

Female Agents Doing Just Fine For the FBI

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The two FBI agents, cruising the streets of a northeastern port city, had been tipped off earlier that the two men they were seeking in connection with a large Washington art theft were in the neighborhood.

A few minutes later, they saw the car.

"I'll block them," the agent behind the wheel said to his partner. "You get out and cover them." Swiftly, he turned his car to obstruct their path and the second agent leaped out, gun in hand.

The men did not resist.

They emerged slowly and, following orders, stood spread-eagled against the side of their car to be searched for weapons. But these two did not behave with indifference. Instead, they kept twisting their heads to stare at the agent covering them.

"Whaddya think you're looking at?" the agent frisking them asked gruffly.

What they were looking at was a slender, blonde-streaked brunette, wearing a blue-and-white tweed pantsuit and a touch of brown eyeshadow, one long red fingernail visible from behind the trigger guard of a .357 Magnum snubnose revolver.

Later, as they were being fingerprinted, one of them turned to her and smiled. "You can arrest me anytime, baby," he said. "It was a pleasure."

The whole operation went smoothly, a normal arrest in all respects — except for the fact that one of the agents happened to be a woman. It was a scene, however, that could never have taken place before July 17, 1972: the day the first women agents in the history of the FBI reported for duty.

Up until that time, during

Coast Guard Rescues Sunken 300-Foot Pier

A 300-foot railroad ferry pier — one of those long barge-like crafts that transport railroad cars across the bay — partially sank yesterday afternoon and was under water for about an hour.

The U.S. Coast Guard said the floating pier, the Los Plumas, sprang a leak and settled stern first in about 20 feet of water with several railroad cars aboard.

A Coast Guard rescue boat was called to the scene and, by using a pump that sucked out 250 gallons of water a minute, managed to refloat the pier.

There were no injuries reported and the Coast Guard had no immediate damage estimate. The owner of the floating pier was not identified.

the 48 years J. Edgar Hoover ruled the Bureau, he was inflexible when it came to the sex of his agents. They all had to be male. Women, he believed, just could not handle the physical demands of the job.

But after his death in May, 1972, and under the temporary leadership of L. Patrick Gray III, the bureau loosened up in a number of ways. Agents, who had been required to wear white shirts and keep their hair short, were allowed to add color to their wardrobe and inches to their hair. Women clerical employees were told they could smoke at their desks, a luxury formerly reserved for men.

And Gray announced, much to the initial apprehension of some of the veterans there, that the bureau would begin accepting applications from women who wanted to become agents.

It has been two years this spring since the first two women began their training at the FBI Academy at Quantico, Va.

Today, there are 27 women working full time as special agents among their approximately 8500 male counterparts, and five more women are scheduled to begin training next month. FBI officials say that the women have been absorbed into the system with a minimum of problems and have worked out very well.

The FBI, contrary to its usual policy, permitted several of its women agents to be interviewed, but requested that their names and the cities where they work not be disclosed.

The women, who included an ex-nun, a former Marine officer, a medical researcher and telephone company engineer, were all enthusiastic about their work and said they have experienced only a modicum of difficulties as a result of their being women. For the most part, they said they were accepted by their male colleagues after several months on the job, although there was some skepticism at first.

In some cases, it was only

an undercurrent. In others, open hostility.

One agent, a onetime Marine who had previously commanded an all-male outfit, said that she had to deal with resistance during her training, but not after she began working in her field office. Most of the men in her class avoided her at first, she said.

But one of them, standing near her in a cafeteria lunch line, had something to say: "A woman's going to have to prove herself before I'm going to risk my life with her."

She ignored him. "I didn't think it deserved an answer," she said. "I figure any male agent who feels threatened by a female agent is suffering from an inability to deal with his own feelings of inadequacy."

One midwestern agent participated in several risky assignments.

Several weeks ago, for example, she was part of a squad that pursued, and later killed, a fugitive who had murdered two policemen in another state and had taken a family hostage to avoid capture. "During that stake-out I was treated no differently from anyone else," she said.

But one male agent in another city, a 23-year veteran of the FBI, said that although he thought women agents were valuable, he still had lingering doubts.

"In a dangerous situation, all things being equal, I would rather have a man by my side," he said. "I must add, however, it depends on the agent. There are plenty of men I know whom I wouldn't want with me — and plenty of women I would want with me. But, as I said, all things being equal, I'll take the man."

FBI officials had long recognized the need for women in specialized assignments, such as surveillance and undercover work, where a woman — or a man and a woman together — arouse less suspicion than a man, or two men. Prior to opening agent's jobs to women, the bureau had used its female clerical employees, with their permission. But the potential of danger always existed, because these women had not been trained.

One woman agent recently participated in the capture of an alleged killer who was sitting in a restaurant. She was sent to confirm his identity. She walked in, sat down near him, and ordered an ice cream cone.

"He tried to pick me up," she said, laughing.