



The Secrets of the FBI

Ronald Kessler

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***The Secrets of the FBI* by New York Times bestselling author Ronald Kessler reveals the FBI's most closely guarded secrets and the secrets of celebrities, politicians, and movie stars uncovered by agents during their investigations.**

Based on inside access, the book presents revelations about the raid on Osama bin Laden's compound, the recent Russian spy swap, Marilyn Monroe's death, Vince Foster's suicide, and J. Edgar Hoover's sexual orientation. For the first time, it tells how the FBI caught spy Robert Hanssen in its midst and how the FBI breaks into homes, offices, and embassies to plant bugging devices without getting caught.

From Watergate to Waco, from congressional scandals to the killing of bin Laden, *The Secrets of the FBI* presents headline-making disclosures about the most important figures and events of our time.

The Secrets of the FBI Details

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Author : Ronald Kessler

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From Reader Review The Secrets of the FBI for online ebook

Andd Becker says

The author states that the events of 9/11 caused the FBI to shift its priority to preventing attacks. The FBI now works closely with the CIA. The author quotes a high-ranking FBI official as saying there is going to be "an attack using chemical, biological, or radiological material." Another high-ranking official agrees that the greatest threat is "an attack with weapons of mass destruction(WMD)."

Another scary threat, according to an FBI higher-up, is "the explosion by an enemy of a nuclear weapon high in the atmosphere to unleash an electromagnetic pulse (EMP)." The EMP generated by the blast "would fry all electronics in North America." America would be "back to the 1300s."

Another scary quote by a named source is that foreign governments make more than 10,000 attempts each day "to penetrate U.S. military and commercial computer networks." To prevent cyberintrusion, this official advises companies to remove from the Internet "anything they really care about."

So why would somebody read this sounds-like-horror-genre?

You would read the book to get an insider's view of how the FBI has worked, historically, and how it works today. You can get answers to questions that you might not find in another book. Questions: What does the FBI Laboratory Division do? (conducts "more than a million forensic examinations a year") Where can you go to find out how to crack a code from long ago? (Google "cipher hard to break.")

Other questions: How do agents check for explosives? How do they stage a lock-in? How do FBI agents slow down a target who is approaching his agent-occupied home or office? (sudden traffic jam; fire hydrant flooding the street; air let out of tires)

And how do they make a room look like it hasn't been covertly entered? (rake the marks their shoes have made on carpets; throw dust on various items)

The reader might draw the conclusion that the book's title is a misnomer. The book might more accurately be titled THE FORMER SECRETS OF THE FBI.

The book is interesting. I received a free copy as part of the goodreads FIRST READS program. Thank you, Ronald Kessler. Thank you, Crown/Random House.

Jason Koivu says

Well, they ain't secrets no more!

And were they secrets in the first place? I guess "technically," but if we're being honest, come on, some of this stuff is just silly. Kessler tosses the FBI some grapefruits right up front in this one, giving the reader little vignettes of instances where the Bureau came away with mud on their face. It's like viewing their blooper reel: Agents foiled by cats and in-and-out jobs gone haywire by zany hijinks. *cue the laugh track!* I didn't have much hope for this one right off the bat.

But eventually it comes around. Kessler hits his stride when he starts in on the pros and cons of each of the Bureau's Directors: Hoover's suspicious denial of the mafia's existence; Freeh's technophobia; Sessions allowing his wife and her friends complete security clearance and access within FBI Headquarters. Many interesting how-to tidbits regarding their techniques are told via entertaining anecdotes. Kessler gives a rundown of how the FBI responded to major national events (Waco, 9/11, etc), not always showing them in a positive light.

Overall though, the book maintains a balance, reporting equally on the good and bad of the FBI's checkered past presented herein. It does so in an engaging manner, which may not be as exciting or biting as some wish it to be. In fact, it's almost a certainty that many deep and important details are left out of this book. I doubt the truly sinister shit the FBI engaged in or became embroiled in, however you want to put it, actually made it into the pages of *The Secrets of the FBI*. However, for those of us with a passing interest, it's a good read for sure!

