

B: There was a lot of press attention and again there was bad information out there. I think the Chief of Police in Palm Beach County, a sheriff or a Chief of Police, someone came out and said the FBI Agents were under-armed that they had no nine millimeters automatic weapons. That was absolutely untrue.

But we had two Agents dead and we had five very severely wounded. So we were evolving a press statement and we were setting up a national news conference, and we were looking for the right words. All the FBI brass, the Assistant Directors, Criminal Division, Assistants to the Directors, the Director, Bill Baker - we were all at the Director's conference table when the Director took a call from Ben Grogan's wife who had just lost her husband. He went into his inner office and we continued writing the press release or the statement.

And when the Director came back into the room about a half hour later, Bill Baker said, "Well Director Webster would you like to hear what we've come up with?" He said, "No, let me tell you what I've come up with." Talking to Ben Grogan's wife, he had come up with the most profound statement about how Agents face these dangers every day ... and not only Agents but law enforcement officers throughout the country.

H: Sure.

B: We used the Director's statement, not ours.

H: Well every once in awhile they get inspired and that's wonderful when you could work something out like that. How many people were there, like you, in this division?

B: There was the Unit Chief who was Chief of the Press Office, there were three Special Agent Press Officers and there were three support employee press officers plus we had two support press officers at Quantico, full-time. This was a very efficient operation when I took over as Unit Chief due to the sterling efforts of my predecessors, Ed Gooderham and Tom Coll.

H: Uh hmm.

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B: Because there was intense media interest in the things that were going on down at the FBI Training Academy in those days, but particularly in the area of the emerging new field - psychological profiling.

H: Right. Yeah we've got so much to talk about here. Now when you started off and Homer Boynton was the Unit Chief?

B: Oh, no, no he was the Assistant Director. He was replaced by Roger Young and then Bill Baker came in.

H: Okay.

B: And Bill Baker, of course went to CIA with Director Webster when Director Webster took over the DCI position.

H: Right, right. So the numbers of people stayed fairly even, going on through. Did you ever do any writing of publications at all or was that a different crowd, like *The Investigator*?

B: No, that was done in the Research Unit.

H: Uh huh.

B: That was Jack French's shop.

H: Okay so you strictly are monitoring the press and the news media?

B: And researching and writing national press releases. We had substantial contact with other FBIHQ Divisions, both investigative and technical.

H: Writing releases and dealing with the press in terms of special activities then.

B: I did re-write the FBI section in CFR-50.2 the Code of Federal Regulations, 50.2 and the FBI Media Guidelines which was a monumental project. We were trying to clarify when FBI representatives could speak to the press and that was about a three to four month process.

H: Uh hmm.

B: Re-writing those and getting them over to the Department of Justice for approval.

H: Now there's always, there's always leaks, there's always press leaks it seems somewhere. Did you manage leaks also?

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B: I managed them in the sense that I had to report them up the chain. If I saw something in the print media that shouldn't be there I had to write it up and send it up and make recommendations ...

H: Uh hmm.

B: ... to the staff. Now, I don't recall one incident where there was an actual leak on an investigation.

H: Uh hmm.

B: I must say.

H: Internal, an internal investigation, you mean in the Bureau.

B: I do not recall where there was one investigation. There may have been I was certainly not aware of it. I was never interviewed in that, you know, regard.

H: Uh huh.

B: Because I was very, very conversant with CFR 50.2 which were the rules governing public disclosures about the FBI.

H: Uh hmm.

B: And it was my job to enforce that. Of course in each field office we had a Media Representative and I conducted training seminars in the field for these people and at FBI Headquarters.

H: Good, that brings out a little something there, too. So every office, there were fifty-seven, fifty-eight or whatever they were at the time, had a Media Rep. Now would they be authorized to make comments to the press and make releases without D.C.'s, without Headquarters' knowledge?

B: As long as it was not a national issue. If it impacted strictly on that field division they, of course after the fact, cut us in.

H: Sure.

B: In the event that we received an inquiry on their particular investigation. But anything that had a national impact of course had to go through FBI Headquarters and then we had to coordinate that with the Department of Justice Public Affairs Operations.

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H: Uh hmm, yeah I imagine though that if you did have leaks, it would be a difficult thing to deal with because of the numbers of people, you know, especially if they had gotten to the point of prosecution, that could make releases certainly from the U.S. Attorney's office or anywhere else. And if you're working with local law enforcement too.

B: The reason we had Special Agents as Media Reps is because they were familiar with the FBI operations and jurisdiction and they were in a better position to know what they can say and what they should not say, particularly concerning pending investigations.

