

## "Deke"

*by Ray Batvinis (1972-1997)*

Historical Committee Chair

One day in 1970 Montana Senator and Majority Leader, Mike Mansfield, entered the Senate chamber and walked briskly down the aisle to the desk traditionally reserved for the Leader. Despite the demands on his time Mansfield took the next few minutes to offer some remarks to his colleagues on the retirement of Cartha DeLoach from the FBI. Mansfield praised DeLoach's many years of important contributions to the country and, in a rare move, expressed deep regret over his departure from government service at such a critical time in the nation's history.

### A Modest Beginning

Cartha Dekle DeLoach was an only child born on July 20, 1920, in Claxton, GA. Throughout his life everyone called him Deke, a nickname derived from Dekle, his mother's maiden name.

Deke's father died on the eve of the Great Depression forcing his struggling mother, Eula, to take in boarders. As a poor kid growing up in rural Georgia, Deke spent his childhood going to school and picking cotton and tobacco to help his mother who cooked and cleaned for her tenants. As a teenager, he clerked at a Claxton drugstore earning a dollar a day (75 cents for Sunday afternoons) while building a reputation as an athlete tearing up his high school football field.

After graduation, he entered Gordon Military College with plans to study pharmacy. Months later his unexpected success as a debater redirected him into law studies. From Gordon he transferred to South Georgia College where he again excelled at football. His athletic success took him next to Deland, FL, where he studied for the next two years on a football scholarship at Stetson University. After



*President Lyndon B. Johnson and Deke DeLoach*

receiving his degree he remained at Stetson for another year and a half studying law.

Deke's interest in the FBI began one day in 1941 when he was sitting around with some fraternity brothers discussing recent newspaper headlines blaring sensational

reports of the arrest of a massive German spy ring. A year later money shortages ended his law studies and rekindled his curiosity about the FBI. But prospects of a glamorous law enforcement career stalled when the Bureau rejected his Special Agent application. Rather than moan, he accepted a clerical job in Washington identifying and classifying fingerprints in the cavernous Identification Division then located in the DC Armory. After a year of feverish politicking to become a "full-fledged FBI Agent," as he later recalled (including a successful meeting with Associate Director Clyde Tolson), Deke found himself a newly minted FBI Agent off to Norfolk, VA.

### An FBI Career Begins

The new G-man's dreams of battling spies and saboteurs quickly evaporated when he reviewed his new ho-hum caseload that included the theft of a jar of stolen Navy pickles. Life was no better in his next assignment at Cleveland where he spent much of his time following the Ohio state Communist Party chief while solving the theft of six and a half tons of defective military condoms.

In December 1943 Deke took military leave from the Bureau to join the Navy. His plans for action in the Pacific and a chest full of combat ribbons derailed when the Navy assigned him instead to Norman, OK, where he managed the Naval air station's athletic program for the rest of the war.

The one high point of Deke's Naval career was his April 1945 marriage to a "beautiful blue-eyed blonde with a gorgeous figure and lovely tan." The nuptial, however, came with an interesting price tag. Deke was raised as a Baptist; his bride-to-be was a devout Roman Catholic who insisted that he convert to her religion. Deke gladly paid the price in full with a smile on his face devoting the rest



*Deke DeLoach qualifying with a Tommy gun at age 92*

of his life to his wife and his faith. The union of Barbara Owens and Deke DeLoach lasted more than six decades and produced seven children: Barbara Elaine, Deke Jr., Tom, Theresa, Greg, Sharon and Mark.

After the war, Deke rejoined the FBI returning to Akron, OH, as the Resident Agent. Two years later, in June 1947, he took a first step up the career ladder with his move to Washington, DC, as a supervisor in the Domestic Intelligence Division's newly formed Atomic Energy Applicant Section. Within two years his easy going and professional manner led him into the world of early Cold War counterintelligence as the Bureau's liaison man with the leadership of what today is called the Intelligence Community.

His real education as a G-man started with his promotion to the important rank of Inspector. For the next several years, Inspector DeLoach regularly crisscrossed the country supervising major investigations of national and international importance. One typical case involved Pearl



*Deke DeLoach using the "FBI" television series to ask the nation's help in pursuing a Top Ten Fugitive*

Miller, a North Carolina crime figure, who gained fame as one of the first fugitives to make the FBI's Top Ten Most Wanted Fugitives list.

