

Gray Learned to Say 'Aye, Aye, Sir'

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 6—Pat Gray is still twisting "slowly, slowly in the wind."

And somehow many in the silent crowd at the Watergate hearings in the caucus room of the Old Senate Office Building today seemed almost embarrassed as they watched the saddened face and chastened manner that appeared to say he was resigned to twisting there forever.

"I said early in the game," L. Patrick Gray 3d, the former acting director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, recounted unhappily, "that Watergate would be a spreading stain that would tarnish everyone with whom it came in contact—and I'm no exception."

Declaring that he had a special responsibility to get to the root of the Watergate affair, he added wearily:

"I failed in that responsibility and I had never failed in any responsibility before and it hurts."

Hurt Apparent

And the old Navy captain, with his graying crewcut and lined features, looked like a man who hurt.

It was John D. Ehrlichman, former chief domestic affairs adviser to President Nixon, who said last March at the time of the Senate hearings on the confirmation of Mr. Gray to succeed J. Edgar Hoover as head of the F.B.I. that the Administration "ought to let him hang there, let him twist slowly, slowly in the wind."

Mr. Ehrlichman, who made the remark in a telephone conversation with John W. Dean 3d, the former White House counsel, supplied a transcript of that conversation to the Senate Watergate Committee.

And hang there he did, until Mr. Nixon withdrew the nomination after the acting director had become snared in Watergate before the judiciary committee.

But that didn't end it.

Today, as Mr. Gray returned for questioning under television lights to the witness stand from which he read an opening statement Friday afternoon he still seemed to be suspended over the quicksand of that scandal.

Indictment Possible

What's more, even with the hearings behind him, he faces possible indictment by the Federal grand jury investigating the case.

What brought him to this point, what cost him the coveted directorship of the F.B.I., what forced him to step down as acting director, what compelled him to lie at times, Mr. Gray seemed over and over to be trying to explain to the committee, was a kind of blind obedience and loyalty that he had learned in the Navy and in a succession of bureaucratic jobs.

In the Navy, the onetime submarine acknowledged sadly, he was taught to say "Aye, aye, sir."

Unlike his predecessor, the late Mr. Hoover, who stood his ground stubbornly against many a President, Mr. Gray was "overawed," he testified, by the office.

That is why, he explained, he did what he thought was the bidding of Mr. Ehrlichman and Mr. Dean and burned papers from the White House safe of E. Howard Hunt Jr., a convicted Watergate conspirator.

"At no time did I feel I was dealing with individuals who were trying to sweep me into the very conspiracy that I was charged with investigating," Mr. Gray said. "That's a madman's horror."

He feels that he is wiser now.

'Hours of Bombing'

Early in the questioning by Rufus L. Edmisten, the deputy counsel, Mr. Gray declared that "in the service of my country I withstood

hours and hours of depth charging, shelling, bombing, but I never expected to run into a Watergate in the service of a President of the United States and I ran into a buzzsaw obviously."

There was a time—a pre-buzzsaw time—when he felt differently.

Queried by Senator Daniel K. Inouye, the Hawaiian Democrat, as to why he had not asked himself "if it was proper [to burn the Hunt paper], why can't Mr. John Wesley Dean 3d take it home to his backyard and burn it?" Mr. Gray replied:

"Those questions were not raised in my mind, because on the basis of my training and dealing with the Office of the President, when I was on active duty in the U.S. Navy, I revered that office and I revered the people in it and I respected them and I had no reason to raise any suspicions."

Contrast Seen

Obviously amazed at the easy acquiescence of Mr. Gray when he had occupied the office from which Mr. Hoover loosed thunderbolts at interferences, Senator Herman E. Talmadge, Democrat of Georgia, drawled:

"You did not think your office as director of the F.B.I. was an extension of the White House, did you?"

"No, sir, I did not," Mr. Gray responded apologetical-

ly. "I had only been in the F.B.I., really actively on duty there and when this whole thing broke, you know, about four weeks."

And then the former acting director of the Federal law-enforcement agency added:

"I have not been suspicious of people, I have not lived nor was I raised or brought up with, or served with, people that I had to be suspicious of. Looking back on it is another matter, sir."

Facility in Office

As for the burden of being the new boy on the block, Mr. Gray told Senator Inouye at another point that he had been so naive he had taken the Hunt papers home (finally burning them with his Christmas trash) because he had not known that the two red baskets under his desk in the director's office were "burn baskets."

As the troubled ex-acting director, in a dark blue suit, blue shirt and blue patterned tie, slowly made his way out of the hearing room at the noon recess, a short blonde woman holding a shopping bag in each hand stationed herself near the door and called to him:

"We'll pray for you, Mr. Gray."

Glancing back over his shoulder, he said earnestly, "that will help."