H: Uh hmm.

B: But the clerks, support employees that were assigned as Press Officers received the same training that we did at FBI Headquarters. Let me mention one other thing.

H: Yeah sure.

B: My experience, a lot of leaks originated with individuals that had testified before Grand Juries, witnesses, a lot of leaks had appeared to come from the law enforcement agencies or from the prosecutor's offices, but, I think most of those leaks were coming from the actual people, witnesses, who had testified before Grand Juries, and lawyers representing these individuals.

H: Uh hmm.

B: They would contact the press. That's where I think a lot of that information comes from. They have an agenda too. To obfuscate or minimize their client's roll, or influence prospective jurors.

H: Oh yeah, yeah. Well you're constantly seeing, you know, leaks. You know, there's a leak from here, or a leak from there on matters of considerable interest and I just was curious as to whether, obviously there are leaks that are done officially for whatever reasons from an organization, then these other kinds. So you didn't necessarily investigate any leaks that would have occurred?

B: Well I might contact a Media Rep in a field office and say, "What's the story here, how did this get into the press?"

H: Uh huh.

B: And they would either have an idea or they didn't, and I just simply reported up the chain what I was told.

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H: Uh hmm.

B: But the problem with leaks of course is that you can jeopardize informants, you can jeopardize investigations.

For example I handled a situation with the *Los Angeles Times*. It had to do with one of the recording companies, MCA. It happens that the reporter, the specialist at the *L.A. Times* that dealt with the recording industry, had gotten information that a major investigation was underway. Again here was another case where the reporter, the journalist, was trying to make it appear as if organized crime was pervasive throughout the recording industry, when in fact the allegation was that organized crime was attempting to infiltrate this one aspect of the recording industry.

H: Uh hmm.

B: And we had some very sensitive monitoring ongoing at that time; electronic monitoring. We did not want that to get out because we didn't want to jeopardize the investigation. So I was authorized by Bill Baker to bring the reporter in and we met with him, and not only within our shop, but also with the representatives from the Criminal Division.

H: Uh hmm.

B: To let this reporter know, "Look if you go public with this right now you're going to kill, you are going to jeopardize our investigation." Well, the reporter and his editors did agree to the hold off for awhile. And fortunately that gave the Criminal Division people and the Agents in the field the opportunity to get their sensitive work done.

H: Uh hmm.

B: In any regard, I wound up getting chewed out by a Federal judge on that matter.

H: Uh oh.

B: Up in Camden, New Jersey. Because after the individuals were convicted and following conviction they claimed that the FBI had deliberately leaked information which jeopardized their defense. And I had to go up and testify as to what I just told you.

H: Uh hmm.

B: And the judge interpreted it that I had exceeded our guidelines so he referred me to OPR and I was interviewed by OPR but it went nowhere because I had very appropriately documented everything I had done.

H: Now that's the Office of Professional Responsibility right?

B: Yes, uh huh.

H: And that's the Federal Government's watchdog.

B: Well that, yeah. In fact they were on the news today. You may have seen that today, OPR at the Justice Department. It's in the news today, this very day and the FBI also has an OPR.

H: Oh okay.

B: Internal watchdogs. The internal watchdogs, that's the correct way to say it.

H: Yeah so the audit function that you have in business. Going back to this cooperation on the part of the press, how confrontational was it in general working with the press?

B: Minimal, absolutely

H: Would they tend, would they tend to believe you?

B: I think Ron Ostrow of the LA Times, I had a lot of respect for him. I think he knew that. One thing I told Ron early on I said, "One thing I will not do, Ron, is I will not lie to you. I will not mislead you," nor would I do that to any journalist.

H: Uh hmm.

B: But I also would tell journalists that covered the FBI regularly that any time you hear me say, "No comment," your antenna should go up and stay up. (laughing)

H: (Laughing).

B: That's as far as I went.

H: Uh huh.

B: That's as far as I went.

H: Well it's interesting because you would get to know these people quite well.

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B: Oh yeah. We socialized with them on occasions such as the 75th Anniversary of the FBI and other major FBI related events. I only had one journalist to my home and that was Brian Fremantle, a British author doing a book on illegal drug trafficking.

H: Sure and part of what they want to do is, is be your friend so that they can obtain more than other guys can type of thing. So I was just curious, you know, both sides are using each other. You want to get the word out concerning the Bureau and they want to get what they can from an organization that's pretty tight and tight-lipped.

B: The best.

H: Yeah.

B: One of the best was Elaine Shannon. I can't remember, she was either with *Newsweek* or one of those and she was the best at getting cozy.

H: Uh hmm.

