Young Blood at Base Creates

Second of Three Articles

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The Federal Bureau of Investigation, one of the most sacred of government agencies, has suddenly come under criticism from—of all places—some of its own agents.

The bureau is having the biggest expansion in its history. It is bringing younger men into the ranks who are discovering that underneath all the media-glamor of the G-men, the bureau is a gerontocracy, a bureaucracy of rigid rules carried out by a group of old men.

J. Edgar Hoover himself is 76 years old. Average length of service for the 15 top directors is 31 years.

They demand annual inspections that pay great attention to neatness of clothing and office—and how much publicity the local agents get the FBI in newspapers and television.

As a result, new internal as well as external problems face the embattled director and his closely knit group of top associates.

Focus of much new internal unhappiness is the FBI inspection system. Under it, inspectors from Washington visit all 59 FBI field offices around the country for days or weeks each year and go over every aspect of operations in minute detail.

Through this system—the results of which govern assignments and promotion—Hoover and his aides are able to exercise control and enforce discipline on the widespread organization.

Tied to Old Practices

But, according to critics with FBI experience, inspections in recent years have been used more and more to prevent modernization of bureau activities and keep agents tied to old-time practices.

Recent inspections, as described by former agents who both ran them and received them, reviewed agent performances on such matters as:

- The number of confidential informants they have and whether that number has increased from prior years.
- The number of public appearances and speeches made about the FBI.
- The number of file clerks recruited to work at "Seat of Government" (Washington) and whether the quota assigned was met.
- The physical appearance of desks, files and chairs and whether food or personal effects were stored in them (they shouldn't be).
- Relations with local news media and number of interviews on local television.
- The personal appearance and attitude of each agent, particularly his weight.
- The dollar value of stolen goods recovered.
- Total investigative matters handled and the number—if any—that are overdue or delinquent.

In the past, agents grumbled about the inspection system and arbitrary manner in which Hoover and his aides applied discipline, primarily through immediate transfers from one city to another. Few agents, however, resigned.

According to former agent John F. Shaw Jr., agents with five or more years in the bureau made good salaries and chose to "defend themselves against the arbitrariness. . .of the system by doing the minimum amount of work necessary, satisfying the paper monster, playing the game of administrative paper pushing" and looking toward retirement.

This attitude is changing. Today, more questioning of the system is being done at lower levels—a situation that reflects the influx of new agents.

More than 2,000 agents have been added in the last five years, and the budget now before Congress would provide funds for another 1,036. Thus, an agent force that during the 1950s and mid-1960s stabilized around 6,000 promises to grow to more than 9,500 by next year.

The new men are attracted to the bureau by its incorruptable, modern crime-fighting image—promoted astutely over the years through television, radio and newspapers.

Once inside the FBI, however, the public image fades for the new agent, and the bureau takes on the look of an old, crusty bureaucracy. Sitting directly under the director at the top is the tightest hierarchy in the federal government, for as Hoover has grown old in the job, he has surrounded himself with men who have worked long years solely for the FBI.

Average of 31 Years

Among the 15 associate and assistant directors the average FBI service is 31 years. These include Clyde Tolson, Hoover's 70-year-old associate director with 42 straight years in the bureau; FBI Lab Director Ivan W. Conrad whose 36 years in the FBI stretch back to the beginning of the lab, and 37-year veteran Alex Rosen, the 65-year-old assistant director in charge of general (criminal) investigations.

Even the newest—and youngest—assistant director, Charles O. Brennan, who recently took over the sensitive domestic intelligence (internal security) division at 48 years of age has spent 23 years in the bureau.

Longevity is not unique to the FBI leadership. Almost 4,000 of the 8,473 special agents on duty as of mid-May this year had served 10 years or more. In fact, 1,000 of them had put in 25 years or more.

The obvious negative result of these longtimers has been a freezing of bureau techniques and attitudes and an isolation from informed outside opinions and criticism.

"The inspectors," one former agent recalled recently, "are supposed to be Hoover's eyes and ears. In fact, they are afraid to tell the truth to the old man. They don't attack some hacks and drunks who are old Hoover favorites. On the other hand, they will blame an entire office if they want to get one agent."

Ed Guthman, who worked in the Justice Department as press secretary to the late Robert Kennedy, recently wrote that "the devilish internal inspection system. . . as Hoover aged, (became) increasingly oppressive to the agents."

Dozen Transferred

A copy of one letter of complaint to Hoover was recently sent to Sen. George McGovern. It described how—after an inspection—one agent was immediately reassigned from Charlotte, N.C., to Little Rock, Ark., for being overweight. Another was ordered from Charlotte to Minneapolis for being late in reporting an interview. The field office itself was given a "fair" in physical condition and maintenance apparently because a stenographer was discovered keeping food in a desk drawer and dust was found on some cabinets.

In another case, 12 agents,

New Problems for Hoover, 76

including the special agent in charge and his assistant, were transferred from a Southwest field office for failing to report to Washington that one of them had gotten drunk at a local police banquet.

One practice that younger agents have begun complaining about is the requirement for specific numbers of informants.

Failure to meet the informant quota becomes a bad mark on an individual's record. In an effort to prevent this, present and former agents say they acquired many informants just for the sake of having them.

The bureau is full of stories of how agents inflate their statistics on stolen goods and cars recovered because they know their dollar values provide the foundation for Hoover's testimony before Congress. Each year the director proudly announces that for each dollar of appropriation, the bureau recovered more than a dollar in recovered goods.

Last year, for example, he reported recoveries and fines in 1969 came to $1.57 for every dollar appropriated in fiscal 1969.

As the bureau's budget increases, however, it becomes necessary for agents to find new means to show greater recoveries so that the statistics presented to Congress can continue to look good.

One little-publicized role played by local agents, particularly in the East and South, is as recruiters for the thousands of file clerk jobs that turn over each year at the FBI's Washington headquarters. To keep the young high school graduates coming in, the bureau puts quotas on all local field offices.

In turn, some agents in charge pass the quotas on to individual agents who then go to local high schools in search of prospects. At times in such presentations, according to both former agents and clerks, the tedious Washington job of a fingerprint clerk is given added glamour so that an agent can meet the requirement placed on him for a recruit.

Special agents in charge are also marked heavily on their public relations activities. This is not limited to keeping up good contacts with local law enforcement groups. It also covers the local press, television and civic organizations.

A major part of each inspection is review of cases on hand and discussion of the techniques being employed to carry on investigations. Since numbers of "investigative matters" play a key part in Hoover's annual congressional presentation, there is little pressure to close cases that are not in the public eye. In contrast, there is encouragement to expand matters already under way in order to build up the figures.

Thus, when a decision was made to go into the area of black student organizations, cases were opened on almost all black student groups rather than just those where information of potential subversive or violent activity had been received.

As the bureau looks to the future, it is clear that a new director would have to make major changes in the FBI's ranking hierarchy and internal inspection system if he plans to move away in any significant manner from the past and present practices established by J. Edgar Hoover.

The chances are, however, that any successor chosen from within the present bureau hierarchy would keep things very much as they are today.

Next: New FBI Building—Hoover's Monument