

Ruckelshaus, a 'Political Outsider,' Commands Uneasy F.B.I.

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WASHINGTON, June 3—With William D. Ruckelshaus's self-imposed tenure of two months as acting director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation barely half over, he finds himself in a perplexing position.

Mr. Ruckelshaus's chief responsibility, one on which aides say he spends an increasing amount of time, is running the F.B.I.'s investigation of the widening Watergate scandals.

At the same time, he is presiding over a large and sometimes unwieldy organization whose morale and pride have been shaken in recent months, and where some senior officials say they resent his appointment as "political" and want him replaced with one of their own.

When Mr. Ruckelshaus took over as acting director from I. Patrick Gray 3d on April 27, he told newsmen that he did not plan to remain at the bureau for much more than "about two months."

Ready to Slay On

A close associate, however, discounted reports that Mr. Ruckelshaus would resign after two months if a successor had not yet been found. The remark, he explained, was made "off-the-cuff," and he said that Mr. Ruckelshaus was prepared to stay on "until the new guy is chosen and confirmed," however long that might be.

The associate also dismissed a report that Mr. Ruckelshaus planned to propose to Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson that a "blue-ribbon panel" of criminal justice and law-enforcement experts be appointed to draw up a list of possible successors.

The idea of such a panel, he said, was "floated around" earlier but had since been abandoned, and Mr. Ruckelshaus



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William D. Ruckelshaus

and Mr. Richardson were now working with the White House "to try to surface a new director."

The associate said that no candidate had thus far been found for the post, which has been filled on an acting basis since the death of J. Edgar Hoover more than a year ago.

Mr. Hoover was succeeded by Mr. Gray who, hours before Mr. Ruckelshaus's appointment, resigned because of "serious allegations concerning certain acts of my own during the ongoing Watergate investigation."

Like Mr. Ruckelshaus, Mr. Gray was resented by many

F.B.I. agents and officials as an "outsider" and a political appointee. Moreover, many of them say that Mr. Gray's actions damaged the bureau's stature and credibility, which they believe will not be restored until a new director has been appointed from their own ranks.

The examples most often cited by the agents and officials were Mr. Gray's disclosures that he permitted the former White House counsel, John W. Dean 3d, to examine F.B.I. files on the Watergate case and that he destroyed evidence taken from the safe of E. Howard Hunt Jr., one of the conspirators who pleaded guilty to the break-in and bugging of the Democratic National Headquarters at the Watergate complex here a year ago.

"Can't Shove Nixon"

Shortly before Mr. Ruckelshaus took over, at the bureau, 71 of its 72 top officials sent President Nixon a telegram cautioning that, unless the next director were chosen from their ranks, within which there was "an inherent nonpartisanship," the bureau might "flounder or lose direction in its service to the nation."

Mr. Ruckelshaus assured the officials that he agreed that his successor should be someone with strong law-enforcement experience and, unlike himself, without a political background. It was for these reasons, an aide said, that Mr. Ruckelshaus declined Mr. Nixon's initial offer of the nomination to become permanent director.

But Mr. Ruckelshaus is said to prefer the appointment of someone from outside the bureau to replace him, on the ground that such an individual would be more likely to examine established procedures with a critical eye. An associate, re-

marking that "the bureau is divided into 11 factions," predicted that anyone appointed from within would encounter immediate opposition from other factions.

An aide maintained that Mr. Ruckelshaus was anxious for the internal differences and morale problems to be resolved by the appointment of a permanent director, but that "he can't be in the posture of showing Nixon on this thing."

The retirement on June 14 of

W. Mark Felt, the F.B.I.'s second in command, may strengthen Mr. Ruckelshaus's position for the rest of his tenure there. Mr. Felt, who friends say wanted the bureau's top post, was one of the initiators of the telegram to the President.

Mr. Ruckelshaus is now interviewing a number of F.B.I. officials as possible replacements for Mr. Felt, and whom ever he selects will have to be considered for the director's post.