

The FBI's

Book 12/17/77

Clarence

Kelley,

Behind

Closed

Doors

By William Gildea

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The testimonial dinner Thursday for retiring FBI Director Clarence Kelley was unique for a couple of reasons: No one could ever hope to see as many FBI agents in one place.

And what Washington social event ever began on time, let alone early? Kelley arrived several minutes before the start of the 6:30 p.m. cocktail hour and a half at the Washington Hilton, but no agent worth his badge would have showed up after the boss. Consequently scores of FBI workers already were lined up to shake his hand even before the appointed hour.

There were about 1,000 persons here, not only FBI agents but representatives of all kinds of law enforcement agencies. The most noticeable was the bright red-coated representative of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. On a night when men outnumbered women and most men wore dark suits of conservative stripe, a red coat attracted more attention than it might at some other festive occasions.

After almost an hour of hand-shaking, Kelley and his wife, Shirley, headed off for a "VIP" room. On the way, a reporter tried to chat with Mrs. Kelley but was dissuaded by a gentleman assigned to escort her to the room. He placed himself politely

but nevertheless squarely in front of the unwanted company (and even presented his identification), saying that she had to move along and that the VIP room was off limits to newsmen anyway.

As if to emphasize a point, another man, descending the escalator to the smaller room, shouted back, "No reporters," just before dropping from sight.

What happened next is conjecture, but it can probably be supposed that behind those closed doors, the Kelleys greeted some of the guests, including Chief Justice and Mrs. Warren Burger, Attorney General and Mrs. Griffin Bell, Watergate judge John Sirica, and a number of congressmen. Former CIA chief William Colby left the room early, as did Sen. Henry Jackson (D-Wash).

From there, it was on to fillet mignon for the 1,000, followed by some incisive remarks by comedian Mark Russell. Noting the presence of Bell, who had forecast last January that Kelley would quickly be replaced, Russell said, "The Attorney General is sitting here still waiting for the dust to settle."

Turning to Kelley himself, Russell said, "I can't stay all evening but I want to be here when they give you those solid gold valances," a reference to two sets of plywood valances and a portable cabinet constructed by the

FBI's special exhibits section and installed in his Bethesda apartment shortly after he took office in July 1973.

The two remarks were greeted with wide laughter, including Bell's and Kelley's, before the audience was settled down with some telegram reading. There were messages of good wishes from former President Ford, Sen. Hubert Humphrey and Vice President Mondale, among others, but none from President Carter.

Bell made up for that a bit when he got a chance to speak, saying that the President had praised Kelley highly during a meeting at the White House.

A smiling Burger said that he had been familiar with the FBI since his birthplace, St. Paul, had been labeled by J. Edgar Hoover "the poison spot of crime in America."

Then, the first FBI director ever to retire was presented citations from the Society of Former Special Agents, the National Sheriffs' Association, the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the FBI itself.

Kelley—who has delayed his retirement from Jan. 1 to Feb. 15 upon request by, irony of ironies, Bell—said of his future plans, "I'm sure I'm not going into the interior decorating business."