B: Trying to get cozy because we were, we expected that, we understood that and we were careful. We were cautious. They may have thought they were getting more than anybody else but they were not.

H: (Laughing) okay.

B: You understand what I'm saying?

H: Sure, sure.

B: (Laughing). One of the most interesting that I dealt with was Jim Polk of NBC News. In fact I remember one, the *Los Angeles Times*, Washington, D.C., Bureau Chief, I think his name was Jack Nelson. He, in my time was probably considered hostile because he had some animus toward the FBI. He carried his Freedom of Information file around with him in a grocery store paper bag. He had ...

H: (Laughing)

B: ... he had gotten information about himself from FBI files by making a Freedom of Information request.

H: Right.

B: The FBI gets, as you well know, gets a lot of unsolicited information. It's my understanding that by law, by regulation of the National Archives, the FBI cannot destroy that information. That gets into another story on its own and that of course with the official and confidential files and that's where a lot of Jack Nelson's, I'm pretty sure that was his name, information originated was through the ... I don't know, have you had any discussions about the sixty-two zero file, the general classification?

H: No, I haven't.

B: Okay well information that did not relate to a specific FBI jurisdictional matter was placed in a general information file and it was referred to, numerically as the sixty-two zero file.

H: Okay, I was thinking, yeah they're zero files I remember. Okay.

B: And that's where a lot of that information was put. For example the FBI might receive information from somebody that has an axe to grind against an individual. They might say that that individual's an alcoholic, a womanizer or whatever. While it doesn't relate to a specific crime within the FBI's jurisdiction, the information cannot be destroyed. Therefore it was sequestered in a special file.

H: So this would be famous people right; actors and politicians and business people and what have you?

B: Yes.

H: Uh huh. Now would there be, I just happen to think of this, would there be actual clipping of articles for example like from ...

B: Yes oh yes.

H: So the Bureau would clip those

...

B: Yes, yes

H: ... and put them into a zero file say concerning a politician, let's say? Is that how that worked?

B: It wasn't, it wasn't designed to accumulate a file, or create a file on a particular person. That would be totally inappropriate. But let's say that someone clipped an article and sent it in to the FBI.

H: Ah, okay that's how they would get in?

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B: Yes. Or if a politician made a statement about the FBI that appeared in print it would be clipped.

H: Uh huh.

B: Something about an FBI case investigation, jurisdiction. It would appear in say the *Washington Post*, well it would be clipped and put into a general file, and sometimes in the substantive file.

H: Now did that, did that come through your office?

B: No, that was through Special Productions Unit.

H: Uh huh, okay.

B: That was under Jim Price.

H: Okay. So this was the source of many of these "files" in quotation marks that were kept concerning famous people and politicians, what have you, much of it would be sent in or complaints made on the telephone or information passed and then that would go into these zero files?

B: Exactly.

H: Yeah, especially, if it had nothing to do with a federal violation.

B: Well let me, let me hasten to add very quickly that I know of no journalist that was black-balled per se ...

H: Uh huh.

B: ... for writing negatively about the FBI. Now it is my understanding, but remember that I was a support employee temporarily assigned to the Crime Records Division from time to time as a tour leader or other special projects. There were some who say that J. Edgar Hoover did not have a press policy, that is absolute nonsense. He did have a press policy. In fact he was one of the best in the government about getting the FBI decent publicity, good publicity, for the purpose of encouraging public cooperation with the FBI.

H: Uh hmm.

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B: Of course Mr. Hoover recognized that in order to meet his budgetary needs that he had to have good reporting, favorable reporting on FBI accomplishments and he was a master at getting that information out to certain members of the press. Now it's my understanding, bear in mind I'm qualifying this that I was a support employee under Mr. Hoover.

H: Sure.

B: I don't pretend to know the big picture at that time so to speak, that there may have been some reporters that Mr. Hoover said, "I don't want to talk to this person."

H: Uh hmm.

B: For whatever reason because the person had some, made some public comment that was not true about the Director or something then the Director would say, Director Hoover would say, "I'm not gonna talk to that reporter, that journalist

H: Uh hmm.

B: If the man can't tell the truth I don't want to deal with him." But later that changed. In my day under Homer Boynton, Roger Young, Bill Baker, I know of no reporter that was ever black-balled.

H: Uh hmm.

B: And I was there from 1981 to 1988.

H: Now you know I could see two kinds of black-ball. If the Director says, "I don't want to talk to that person" the person can still get connected ...

B: Yes, by contacting a press officer or media rep.

H: Yeah. Go see one of you and get whatever their looking for, I would expect.