Melissa says

Although Ronald Kessler's *The Secrets of the FBI* is a nonfiction account of the United States' Federal Bureau of Investigation, it reads like a spy novel. Action-packed and fast-paced, each chapter describes a different event in FBI history, including everything from how agents began using the phrase "More roast beef!" to how the Bureau caught Robert Hanssen – a surprisingly different account than offered by the movie *Breach*, which depicts the same story. While *Breach* makes it look like one agent single-handedly identified, located, and captured Hanssen, Kessler tells readers the whole story, crediting hundreds of agents and informants with Hanssen's capture. Throughout the book, Kessler is not shy about highlighting the Bureau's mistakes, allowing readers to get the whole story rather than the sugarcoated versions typically found in anything put out by the Bureau itself.

The intelligence community is filled with acronyms, abbreviations, and code names for just about everything, and learning to read these is like learning a new language. In his book, Kessler is able to immerse readers in the intelligence community but still allow readers to understand the text with relative ease.

Although he uses all of the abbreviations and acronyms in order to stay true to the Bureau's history, he is careful to frequently remind readers of how these abbreviations translate into plain English, often reminding readers that "SAC" is just FBI shorthand for "Special Agent in Charge," and "DCI" is short for "Director of Central Intelligence." By the end of the book, readers not only learn about the Bureau's complex history, but also learn many of the intelligence community's abbreviations and acronyms, a sort of icing-on-the-cake to reading Kessler's book.

Since many of the topics in this book are very intense and serious, Kessler is careful to intersperse these with humor, a sort of comic relief. Partway through the book, just as Kessler wraps up his description of a CIA mole, he tells readers a story about an agent ordering a deli sandwich for lunch. In this chapter, entitled "More Roast Beef," Kessler explains to readers that "according to a bureau legend," a deli around the corner from an FBI field office supposedly gave agents more food. One day, an agent was horrified to see that his sandwich looked no different than anybody else's and, "showing the deli man his credentials, the agent said, 'FBI! More roast beef'" (Kessler). Although he goes on to relate this story back to the serious topic of the FBI, it is narratives like this that allow readers to stay interested throughout the entire book.

Throughout the book, Kessler gives readers the FBI's version of many well-known events, such as the Waco showdown in 1993, and Ruby Ridge in 1992. Located in northern Idaho, the Ruby Ridge standoff started when four US Marshalls approached the house of Randall "Randy" Weaver on August 21, 1992. In the events that followed, several basic FBI policies were violated by an impatient HRT (Hostage Rescue Team). Kessler tells readers "agents are taught at Quantico to 'isolate, contain, and negotiate'" (Kessler). When this policy is applied to Ruby Ridge, the result is to have the agents cool their heels outside Weaver's cabin until he "eventually give[s] up peacefully," as most suspects do if left alone long enough (Kessler). However, the HRT "came up with an assault plan that called for dismantling the house . . . within two days" (Kessler).

Although no one can know for sure how the outcome would be different had the HRT waited for Weaver to surrender, Kessler makes sure to tell readers about the policy taught at Quantico in order to ensure that

readers have all sides of the story, allowing them to formulate their own opinions.

Overall, I give *The Secrets of the FBI* five stars, and I think Kessler did a fantastic job turning a very complex topic into something understandable and interesting to read. I thoroughly enjoyed reading the entire book, and there was never a dull moment or a pause in the action. I think it is important for people to see the truth behind many of the heavily-publicized fiascos in FBI history, and I think Kessler does a good job of explaining these events – including Ruby Ridge and Waco – in language that is understandable yet highly detailed and complex. This book was extremely well written, and I would recommend anybody who is interested in the intelligence community read this book.

