



The FBI Oral History Project

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Interview of Former Special Agent of the FBI Richard H. Ash (1948 – 1977) Interviewed by Stanley A. Pimentel On March 30, 2004 and July 15, 2004

Edited for repetitions, spelling, etc. by Sandra Robinette on December 15, 2004. Edited for Mr. Ash's corrections by Sandra Robinette on February 19, 2005 and April 10, 2005.

Pimentel: Today is March 30th, 2004, and I am Stanley A. Pimentel. I'm at the home of Richard H. Ash to interview him about his career in the FBI.

Dick has reviewed the Oral History Heritage Project copyright release and background form and he and I have both signed it and dated it for March 30th, 2004.

Dick, if I could, I would like you to start out by maybe your early childhood, where you were born and raised, where you went to school, and then we'll progress from there.

Ash: I was born in Downingtown, Pennsylvania, and remained there through my high school years. I went to Bucknell University in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, where I entered into an Engineering Degree curriculum.

Then World War II came along and interrupted my studies there. Then I went through several years of World War II, including the Battle of the Bulge as an Infantryman. After the war, I reentered Bucknell and graduated there in 1948.

In the meantime, in my senior year, I married Mary Nell Walraven and proceeded to look for a job when I graduated and ultimately entered the FBI.

Pimentel: How did you enter the FBI, did you answer some sort of announcement or was publicity or recruiting program or?

Ash: While I was still in the University, an FBI Agent appeared on campus as a recruiter, so to speak. As a result of his being there, I then submitted an application and went through the process.

Pimentel: Okay. And then the rest is history I guess.

Ash: That's about right.

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Pimentel: You want to go into all that. You went through the old Academy?

Ash: Went through the old Academy.

Pimentel: And this was which month?

Ash: I think we're talking about February of 1948. My memory is a little vague, I don't remember any more whether we went thirteen weeks, fifteen weeks, or more, but whatever it was, it was at the old Academy.

I can recall that they were building a pistol range at that time and part of the New Agent training was digging and shoveling in an effort to build the range.

But after completing training school, my first office was in San Francisco. My first supervisor was a man by the name of Bill Simon, who became rather notorious in the FBI. He was the supervisor of the applicant squad. His relief supervisor was Elmer Lindburg, who also became an SAC later in his career.

I was there a very short period of time. The whole time I was there, I worked applicant cases and I was there only about six months.

And then over the Labor Day weekend of 1948, I was transferred to the Seattle Division. I remained in the division there at headquarters, for a very short period of time.

They posted an advertisement on the bulletin board at the Seattle Office indicating that they needed Agents in the Richland Resident Agency, Richland, Washington, and one of the inducements was that there was housing available there, for rent, at a very reasonable price.

Richland, Washington, was the home of the Atomic Energy facility, where they were at that time building a plant to enrich plutonium for the bombs. So I took that opportunity and went to Richland, where I remained in the Richland RA for about three years, as I recall.

Ash: When I first went to Richland, the town was a company town. General Electric was the prime contractor for the plutonium facility under AEC (Atomic Energy Commission). The housing was all government housing and we were provided with a duplex. My recollection is that I was paying \$35 a month, which included utilities.

Yes. And when I first went to Richland, there were 35 Agents in that Resident Agency. The Senior Resident Agent was a man by the name of George Treadwell, who was a native of Georgia. Discipline there was not very tight. The single Agents lived in a barracks kind of facility there, which was provided by AEC and a number of very interesting parties were held in the evenings in that barracks. Somebody, somewhere decided that they needed a little more clout in that Resident Agency so they transferred in Joseph Casper as the Senior Resident Agent and gave him the title of Assistant Special Agent in Charge.

He came out of someplace at Bureau Headquarters. They transferred him directly out there. He ran a rather tight ship there.

Also in the interim, we were doing applicant investigations on everybody that worked there. Didn't matter whether they were plumbers, whether they were maintenance men, whether they were custodians, whatever, they ran security clearances. The FBI was charged with doing this background. And that's all we did in those days just about, except for maybe one or two Agents who were working criminal kind of stuff, nothing significant.

Somebody changed the policy along the way where we wouldn't do investigations on everybody but only on the critical employees. So, along with Casper's tightening the ship and the change in the policies, the numerical numbers of Agents in that Resident Agency were reduced, while I was there for the three years, from 35 down to about 5. I left there in 1951.