B: We would give that person the information, the amount of information that we were permitted to give under the CF-50.2.

H: Right. Now the other side of it though is a different story, if the Director says, "We don't talk to this guy."

B: Absolutely.

H: And that did not occur I gather from what you're saying.

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B: That did not, and from 1981 on is what I'm familiar with.

H: Uh hmm.

B: And I suspect that that policy was in effect when I first became a Media Rep in the field in 1978 because Homer Boynton, at that time, was the principal spokesman for the FBI.

H: Uh hmm.

B: And I know that he was highly regarded by members of the press, highly regarded.

H: So that's an interesting thing. I would imagine that very few heads of government agencies would want to deal with somebody who was antagonistic.

B: I would agree with that. I would like to add about the official and confidential files, Mr. Hoover had the good sense to sequester and restrict access to these files.

H: (Laughing) You know, that just seems like a reasonable thing (laughing) not to, you know not to cooperate with somebody like that. But, well that's interesting though to get some of this together. What was happening nationally during this time period that had an effect on the FBI? What big things were going on from 1981 to 1986?

B: As you well know, the decade of the eighties was considered the 'decade of the spy.' We had three times as many Americans selling us out during that one decade as compared to the three prior decades.

H: Uh hmm.

B: So we had a number of national issues involving Americans that were betraying our country.

H: Uh hmm.

B: The first that I was familiar with was FBI Agent Richard Miller. Then we had the two individuals Ed Howard at CIA and a later situation. What's the name of the guy at CIA? Aldridge Ames, Aldridge Ames

H: Uh huh, right.

B: Pelton at NSA, then of course, the big one, the breach. Goodness I can't believe I missed the most recent one and I can't remember his name, he's serving time.

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H: Hanssen?

B: Hanssen, Robert Hanssen.

H: Uh huh, okay.

B: But the decade of the eighties was considered the 'decade of the spy.'

H: Uh hmm.

B: So we had a lot of those. We had, but also you've got to remember too and it's one of the things that mystified us on our side of the coin. The FBI in those days was knocking the heck out of organized crime. We made some tremendous cases against organized crime.

H: Right.

B: Yet, one of the things that mystified me, was the press seemed to be more interested in this suit against the FBI, that suit against the FBI, minorities and females, suing the FBI, that sort of thing.

H: Uh hmm.

B: But here we were knocking the heck out of organized crime. It got a lot of regional attention and a lot of local attention but not on the scale I thought it should have gotten.

H: Uh huh.

B: Just like the Klan at one time, it was said that if you had five Klansmen standing on the street, four of them were FBI informants.

H: (Laughing), Well that's true.

B: But the same thing pretty much with the FBI with the organized crime. So we got, we had a lot of national releases and we had to coordinate those of course with the various field offices that were involved.

In fact the New York Division of the FBI had two Media Agents, full-time assigned.

H: Uh huh. Well that was organized crime country up there, certainly.

B: Yeah oh yeah. But we had the *Macheteros*, who were active down in Puerto Rico.

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H: Uh hmm.

B: They were a terrorist organizations and we had a lot going on with that. But I can tell you this; you were never bored in the Press Office.

H: (Laughing). It doesn't sound like it, doesn't sound like it.

B: And we had to keep the Press Office open until at least 7:00 p.m. because of our West Coast offices that were three hours behind Eastern time.

H: So that put a lot of pressure on then and, as you mentioned, there was just three Agents and three clerks plus a Unit Chief, so that made for long days.

B: Oh absolutely.

H: And a lot of calling, I'm sure on nights and weekends.

B: Oh absolutely.

H: To deal with all of this stuff. Could the Bureau shape the direction of the media in terms of what they did choose? You mentioned here that the press was more interested in law suits against the FBI than they were in some of the other; in other words some of the negative stuff as against the positive. Was there an ability to encourage more positive coverage?

B: Well we could do that by making our press releases. We might do a dozen or two national news releases a week. We also held regular press conferences. I would say at least two a month, where not just the select members of the media but all members of the media were invited to attend. Also, Director Webster met informally, but on the record, at least quarterly with our 30 – 40 press regulars.

H: Uh hmm.

B: That pretty much was the way we could influence, or attempt to influence. Of course we always wanted the press to accurately report on FBI operations and jurisdiction.

H: Sure.

B: But I was never, I never did and I was never tasked to try to mislead the press. I can tell you that for the record.

H: Yeah, well I wasn't even going in that direction.

B: No, no, I know.