A. S. says

“*The Secrets of the FBI*” by Ronald Kessler is an interesting investigation by the author of the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s history, techniques, leaders, traitors, successes, failures, and its gradual evolution. The chapters vary in topic: anything from terrorism, to moles, to vignettes about creative ways of breaking into the suspect’s home to plant bugs, to brief salacious tidbits about celebs, to the complicated relationships with other agencies, to the FBI training grounds, to the new laboratory and how evidence is processed there, and etc.

My favorite chapters were the ones where the field agents talked about their jobs of breaking into the suspect’s houses. There are some really funny stories there—a seventy-something pound dog who was supposed to be guarding the suspect’s home becoming the FBI’s best friend after repeatedly being given a Big Whopper, FBI crew dressing up as telephone men only to have the real telephone men come to the suspect’s apartment at the same time, using a cardboard picture of a bush as a cover to substitute for an actual bush, accidentally replacing the suspect’s lost cat with a stray cat after a successful break-in, and etc. I also enjoyed the chapters about discovering moles and spies—unmasking the double-agents from enemy territory and recruiting them for the domestic one.

Overall, it’s an interesting read that spans the timeline from the Hoover-dominated FBI to the current one. Hoover is shown as being obsessed with blackmail, while being too intimidated to fight the Mafia. But the newer directors weren’t always better. One would randomly break into songs or ask inappropriate questions during his briefings, another hated technology and had agents write things down on paper, and etc. The latter parts of the book are wholly grounded in the present and discussing FBI’s biggest risk to date—terrorism. I read this book for entertainment purposes, and thought it was pretty informative and interesting.

wally says

just finished this one, 31 may 2017, i liked it. 3 stars. an interesting read...the tacops, if i have that right, clandestine break-ins of here and there, short stories about an assortment of those. i think the surprise...su-prize! su-prize suprise!...was the condition of the f.b.i. pre 9/11. not up on technology. and it took a few years to iron that out. story did confirm a...thing...a factoid...i read in another non-fiction. something about the number of f.b.i. agents assigned to terrorism pre-9/11...some 2,000. in this one anyway, in the other i think the number was 2,650. and this one does highlight the fabled wall that some guy erected and that made it difficult to be proactive. anyway...i think the number of agents went to something like 4,000? up 2? somewhere in there. ballpark. and the f.b.i. lab must be awesome. the numbers. things looked at in a given

year. or maybe day for that matter. book seems to minimize the mistakes of waco and ruby ridge. yes, that's what it does. some about hillary in here. made me consider all the "news" about trump. hillary gets a free ride. vince foster. but yeah, when she collapsed and they threw her in the car like a piece of firewood, priceless. those guys were heroes for a day. so, good read, 3 stars i like it.

Johnny Williams says

Well well well - I thought maybe this time Kessler had developed some writing skills or at least hired a co-writer to help him along-- but no he winged it alone -- thus what we have is relatively long list of short some-very short- so called "secrets" of the FBI which are not secrets at all-- but if you are unfamiliar with the FBI and are curious to see some of the back office stuff -- this would be an OK book-- Its obvious- in my opinion- that in order to get the access Kessler did-- he had an under the table agreement to treat the agency well -- for sure the current administration -- thus tainting the book-- I am sure -(really sure) that there are some much more revealing and tantalizing "real" secrets within that Hoover building-- but --- Do we "really" want to know--

Lee says

In this book you learn a little of everything about the FBI and I was surprised and the amount of detail that was given here. I always thought The FBI was one big secret. I would say this book was a page turner but kind of dry in some parts. The pictures are interesting and give you something to look at. This book is so recent that it even talks about the killing of bin liden.

The book also goes into great detail about how corruption had been through out the FBI
To summarize this a good read.