## Inner Circle

As his list of accomplishments as an investigator, leader and diplomat steadily grew, so did his profile with FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover and his senior staff. For years Lou Nichols served as Director Hoover's legendary head of the FBI's two most sensitive and politically explosive elements — public relations and congressional affairs. Following Nichols retirement in 1957, Director Hoover picked DeLoach as Acting Assistant Director. He now entered a universe that required equal parts talent, experience and the balance of a high-wire walker. Deke became a fiercely loyal Director Hoover lieutenant while serving as a low-key honest broker always pursuing balanced solutions acceptable to all sides. Two years later Deke took permanent command of the position at 38 years of age.

DeLoach faced many challenges during this period. His worst moment was the Nov. 22, 1963, murder of President Kennedy in Dallas. Now a part of the inner circle he witnessed first-hand how Director Hoover operated in times of crisis. In a memoir that he penned years later, DeLoach countered Director Hoover's critics who claimed that he received the terrible news of the president's death "dispassionately, devoid of human feelings" while "quickly considering the proposition with a cold and analytical eye." DeLoach reminded readers that just hours after the killing President Lyndon Johnson ordered the FBI to take charge of what was, in fact, a local homicide. It was "always [Director Hoover's] way in time of stress" and "his greatest asset in a job that frequently placed him in the middle of situations where life and death hung in the balance." On such occasions, he recalled, Director Hoover "became a machine, spitting out orders almost automatically, measuring his words with the precision of a jeweler."

With the FBI running the investigation a major public controversy promptly erupted that threatened disaster for the case and the country. Dallas Police Chief, Jesse Curry, now fuming over the removal of Kennedy's unexamined body to Washington and the federal takeover of his case, refused to turn over evidence to the FBI. Further fueling the fire was the Chief's public claims that the FBI had Lee Harvey Oswald under surveillance and lost his trail without informing the Secret Service, suggesting a failure that could have possibly prevented the tragedy. An incensed Director Hoover immediately retaliated by cutting off Curry's department from FBI Laboratory services which, unlike today, was merely a courtesy extended to local police agencies. One day, as the standoff intensified, DeLoach found himself preparing for a trip to Dallas to deliver a previously scheduled speech. Before departing

## DeLoach Scholars

A new merit-based scholarship was created last year to honor Mr. DeLoach's service and commitment to the FBI and to the Society. The **Cartha D. (Deke) DeLoach Scholars** award is worth \$2,500 each. The children of Regular and Associate members are eligible. Please visit the Web site for more information: [www.socxfbi.org](http://www.socxfbi.org).

## Legacy Donation

Following Deke DeLoach's death and in tune with Deke's generous spirit, his family donated a replica Tommy gun (engraved with Gman-1) from Deke's collection. The Tommy gun was donated to the Former Agents of the FBI Foundation.

Washington he received an unexpected phone call from Eric Johnson, the new Dallas mayor, who asked to quietly meet with him while he was in town. Over breakfast a few days later Mayor Johnson sounded DeLoach out about mollifying Director Hoover with a Curry apology. Deke's cautious reply then moved the mayor to question how the FBI Director would feel about Curry's retirement. A startled DeLoach replied, "That would be a whole new ballgame." Weeks later, after Curry abruptly stepped down as chief, Director Hoover reinstated laboratory privileges.

The Curry-Hoover feud was not DeLoach's only headache. The Secret Service, devastated over the president's death, quickly found itself in the bulls-eye of a national firestorm for failing to keep the president safe. The already icy relations between the Bureau and the Service further hardened when LBJ issued orders for a greater FBI role in presidential protection.

The first signs of thaw occurred just months later when Father Daniel J. Power, S.J., the director of development at Georgetown University, invited Deke and Secret Service Chief Jim Rowley, for a quiet lunch at his university office. Rowley, a former FBI Agent who knew Deke well, soon met with Power and DeLoach for the first of several intimate luncheons. As they settled into a relaxed conversation DeLoach began sensing Rowley's eagerness to cooperate rather than making "the FBI a scapegoat for his own agency's shortcomings" as Director Hoover feared. While keeping the director regularly informed both men worked together quietly behind the scenes over the next few months carefully crafting guidelines that strengthened the FBI-Secret Service relationship and ensuring greater protection for the president and his family.

## Greater Influence

The year 1964 offered no respite for DeLoach. In June three civil-rights workers suddenly disappeared without a trace in Neshoba County, MS. Within weeks, 400 FBI agents from around the country had fanned out across the Marigold State seeking answers in what became

the infamous MIBURN investigation. July witnessed the historic passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 over stiff southern conservative opposition. The new law proudly signed by President Johnson expanded voting rights and the protection of Constitutional rights in public facilities and education. That same month Walter Jenkins, a key Johnson aide, called Deke with presidential instructions to open a new field office in Jackson, MS, (it had previously been part of the New Orleans Division). As a signal of Johnson's commitment to enforcing the law and combatting racial violence in the South the President personally instructed Director Hoover to open the Jackson office.