H: But you know you were saying that we had these spy scandals which were very embarrassing to the government and to the Bureau in particular in some cases. We did a lot of good work with Organized Crime. The terrorism activities, I was around for some of that with the Puerto Ricans, were major, major accomplishments and/or major items of consideration anyway. And yet you were saying there was a great deal of interest in these suits against the FBI for a variety of problems, social problems. Just curious as to whether there was any way to try to turn those things around?

B: Well, of course, we acknowledged that these matters were very important, that the FBI was very aware of its responsibilities and obligations under the law. We made that well known to the press. Of course when there is a pending investigation, generally speaking we were not permitted to discuss pending investigations, or suits.

H: Right.

B: We could acknowledge, "Yes, the matter is under investigation but it would not be appropriate for me to comment further."

H: And that would be as far as it would go?

B: Yes, exactly.

H: Let's see here, I made a lot of notes. I'm sure I must have missed something or two here. What else would you like me to know about your career, about the press relations of the Bureau?

B: As I said before, I can assure you there was never a time that I was bored (laughing).

H: (Laughing).

B: Particularly when I was Press Officer in the field and a Supervisor. It was interesting in the field because one of the ... my most memorable time in the FBI was when I supervised the Fugitive Squad and I had all the young Agents. I had the former cops, former military, former FBI clerks chasing fugitives. They loved that kind of work. Then I had all of the senior Agents that were no longer interested in chasing after fugitives working the applicant background investigations.

H: Uh hmm.

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B: The background investigations we did for the White House, for the Department of Justice, for the U.S. Courts, for the Department of Energy. Of course the FBI did those on a reimbursable basis.

But as a Supervisor and as a Media Rep and being the closest Supervisor residing nearest to the field office, I usually wound up coming into the office, opening the gun vault, going out with the Agents when they made their arrests. And, then, while they were processing the fugitive I would write the press release so the next morning when the Special Agent in Charge came in the press release was on his desk.

H: Uh hmm, uh hmm.

B: But that was my most memorable time in the FBI. We got a lot of bad people off the street. I'm very proud of the fact that when I was the Fugitive Supervisor in Baltimore, not one shot had to be fired in anger or in defense.

H: Right.

B: In the prior administration there had been a couple of shootings and in subsequent administrations, but I had a very, very simple rule with my Agents. I said, "Don't be too proud to take the Baltimore City cops with you and always take a big posse. I don't want two or three guys going out to pick up a badly wanted guy."

H: Yeah, yeah. Well it's not bad advice today too.

B: That was my philosophy and it paid off, I think.

H: Great. Would you do it all again?

B: I'm still doing it (laughing).

H: (Laughing).

B: I'm a Contract Investigator for the FBI for eighteen years now.

H: Uh huh, uh huh.

B: I do personnel and security clearance background investigations under contract to the FBI's Background Investigations Contract Unit.

H: Uh huh.

B: So next year I will celebrate my forty-ninth year of some affiliation with the FBI.

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H: Well, that's a good long run. Let me turn it off here.
We're back on again, just thought of something. Go ahead.

B: I'd like to point out that the FBI does a lot more than chase after fugitives. It does a lot more than investigate organized crime, and spies.

I recall a case that I had against employees of Japan Food Corporation. They were attempting to bribe a Federal Food and Drug Administration official and a Maryland health inspector official. What they were trying to do was put several thousand pounds of contaminated food products back out on the market that had been embargoed by these two agencies.

So when they went out to the big warehouse in Columbia, Maryland, the chief salesman and the chief warehouseman attempted to bribe them and that was my investigation. We wound up convicting them and sending them to jail. But we also got them not only for the attempted bribery, but also for contempt of court, ignoring a court order to destroy the embargoed food products. By the way, the Food and Drug gentlemen both cooperated.

In fact myself and another Agent, Greg Tessier, put on white smocks, white plastic helmets and went out posing as Food and Drug inspectors. Now this is back in the seventies long before they had the undercover operation squads and all that stuff.

H: Sure.

B: And we went out there of course to corroborate the information supplied us by the Food and Drug people, but also in the event that more bribes were offered. Unfortunately they were not forthcoming.

But again those two gentlemen were convicted and did go to jail, not only for the attempted bribery but for contempt of court because they were under a court order to destroy that embargoed, contaminated food product.

H: Hmm.

B: And so the FBI does a lot more for the people than just investigate the so-called glamorous crimes.

H: Well that certainly has some resonance in modern times too, doesn't it?

B: Oh absolutely.

H: Yeah.

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B: In fact the mortgage fraud thing that's ongoing right now and in fact that is a systemic problem.

H: Uh hmm, uh hmm. Yeah it's going to take a long time to get that one sorted out. Okay I'll turn off here.

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