During that period of time in the Bureau, there was a tendency because of cost, that in transferring Agents, once you got, say on the West Coast, you were pretty much up and down the West Coast. And I, being an East Coaster, and my wife was from Indiana, we were spending all our money coming back every year to visit relatives. So I resigned from the FBI in Washington.

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Pimentel: In 1951?

Ash: Yeah, and took a job in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where I went to work as a so-called Engineer for the Raub Supply Company. Which was a plumbing and heating supply company. There are no businesses like that anymore. They were the wholesalers and interfaced between manufacturers and the plumbers and appliance dealers. It was a family-owned organization.

I wasn't really all that satisfied there, and within a matter of probably eight months, I made application to come back into the FBI. That process was interesting because, by that time, Joe Casper, who had been the ASAC in Richland when I resigned, was by that time assigned to FBI Headquarters, as I recall. So was Joe Ponder, who had succeeded Casper as being Senior Resident Agent in Richland, who I knew, and they were both at Headquarters.

I contacted Casper and indicated I wanted to come back in, and I'm sure that on the basis of his initiating some sort of paperwork at the FBI Headquarters, I was invited back. In 1951 when I came back, or early 1952, I was assigned to the New York Office, and.

Pimentel: Did you have to go through Agents training again?

Ash: No, the only thing they made me do was go to in-service.

Pimentel: Okay.

Ash: For two weeks, which was not immediate. I went up there and started to work, and then they sent me to an in-service class. I was assigned to one of the security squads. The squad supervisor was a man by the name of Warren Marchesault.

The Bureau at that time was heavily involved in investigating the Communist Party, the Communist Front organizations, and Communist satellite organizations. There were a number of different security squads.

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Ash:

The squad that I was on was handling what were known as the Smith Act subjects. These were the leadership of the Communist Party, who were in the process of being indicted and tried under what was known as the Smith Act. Subsequently, the Smith Act was ruled as being unconstitutional. These people were never convicted under any other law. Anyway, we handled Smith Act subjects and also we handled Communist Front organizations.

The main one that was assigned to me was the American Slav Congress, which was a huge membership organization, closely affiliated with the Communist Party. The whole time I was there, I was involved with that kind of activity.

Then in 1954, I was transferred to Kansas City, and there again, I came upon Bill Simon, who had been my first supervisor. He was the Special Agent in Charge there at the time I was transferred to Kansas City.

I had correspondence with him when I was under transfer and indicated what I had been doing in New York, and he had indicated that maybe we'll be able to use you on security matters, but we don't have many of those here in Kansas City. So anyway, initially I started working security cases, and he was right, there was hardly anything there.

Shortly thereafter I started working some criminal cases and somehow or other, I became the Bank Robbery Coordinator in Kansas City. Kansas City covers all of the western part of Missouri and all of Kansas. And in the rural areas, both in Missouri and Kansas at that time, there were large numbers of bank burglaries. These little banks at that time, it is almost inconceivable today, but they would be out in the middle of nowhere and some of them would be just one room, and the safes would be stand-up, big iron safes. You know, that was the vault.

Well I can remember one of these gangs had some sort of a truck, that they would break in at night, into the front of these banks and pull the safe out and haul it off into the boonies somewhere and then work on it and get the money and other valuables out.

Ash: One interesting case we had there. The Organized Crime groups were very active in Kansas City. And they had an unofficial understanding with the Kansas City Police Department, that the Kansas City Police Department would overlook their gambling activity as long as the mob would not commit any other kinds of crimes within Kansas City.

And on one occasion, in one of these rural bank burglary situations, the robbers went in and they blew the bank up, when they went in, and by the time we got there, the safe deposit boxes had all been -

Pimentel: Rifled.

Ash: Rifled, and stuff was all over the floor. So the FBI Agents, as they are trained to do, were sifting through all that stuff. In one of these, they found a torn envelope, there in the envelope was a half of a hundred dollar bill. They did not find the other half.

So I hadn't been involved in the details of this investigation, but when this hundred dollar bill came back into the Kansas City Headquarters Office, we decided to take the number off the bill and go over to the Federal Reserve Bank, which was also in Kansas City, and talk to them about what they could do.