Just three months later Director Hoover issued stunning orders for Deke to convince President Johnson to waive Hoover's mandatory retirement at the age of 70. Years later Deke still recalled his shock at the President's response. Sitting at his desk in the Oval Office, Johnson abruptly told DeLoach that agreeing to his request would mean, "I won't be able to name you as director of the FBI." Placing the decision in Deke's hands, the President firmly asked him if he really wanted the order signed. Yes, he wanted Director Hoover's job, but as he later recorded, "I'd been sent to do a job. I had accepted the assignment. If I used the occasion for my own advancement, I would be betraying the trust of a man who had always believed in me." Johnson signed the order guaranteeing Director Hoover's continued control of the Bureau to the day he died. Just weeks later Deke ended his year taking notes while Director Hoover held his disastrous meeting with Dr. Martin Luther King.

In January 1965 Director Hoover promoted him to the rank of Assistant to the Director, marking the start of five years that DeLoach called the "most exciting of my life." As the FBI's Number three man behind Director Hoover and Tolson, now in their early 70s, he took on more and more responsibility for the Bureau's daily operations. A visible sign of his new role was President Johnson's installation of a special White House telephone in his home so he could reach DeLoach at a moment's notice.



*The DeLoach family*

LBJ wasted no time. Dissatisfied with CIA reporting about a possible communist coup in the Dominican Republic, Johnson ordered Deke to dispatch 25 Agents to Santo Domingo to get the facts. In April 1968 he oversaw the murder investigation of Martin Luther King, the hunt for his killer, escaped convict James Earl Ray, and the FBI's response to the widespread racial violence that exploded in cities throughout the nation. Months later Congress passed the historic Organized Crime Control and Safe Street Act that contained new and historic provisions for conducting court-approved electronic surveillance. Then there was the killing of Senator Robert Kennedy in June 1968, the Barbara Jane Mackle kidnapping in December 1968 as well as the ongoing New Left and Black Panther investigations.

## Moving On

In later years DeLoach faced accusations of being Director Hoover's toady, who engaged in all sorts of illegal activities that violated the civil liberties of Americans. Years later his sons recalled their dad's humorous reactions to a life of charges by his detractors. Deke reminded them "that the higher a monkey climbs a tree the more he exposes his ass."

After Deke retired from the FBI, he joined PepsiCo, Inc. as vice president for corporate affairs. Shortly after Director Hoover's death in May 1972 Attorney General Richard Kleindienst twice offered DeLoach the top spot of FBI director, an irony that was not lost on a man who always wanted the job. But Deke had moved on. He remained a fiercely loyal Bureau man but he enjoyed the business world. He still had children to educate and, most importantly, Barbara had no interest in moving back to Washington.

In later years the couple built a retirement home on Hilton Head Island, SC, where Deke continued to exercise his ever-restless mind. He became active with his local

Society chapter, immersed himself in church work, and formed and chaired two banks. With extra time on his hands he focused on philanthropy and charitable work. For more than two decades he chaired the J. Edgar Hoover Foundation, which has contributed millions of dollars in scholarships to law enforcement officers and students pursuing scientific studies. He was a member of the Heritage Foundation Board of Directors that raised millions of dollars for charity through sponsorship of the Heritage Golf Classic. Through grit and gentle persuasion he led a campaign to build a Catholic high school in Hilton Head while spearheading the construction of the island's Self Center for the Performing Arts that today draws thousands of visitors for concert and plays. In 1995 he wrote *Hoover's FBI*, a revealing autobiography about his life and times as an FBI Agent and senior Hoover official.

Deke could always handle a weapon and was a heck of a shot. Despite his accomplishment-filled life, one of his greatest thrills occurred a couple of years ago at the local FBI firearms range. Everyone that day caught Deke smiling like a kid after once again qualifying, like he did so many decades ago, with the Thompson submachine gun.

## Later Years

Researchers from around the world interested in learning more about Director Hoover and the turbulent FBI years of the 50s and 60s routinely journeyed to Hilton Head to meet Deke, the "holy grail." Always the humble educator, he sat for hours explaining the special role and responsibilities of the FBI to anyone from young people with life changing career choices ahead of them to the rich and famous seeking professional insights. Everyone received his full attention.

Deke died peacefully on March 13, 2013, and his survivors include his wife, Barbara, and his seven children. He was 92 years old.



Deke DeLoach, 92, at qualifying shoot with Tommy gun