Alisa Rodney says

Fascinating accounts of FBI actions and practices since the time of J. Edgar Hoover. The book illuminates the methods, short-comings and successes of all directors since Hoover's time. This author has "inside" stories of the workings and relationships among field operatives and directors. He describes how activities were monitored, attacks on our soldiers and country were investigated. Kessler gives G.W. Bush credit for changing the FBI from an organization that mainly investigated prior actions to one which moved into a preventative role. There is a good bit of humor when describing Director Sessions' wife and her sense of entitlements as the director's wife. A good bit of the book explains the weaknesses of the agency and how each director either lived with it or vastly improved it. The inability of government agencies to communicate was placed squarely at the feet of Director Louis Frie, who hated bureaucracy and hated computers. No upgrades to communications were made for many years, which many believe contributed to 9/11. This was not my usual read, but I thoroughly enjoyed it!

Matt says

Kessler returns with an inside look at the secret side of the FBI. Nowhere near as clandestine as its CIA

counterpart, the Bureau still has some secrets found within its closets, apart from the famed Hoover Era. Kessler examines the Bureau from many sides and during a number of time periods, offering up some interesting nuggets over the years, all gleaned from the numerous interviews he did for a previous book on the Bureau, as well as through new intel garnered from revised information and new events. The Bureau, which acts as America's federal police agency, has a lot to handle as well as a great deal of politicking with which it must deal. Kessler gives great insight into the inner workings of its leadership, some of whom are key players and others who have abused their time there. He also addresses some of the key black marks on its reputation (Ruby Ridge and Waco), as well as the struggles it has with working through some of its modern assignments. One area that cannot be overlooked is the new role undertaken by the Bureau post-September 11, 2001. While tasked with terrorist cell detection, infiltration, and destruction, the Bureau's hands are bound to laws that limit their effectiveness at many levels. Kessler tries to argue this, while remaining as neutral as possible. He also uses his great storytelling abilities to weave historical happenings not known to the average citizen, done in such a way as to entice the reader. A well-rounded book with great anecdotes and easy-flowing narration makes not only for a great read, but leaves the reader seeking more information about those subjects addressed within its numerous chapters.

I was first introduced to Kessler when I read about his inside track into the life of the Secret Service. He matches his investigative abilities here with another look at those who protect Americans in this book, serving up a variety of stories, some told in passing and others in great detail. Adding onto some of the interviews he took for an earlier book, Kessler keeps both a historic and modern balance in his stories, as he does with well-known situations and internal issues unknown to many. His easy access to many within the Bureau makes the book not only interesting, but more than a superficial look from the outside in. Kessler's attention to detail lends credit to the numerous tales told herein and offers a great lure to any reader intrigued in the Bureau or parts of the security arm of the United States government.

Kudos, Mr. Kessler for all your hard work and effort into this interesting look into the FBI.

Randy Auxier says

It was a slow week at our local B&N, a while back when I bought this book. Nothing new on the shelves that looked exciting, but I knew that the Clint Eastwood film about J. Edgar Hoover was coming out, and along with it, probably a renewed discussion of the FBI, then and now. With a yawn I scooped up this book and checked the calendar for releases of something better. Sure enough, now it pans out –new stuff from Stephen King, Umberto Eco, Gregory Maguire. It was the holiday shopping season, after all (publishers hold the best books for November release on purpose), but don't buy me those books. I already dropped a c-note and then some to obtain them all for myself, but they may yet become slightly used gifts to my own loved ones after the New Year arrives. One of the perks of being your own Santa is that you have plenty of time to enjoy the gifts you'll give to others.

Where was I? Oh yeah, this boring FBI book. I think Ronald Kessler must also have known that the Hoover movie was coming, since this really isn't a book. This is a series of vaguely related chapters about, well, this, that, and especially the other, undoubtedly culled from the remnants of his previous books on the FBI and quickly bundled for release. Kessler has been a truly important investigative reporter for almost fifty years, even if his politics was an ever lengthening dog-leg right. An admiring book about the Shrub presidency in 2004 pretty well clinches the question of whether this guy is politically credible, but think about it. Would you want a committed leftist writing about the secrets of the FBI? In that case, you would never know which criticisms were exaggerated and which were accurate. But if a right-wing guy criticizes the FBI (and Kessler

definitely does), you can rest assured that (1) his commendations of the Bureau can be ignored, and (2) his criticisms are likely true and also have been toned down. So we can safely infer that the truth is sure to be worse than whatever Kessler says.