I thought this was a lost cause. We go in there and give this man a number and say look for this number. Anyway, we did that, and I did it personally. I no sooner got back to the office when I got a call from the Federal Reserve Bank, and they said a man just came in with the other half of this hundred dollar bill. He said he was a messenger for somebody at the Gaetano's Restaurant, down on the east side, which was the mob part of town.

So another Agent and I go trooping down there to the restaurant, and the runner comes in there. We say who sent you, and he gives us a name. So we go to see that man. He gave us the unlikely story that he got this by sitting next to somebody at the bar, and he gave him \$20 for this half of a hundred dollar bill. He decided he could cash it in. Well who was the man at the bar, you know, I don't know, this kind of thing.

Ash: Anyway, we proceeded with that. It turns out that the man that we had been interviewing was one of the dealers at what was known in Kansas City as the Downtown Bridge Club. Now nobody ever played bridge in the Downtown Bridge Club. It was the mob's gambling facility in Kansas City. So on the basis of talking to him and realizing who he was, one of the Agents who had been working Organized Crime cases there and I proceeded to the Don, I guess he was. Look now this is what we have, and you know, he told us well I don't know anything, I don't know anything. Finally by putting some pressure on him, as I recall, he finally said, well it was given to us by Guido, somebody or other, I don't remember his last name.

And a couple of days later, driving into work with the radio on, we heard that Guido had been found dead in the trunk of a car, so he had caused them some heat that was not supposed to be and the mob executed him. His murder was never solved. But that was one incident.

Another interesting thing I did in Kansas City is that, there was a case involving a man by the _____ who had been a Communist Party member somewhere other than in Kansas City, who also became a Union official. Laws at that time barred Communist Party members from being officials of the Union, under some labor management relations act, which probably has been declared unconstitutional since, I don't know. He had attested that he was not a Communist Party member when he became the union official.

But, anyway, he was then living in Missouri, as I recall in Columbia, Missouri. Whoever was the office of origin in this case wanted us to go out and interview this guy. So another Agent and I go out to Columbia, Missouri, and we get in touch with him.

He was very forthright. I can remember interviewing him in the car. He admitted that he had been a Communist Party member, but at the time that he became a Union official, he had quit paying dues. And so, the conversation was yeah you can quit paying dues, but you continue to be affiliated with the Party. He said oh yeah. In effect, he admitted that he had continued to be active in the Communist Party, but quit paying dues. And we put all this in the signed statement.

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Ash: This was shortly after the Bureau introduced what has become known as the FD-302, which is the interview report form, I think is its official name. Prior to that time, all of the written material, whether you were interviewing suspects or witnesses whatever went on a piece of paper that became a part of the report. Defense attorneys became more intelligent. They were demanding the whole file when one of their defendants was under prosecution, and this caused all kind of problems.

There was a recent article incidentally in *the Grapevine*, written by John Minich, that a Bureau official by the name of Dwight Dalby was the one who came up with the FD-302 idea. So with the FD-302, there was supposed to be a contemporaneous reporting, as I recall, you had to get it into the 302 within three days of the interview.

This interview occurred shortly after, so we took the signed statement and also wrote an FD-302. When this went to trial, and the trial was in Denver, I was called as a witness. It is my recollection that was probably the first time that I had been involved in a Federal trial as a witness, I think. Anyway, there was a continuous delving by his attorney into my recording this information and demanding the original notes.

The protocol at that time was that you did the 302, that was the original reporting, and you discarded the notes. Which I continually explained on the witness stand, not to the satisfaction of the attorney. One of the newspapers came out and described this dialog between me and the defense attorney as an angry kind of confrontation. I don't remember it that way, but anyway, he was ultimately convicted, but the significance to that was the relationship of the FD-302.

Pimentel:

Ash:

Pimentel: Oh I see.

Ash:

Another sort of interesting incident, which has no historical significance occurred while I was in Kansas City. Some woman called in to the complaint desk saying that one of her neighbors was shooting at airplanes. And of course, the thing was written up on a complaint form, and some supervisor assigns this thing to me.

And you know, I look at this and think, this is another dream, she's listening to thunderclaps and thinks the neighbor is shooting. So I run out there.

