

WXPost Turmoil at FBI When Hoover Died Is Told

DEC 2 1975

By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

A retired FBI official who was reportedly ordered to protect the files in J. Edgar Hoover's offices immediately after his death said yesterday that he locked only the FBI director's personal office—which had no files in it at all.

The turmoil that followed Hoover's death on May 2, 1972, was replayed before a House subcommittee headed by Rep. Bella Abzug (D-N.Y.) at a day-long hearing loaded with often conflicting details.

The first witness to testify, former Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst, said he learned of Hoover's death by telephone early that morning and quickly "issued the order that the offices of the director be locked and secured" until an acting FBI director could be appointed and held responsible for bureau records in the nine-room suite.

Instead, the contents of some 35 file cabinet drawers constituting Hoover's so-called "personal file" were shipped to his house shortly after his death and subsequently destroyed.

Maintaining that he carried out his instructions properly, John P. Mohr, former assistant to the director, testified that acting Attorney General Kleindienst asked him only to "secure his (Hoover's) personal office."

Declaring that he "would have had to kick a lot of people out" if the entire suite were to be sealed off, Mohr said he explicitly asked Kleindienst whether he meant Hoover's "actual personal office and he said that he did."

"I did what he told me to do," Mohr protested. He said he had an FBI lab technician change the locks on the two doors to Hoover's file-empty inner sanctum and promptly dispatched a memo to Kleindienst on May 2 or 3 telling him "that I had secured Mr. Hoover's personal office and that I had the keys."

According to other testimony and records brought out by the subcommittee, the files scattered over the rest of Hoover's suite were divided into so-called "official-confidential" holdings and the "personal file," all indexed in a single card-system but color-coded to maintain the distinction.

The distinction, however, was not always clear. Congressional investigators have found that among the records initially classified "personal" were memos on FBI "black bag jobs" or burglaries, files on individuals such as Washington lobbyist Fred Black and one-time Communist Elizabeth Bentley, and records on the "bombing at U.S. Capitol" several years ago.

Hoover and his longtime executive assistant, Helen Gandy, had apparently started reviewing the "personal file" in the fall of 1974 and sorted out those that should have been "official-confidential" and thereby preserved as official FBI records. However, all those transferred from "personal" to "official-confidential" were filed under the letters A and B.

Miss Gandy said yesterday that she and an associate, Erma Metcalf, didn't get around to reviewing the rest of the FBI director's "personal file" until after his death. She told the subcommittee that they reviewed every piece of paper from C to Z, but found absolutely nothing that was not of a personal nature.

"As I say, you just have my word," the 78-year-old Gandy testified. But she was firm in stating that "I destroyed nothing that pertained to bureau matters."

Miss Gandy also said that Hoover's immediate successor, acting FBI Director L. Patrick Gray, made a cursory check of the "personal file" before it was shipped to Hoover's home and assented to her disposal of it. The subcommittee was told that Gray has denied this to subcommittee investigators, but



Waiting to testify at FBI hearing are former Attorney General Richard Gandy, Hoover's former secretary. At G. Kleindienst; W. Mark Felt, former FBI associate director, and Helen W. Felt's right is Mrs. Felt.

By James K.W. Atherton—The Washington Post

Miss Gandy remained unshaken.

"... I've no reason to lie," she declared.

The files in Hoover's office that were marked "official-confidential" before his death were turned over to then-associate director W. Mark Felt, who said he kept them in his office until leaving the bureau. He said he repeatedly suggested that Gray take a look at them but Gray did not.

Instead, according to Mohr, Gray began demanding, even before his appointment as acting FBI director on May 3, 1972, to know where Hoover's "secret files" were.

"I told him there were no secret files" at a meeting with Gray on May 2, Mohr said. But Gray came back next day in an "agitated" state and renewed the demand, he added.

"I got a little agitated myself," Mohr testified. "I thought he was looking for files that would embarrass the Nixon administration... I think I did cuss at him a little bit."

Gray, Mohr recalled, told

him at one point, "Look, Mr. Mohr, I'm a hard-headed Irishman. Nobody pushes me around." With that, he got up and left. That afternoon he was named acting director of the FBI.

Insisting once again that the FBI had no "secret" files, Mohr defined a secret file as "one marked secret." Asked if he told Gray about Hoover's "official-confidential" files, the former FBI official

replied, "No. He didn't ask me" about those.

Senate investigators are also inquiring into the contents of these files, the subcommittee is obtaining sanitized summaries of the so-called "derogatory" documents that have been found. The examples cited yesterday, from Fred Black to Elizabeth Bentley, were all said to be in the "non-derogatory" category.