One of Kessler's earlier books led to the firing of William Sessions as FBI Director, and Kessler continues to rag on Sessions in this book. He also assesses the quirks and peccadillos of every Director in the Bureau's history. Only the current Director, Robert S. Mueller III, comes out totally unscathed. Indeed, the parts on Mueller are hagiographic, it seems to me. When Kessler doesn't stop with praise for Mueller's performance but goes ahead to comment about how good-looking the man is, well, nevermind. The point is that the Directors come in for a serious shellacking.

The rest of the book consists of three things, one valuable, one scandalous, and the other ridiculous. The valuable thing is that Kessler explains how the FBI changed after the 9/11 attacks from a reactive policing force that caught criminals after their crimes were committed into a proactive force whose purpose was to prevent crimes before they happen. Shades of Phillip K. Dick's *Minority Report* aside, this is the first believable defense of the USA Patriot Act I have seen. I can't agree with it, Civil Libertarian that I am, but as Kessler recounts a dozen terrorist plots that have been prevented (in which the FBI had some hand), and I remember how these have been adding up, I at least have to admit that, even if the loss of liberties was not worth the trade, the FBI and others have certainly been doing their jobs proactively and, so far, effectively. Kessler does no fear-mongering in this book. He sticks to the facts and it turns out that the world is scary enough without needing to be exaggerated.

The scandalous part of the book is a dozen or so chapters on the spy game, including both Cold War and post-Cold War episodes. We get the whole Robert Hanson story and stories of other less spectacular spies for both them and us. This part of the book is really just historical journalism, collecting what was known at the time and presenting it in digestible form. I include here the Watergate stories. Kessler worked at the Washington Post during those years, and Kessler was the one who outed, in a previous book, W. Mark Felt as the infamous Deep Throat source for Woodward and Bernstein. Kessler's claim about Felt was later confirmed. These stories of spies and scandal do also occasionally contain the sexual misdoings of politicians and spies themselves, so there is just a bit of the salacious here. The commonness of sex clubs in the life of the DC elite is a little surprising to me. On the other hand, I've also never understood why lying and misjudgment do not ruin a political career while infidelity does.

The ridiculous side of the book is the over-enthusiastic valorizing, in several chapters spread throughout the book, of the TacOps division of the Bureau. These are the people who break into houses and businesses and plant surveillance devices. The descriptions and the general attitude here is to make heroes of people who essentially violate our privacy rights with only the oversight of the FISA court. This stuff would fit with the style of *Soldier of Fortune* magazine. I almost didn't make it to chapter two of the book because the first chapter was nothing but a celebration of a black and white world in which good guys sacrifice everything to protect their country from bad guys. Fortunately, only the chapters on TacOps are like this –and that's about six of 32 chapters. This book makes great bathroom reading by the way. The chapters are about the right length, if you know what I mean, and if you do run out of tp, well, the TacOps chapters are there.

Deanna Against Censorship says

An interesting book as long as the reader remembers that it only gives the FBI side. Keeping that in mind,

the book has much to offer.

The book shows how far the FBI has changed since the Hoover era. A change for the good on which both left and right can agree. In the later years of the Hoover era the FBI was not taken seriously by the other agencies of the Criminal Justice System. Post Hoover the Bureau has been more respected by other CJ agencies. The Tech Ops information was fascinating. The stories of the cases enlightening. I do agree that the FBI must not be replaced by a new agency to investigate terrorism. The FBI has experience in investigation that is vital to our continued fight. People who do not have investigation knowledge, practical not just theory, are necessary to solving the puzzles of crime or the puzzles of terrorism. Of course the Bureau must have intelligent, honorable leaders who put the Constitution above politics.

