

Morale of F.B.I. Sagged Before Gray Resignation

News About His Replacement Sets Off Speculation in Agency—Senior Aide There Was Given No Advance Word

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WASHINGTON, April 27—Morale at the once-proud Federal Bureau of Investigation had dropped to an all-time low today before the resignation of the Acting Director, L. Patrick Gray 3d, after a year of confusion and controversy since the death of J. Edgar Hoover.

The word that President Nixon had named William D. Ruckelshaus, Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, to succeed Mr. Gray arrived at the agency at quitting time, too late to tough off anything more than speculative conversation in the corridors.

One F.B.I. clerk said that he had never heard of Mr. Ruckelshaus, but another responded, "It's a natural; he worked here before."

Mr. Ruckelshaus was an Assistant Attorney General for the Justice Department's Civil Division for two years.

The senior official at the agency, W. Mark Felt, was not advised of the President's appointment in advance and was caught off balance when informed by a reporter.

"Rucklehaus?" he asked. "No, I don't know anything about him."

Generally, agents and officials of the F.B.I. were angry at reports in the morning papers that Mr. Gray had destroyed documents taken from a figure in the Watergate case, then they were relieved by the news at midday of his resignation.

Issue of Confidence

Would Mr. Ruckelshaus help to restore confidence in the bureau on the part of the public and bureau employees?

"Well, maybe if they don't eat him alive," one F.B.I. employe replied.

On the day of his departure, it was hard to find anyone with a charitable word for Mr. Gray. Earlier, some agency officials had defended him as "unsophisticated," a man of integrity but without the necessary experience in law enforcement or politics to defend himself on either front.

Today, there was little such comment. "He did more to hurt us in one year," an F.B.I. field agent said, "than J. Edgar Hoover did in 48."

The news reports this morning that Mr. Gray had destroy documents given to him at a meeting in the White House after the Watergate arrests touched a particularly tender nervt at the F.B.I.

"Nobody ever destroys files, nobody has the authority to do that," one agent said with feeling. "The F.B.I. is a fact-finding organization, a fact-gathering organization. That's what we've built our record on."

Discouragement was prevalent among veteran F.B.I. officials of the Hoover generation.

"This has not been good for morale," one of them said after Mr. Gray's resignation had been announced. "We're accustomed to working under very strong leadership. What we have had has been a different sort of thing. Now it looks like we are going to have to go through the same thing again."

"There was a little relief

around the bureau when the resignation came," one F.B.I. source said. "This morning, people were going around saying, 'This is the end, we can't take any more.' That was when we hit bottom. Now, there's no place to go but up."

One of the major challenges that Mr. Ruckelshaus will face, in the eyes of bureau leaders, is the task of giving the agency an identity separate from the Nixon Administration's.

"Under Nixon, the White House seemed to embark on an effort to turn the F.B.I. into an instrument of its own will," one field agent said. "We've all been afraid the White House might compromise the independence of the bureau. Maybe now that can be restored."

One of the chief charges made against Mr. Gray in the bureau during his year's tenure as Acting Director was that he was more concerned with his personal and political advancement than with the efficiency and morale of the agency.

Mr. Ruckelshaus has made little secret in recent months of his plans to return to Indiana and make a second try to defeat Senator Birch Bayh, a Democrat, in next year's election.

Mr. Gray suffered a serious loss of confidence among F.B.I. personnel during his Senate confirmation hearings when he made available material from bureau reports. Agents in the field reported that they could detect a lowering of public respect for their work at that time.

F.B.I. veterans were particularly concerned that the acting director had sent to the White House, without any record of their transmission in the bureau, reports from Republican campaign employes who had asked to talk privately with agents.

Before the announcement of Mr. Ruckelshaus's appointment, two secretaries stood in a corridor of the F.B.I. offices in the Department of Justice, discussing who might succeed Mr. Gray.

"Who would want it?" one asked.

"There must be some honest man who wants it," her companion replied.

"This is the Nixon Administration," the first said. "They thought they got one with Gray, and look what happened to him."

Down the hall, a clerk said of Mr. Gray, "I bet they're going to give him a gold watch for following orders."