

Candor and a Low Profile Have Character

By JOHN M. CREWDSON

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, July 8—The Federal Bureau of Investigation has not produced many headlines since Clarence M. Kelley took over as its director a year ago tomorrow. There have been no determinedly innovative edicts like those L. Patrick Gray 3d issued approving women agents, colored shirts and longer hair, no bold investigative strokes like William D. Ruckelshaus's foray into the White House to recover missing wire-tapping records.

Perhaps the most noteworthy thing has been an unprecedented public admission of failure—Mr. Kelley's recent concession that the bureau was "stumped" in its quest for Patricia Hearst and her kidnapers, the terrorist self-styled Symbionese Liberation Army.

But that sort of candor, unheard of in the days of the late J. Edgar Hoover, is more than a modest advance in public relations. The policy behind it is one of several subtle indications that the F.B.I.'s diminishing visibility is not to be mistaken for the onset of stagnation.

Change in Style

The distinction between Mr. Kelley and his predecessors—Mr. Gray and Mr. Ruckelshaus—is chiefly one of style, of the manner in which the cautious, thoughtful, former Kansas City police chief has set about moderating the internal tensions that criticism of the bureau's Watergate investigation produced and improving what he sees as an already highly sophisticated law enforcement machine.

In a recent interview, Mr. Kelley repeated his earlier remark that the Hearst case had, at least temporarily, stopped the F.B.I. cold.

"We can't win 'em all," he said. "I hope I don't have to say it too many times, but I'm going to say it if it's true."

"We may not tell you everything, but we're not going to lie to you. We're not going to try to confuse the issue with a lot of fast talk and eloquence.



Associated Press
Clarence M. Kelley

Why dance, prance and otherwise evade the issue?"

The days when anonymous "F.B.I. spokesmen" were reluctant to provide all but the most cursory details of an ongoing investigation do appear to be over. Mr. Kelley views "a more open stance" as vital to what he initially thought "was going to be one of my more fearsome jobs"—to restore the bureau's admittedly damaged credibility with the public.

But he was pleased to find that that task was "not as difficult as I first thought it to be," and has discovered "that the bureau is still held in high regard." He is equally encouraged by his finding that morale, among both the headquarters staff and agents in the field, is high.

If so—and there is ample evidence that many persons in both groups were dispirited, for different reasons, under Mr. Gray and Mr. Ruckelshaus—the improvement may be due as much to what Mr. Kelley is as to what he does.

For one thing, unlike the two men who sat in the spacious director's office before him, he is not viewed as an "outsider" who lacks sympathy or understanding for the unusual law enforcement problems that confront the F.B.I.

Before taking over his hometown force in 1961, Mr. Kelley

put in 21 years as an F.B.I. agent. That experience has already generated what many agents view as an important difference in bureau policy. Mr. Kelley, who served in 13 posts in 19 of his 21 years with the agency, has said he wants to reduce the number of regular transfers that he thinks were made as much for the sake of movement as anything else.

His modest demeanor and tendency to shun personal publicity have made a difference as well to those agents and officials who were privately appalled by the peripatetic Mr. Gray's frequent speeches and trips that took him away from headquarters—and, many thought, diminished his control over the bureau's day-to-day business.

Finally, there is a divergence of personalities. Mr. Kelley is quick to laugh at himself—he chuckles over a newspaper's description of himself as

"square-jawed, grey-haired"—a characteristic that Mr. Gray, a retired Navy captain whom some saw as imperious, was believed to lack.

"He's an old shoe," said one F.B.I. official of the director the other day, not without a trace of fondness.

But the 62-year-old Mr. Kelley, a lawyer who developed a reputation in Kansas City as a strong advocate of modern law enforcement methods, has at the same time left little doubt, both within the bureau and without, that his job involves running the agency the way he thinks best.

Nothing Illegal

While reluctant to characterize the performance of Mr. Gray, who directed an investigation of the Watergate case that has been called less than exhaustive, Mr. Kelley has made it clear that he will not "accede to instructions to do

ized Kelley's First Year as F.B.I. Director

anything illegal or unconscionable" from his superiors in the Nixon Administration.

While he acknowledges that there may be sentiment among the younger agents in the field to move more quickly into policy-making posts at headquarters—the average age of Mr. Kelley's top deputies is well over 50—he lauds "the great value of experience," and insists that his desire for internal "stability" will preclude headquarters appointments based on age alone.

Apart from several modifications of policy, at least one tactical innovation has been made.

Mr. Kelley has overseen in the last year the development of so-called "special weapons and tactics" (or SWAT) teams in several F.B.I. field offices across the country. The units are trained and equipped to deal with situations such as the Los Angeles shootout that end-

ed with the deaths of six S.L.A. members.

The brand of urban terrorism practiced by the decimated organization, Mr. Kelley said, was "unlike anything we've ever faced before." But he added that the bureau's intelligence experts had found no evidence that the group's highly publicized exploits had "stimulated any further terrorist-type of activity" by similarly inclined groups.

Mr. Kelley, who as the Kansas City police chief pioneered in the use of computerized law enforcement records and began the first 24-hour helicopter patrol in an American city, said that he believed the Hearst case might have been solved if the F.B.I. had been able to use prohibited domestic security wiretaps.

The bureau is permitted to tap telephones only with court approval and only in criminal cases, but Mr. Kelley said he

had found such authority unsuitable for investigations of organizations like the S.L.A.

The director recently embellished his emerging reputation for putting pragmatism above ideology when he ordered steps to limit the information that the bureau will furnish to state and local governments or financial institutions.

Change in Arrest Data

As of last week, arrest data more than a year old from the files of the bureau's identification division will not be provided to outside agencies for purposes of employment or licensing unless the F.B.I. has and can also include information on the disposition of those arrests.

There have also been changes in the bureau's management structure, sometimes criticized under Mr. Hoover as top-heavy, archaic and isolated from the majority of personnel

who serve outside of Washington.

Although the median age of top officials has declined little, "if at all," Mr. Kelley said he was making an effort at headquarters to "discuss things openly" with his aides and then pass "everything that transpires here down to the field."

The heads of the 59 field offices are brought to Washington periodically for "retreats" that Mr. Kelley conducts, and he has introduced what he calls a "participatory management" program that allows subordinates to make some policy decisions and resolve some problems themselves.

When he was an F.B.I. agent, Mr. Kelley recalled with a smile, "we had had the feeling in the bureau that the organization in this building was separate and apart from the field. It need not be."