Kessler gives a seemingly logical explanation of the Bush Patriot Act, not a good enough reason to ever take away our rights. Kessler does stress that the FBI believes in the law and follows said law. That is good.

I am happy I read this book. It held my attention from the first.

Marca says

Fascinating behind-the-scenes dish on the FBI. Discusses details on some cases that were in the news over the last twenty years, so even more interesting. My favorite take-away had to do with a cat. Some agents accidentally let a cat out of a home where they were planting bugs, so a dragnet was dispatched to find the cat (so homeowners would not know the FBI had been there). The tabby was finally located and returned to the house. The family dog growled and was very hostile to the cat and the cat ran up the curtains before disappearing somewhere in the house. The next day the FBI learned from their bugs that they had retrieved the wrong tabby.

Jay Connor says

I picked up this book because I enjoyed Kessler's book on the Secret Service (reviewed here in 2009). Kessler's style in both is fairly meat and potatoes journalism: interviews to point of view to theme to repetition. What I think is most fascinating, is in taking these two books together. You are given a unique and telling view of the arc of these two organizations. The Secret Service seems to be stuck in a "last assassin" mindset, almost fully unprepared for the next set of threats to the President; whereas, the FBI, perhaps because it was so hopelessly out of step leading up to 9-11, seems to have re-envisioned and re-energized itself into a singularly adept and valuable government organization.

Two particular insights about the FBI are most telling. First, the importance of picking the right thing to measure. In the old FBI -- think Efrem Zimbalist, Jr. of the FBI TV series from the mid-60's to mid-70s -- the most important measure was getting your man, i.e., arrests. An FBI agent was judged as to how many bank robbers, organized crime figures, traitors, or corrupt congressmen he/she arrested. The problem was that by emphasizing arrests we grew very little knowledge about the underlying system or structure that nurtured and supported the crime. After a wrenching cultural change post-911, the key measure now is whether or not all of the intelligence available from a target has been gleaned before the arrest. What is key now is the growing intelligence, and the bad guys are the best source (active or passive) of providing that intelligence. This shift in measure has probably, as much as any other tactic or action (including enhanced interrogation and the \$

billions on Homeland Security bureaucratic reshuffling), kept us free of another catastrophic event, so far.

The second very significant insight is that much of our financial institutional collapse of 2008 can be traced to 9-11. As the FBI was struggling with the cultural change I outlined above, there was a growing realization that growing intelligence against terrorists required more assets. In 2002 and 2003, more than 2000 agents were switched from pursuing leads, intelligence and arrests in the area of financial corruption to the war on terror. This led to five plus years of essentially no investigation into fraud in the financial markets. Without this oversight, we discovered what the markets, left to their own devices, would create: mass institutional corruption leading to the single largest recession since the great depression and more jobs lost ever. And we continue to bang the drum that the "job creators" need less regulatory oversight! Give me a break!

Michael says

Very repetitive.

Christina says

This book is a seemingly random collection of anecdotes about the FBI throughout its history, apparently some of which the author already covered in one of his previous books about the FBI (which he made sure to mention several times). Some of the anecdotes were interesting -- like the details of how the FBI breaks into houses and businesses under surveillance -- but others just seemed tawdry and salacious, like about the sex scandals and orgies in the 1970s. Mostly I couldn't figure out why the author wrote this book since he'd already written about the FBI and seemed to be rehashing preexisting material. That, and his repeated references to his conversations/interviews/communications with high ranking people, which to me suggested the icky insider-DC tone of "Look at the access I have to powerful people!", made me skeptical of his spin on things. I think he's a journalist, but I didn't have the confidence in his narrative that I usually have from other journalist authors. Still, I did finish the book and found some of the information to be interesting. I just could have done without the scandal/gossipy/headline-grabbing stuff and would have appreciated if the book had a more coherent theme or thesis.
