

Q and A: FBI Aide

James B. Adams, associate director of the FBI, holds the second-ranking position in the agency. He will retire next week after more than 27 years with the FBI to take a senior law-enforcement position in his native state of Texas. He was interviewed by Washington Star Staff Writer Robert Pear.

Says History Will Treat Hoover Well

Question: What are the biggest changes you've seen at the FBI?

Adams: I think the most significant change has been within the past five years, when we began our initiatives of quality work, whereby we were taking our limited resources and attempting to apply them to the areas of the most important problems facing the bureau. I came in in 1951. It was a time when the Communist Party was under intense investigation. The FBI discharged its responsibilities in that area. We moved to the Soviet espionage threat later in the '50s. In the '60s, we saw organized crime being recognized for what it was. With the passage of legislation initiated by Attorney General (Robert) Kennedy, we had new weapons to cope with that. Then we saw the aircraft hijackings. We saw the rise of terrorism with the Tel Aviv Lod Airport (attack).



Q: What did you think of J. Edgar Hoover?

A: History will treat him well. You have to recognize that the initiatives developed under his administration — the centralization of fingerprint records in our identification division, the establishment of the FBI laboratory, the creation of the national academy as the premier training center for state and local law enforcement agencies, the National Crime Information Center — his contributions to professional law enforcement will

outweigh mistakes that he made, for which he's been severely criticized.

Q: What were Hoover's most serious mistakes?

A: Perhaps the most serious mistake was in later years, isolating himself from staff. He thereby denied himself the critical examination of changing issues confronting the FBI. And we were slow to depart from some prior investigative activities which had been well accepted in prior years, but due to changes in the law, changes in constitutional interpretations, necessitated an adjustment to more modern law enforcement.

Q: Why did Hoover isolate himself?

A: There was a tendency on his part to believe that many changes which were occurring represented attacks on him personally. And I think that as a result, he became unduly sensitive to criticism.

Q: Did Hoover hold onto his office too long?

A: Yes. The tremendous experience Mr. Hoover acquired over his 48-year career enabled him to make the most significant contributions to law enforcement of any man of his time. However, I believe that at some point the advantages of experience can be offset by an increasing tendency to resist change. Congress has now established its view of the proper balance by placing a 10-year limitation on the term of the director.

Q: How do you evaluate the performance of the FBI and Patrick Gray during Watergate?

A: The performance of the FBI during Watergate has been commended by all of the knowledgeable people. Many people think of the FBI as having been involved in the wrongdoing, which is absolutely false. The FBI was responsible, in conjunction with the special prosecutor, for investigating the incidents which occurred during the Watergate episode. The only criticism that has come up is that during that period of time, former Director Gray admittedly destroyed certain material which had been made available to him, which he has readily

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acknowledged and for which he has been publicly criticized. But the FBI as an institution emerged from Watergate in a very fine fashion.

Q: Are citizens less willing to cooperate with the FBI today than they were 25 years ago?

A: Yes. As a result of disclosures under the Freedom of Information Act, and threatened disclosures of informants in connection with civil litigation, we have encountered an increasing reluctance on the part of citizens to cooperate with the FBI because of fear that their identities might be revealed.

Q: Could that reaction be due to distrust of FBI agents for other reasons?

A: It could be. However, in visiting various areas of the country, in discussing the activities of the FBI, I find that there is very strong support for the FBI today, as there has been in the past. Most of the reluctance in cooperating is because of fear of having a confidential relationship disclosed.

Q: What will be the effect of having more women, more blacks, more Hispanics as agents?

A: It will make a significant difference. Part of the FBI's problem over the years has been its receptivity in certain minority communities. The more representative your work force is of the United States population, the greater opportunity you will have to obtain the full cooperation of the population at large. By increasing our representation of minorities, we should be able to overcome some of the suspicions which have existed in the past concerning the FBI in the minority communities.

Q: Are you making any progress in the fight against crime?

A: It's hard for me to separate respect for the law and respect for authority. The criminal justice system today is creaking. Any time you can have serious crimes committed and not have enough penitentiaries, or enough judges, or prosecuting attorneys, to subject individuals who commit serious crimes to the full potential of incarceration — you have less than effective law enforcement. I've always felt that surety of punishment is the greatest deterrent to crime.

Q: Why are you retiring?

A: I'm 52 years of age. We have a mandatory retirement in the FBI at age 55. I've been eligible to retire with complete annuity for the past two years. Facing the prospect of mandatory retirement in the near future, I welcomed the opportunity to assist the governor of Texas.