She lived across the street from the man that she claimed was shooting at the airplane, on a very busy thoroughfare in Kansas City. And so I get in there. This woman is in her mid- forties I guess, and very reasonable. I said, well how do you know he's shooting at airplanes. And she goes back and she picks up a log. She says now on a certain date and at a certain time, she hears this noise and at that same time, she sees an airplane. She goes through this log. You know over a period, as I recall, maybe a month, or even longer maybe.

So then I decide, well I have to do some background on this man she is accusing. Well it turns out that he was a maintenance employee for TransWorld Airlines, which had a big maintenance shop in the Kansas City area. The Kansas City Airport at that time was downtown, right in the middle of town, and you could see the airplanes take off and fly in below the level of the high rise apartments.

You know this man was working for TWA. It doesn't make any sense. I started interviewing his supervisor and his fellow workers. They all said he was great, you know they didn't have any problem with him. I said well the only way to solve this is to go and interview him. So I get another Agent and we go down, called him up, said we're coming down and talk to you.

And I go in there and the interview went something like. Do you own a gun? Yes. What kind of gun do you have? I have a pistol. And I said, I suppose you go out and shoot the pistol at targets or something in the back yard. No. I said well what are you shooting at? Rabbits or squirrels? No, he said, those goddamn airplanes.

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Ash: So there you are. Here's this man with a pistol shooting. The next thought was I'm not ready for this, what do I do now? So I said you shouldn't be doing that. "Well I can't stand the noise," he said, "they're flying too low and all that stuff. "

So I quick run to the United States Attorney's office. He throws up his hands. He doesn't want to prosecute some guy in Federal Court with his pistol shooting at airplanes. And as I recall, the resolution to this thing was he ultimately, as far as I was concerned and as far as the Bureau was concerned, he declined prosecution. But he found some lawyer who knew this man, who agreed to go to him and get his gun from him. And that seemed to satisfy everyone. Very strange.

Pimentel: Strange!

Ash: There was another interesting case while I was in Kansas City which I think has historical significance. Somebody wrote a series of letters for a period of time, which were extortion letters, to the Rock Island Railroad, which at that time went through northern Missouri. And in those letters, he would demand, to my recollection now, something like a hundred thousand dollars, or he was going to bomb the train.

In one of these letters, he demanded that on a certain date, as the Rock Island train number so and so was going through a 200 mile stretch, as I recall, of northern Missouri, somewhere along there, he would light a fire on the side of the railroad, and they were supposed to throw this bag of money off when they see that. This became a big deal.

By that time, Mark Felt, who is widely known in the FBI, was the Special Agent in Charge in Kansas City. At the time that this was going to occur, he decided that we were going to cover every so-called crossing, whether it was big or little, of this big stretch of the railroad with personnel. He enlisted local authorities, railroad people, FBI Agents, anybody he could find. It was a big deal. They were given big assignments where they had big maps on the wall and all this sort of thing.

Ash: My assignment was to go with the ASAC, who at that time was Herb Hoxie, and go with the railroad people, who had a car, an automobile that had train wheels on it. We were going to follow this train. This was a hell of a ride, I tell you, cause that train was going probably 90 miles an hour. We're trying to keep up. Those cars are not made for those railroad tracks and it was a really rough ride.

I made notes.

Pimentel: That's good. You were the first one to do that, by the way.

Ash: Anyway, that all came to nothing. We never saw a fire, nothing happened. It did not stop the letters.

As I probably said before, as I recall, there were a series of seven letters. They were all mailed from some little town in Northern Missouri, and I want to say Liberty, but I'm not sure.

Pimentel: Yeah, that's right.

Ash: We even had a situation where we ran a stakeout on all of the mail depositories in that little town, for a week.

But what's interesting about this is that a Resident Agent in Manhattan, Kansas, came up with the idea that we ought to take these letters to the Menninger Clinic. Now the Menninger Clinic was a psychiatric research kind of clinic, world renowned. Take it to them and have their psychologists take a look at these letters and see if they could come up with some idea as to the type of person who might have written them. Which was done.

I happened to have been one of two Agents who went to the Menninger Clinic at the time they wanted to discuss the results of their analysis. It was fascinating. What they had done at Menninger, is they had taken the copies of these letters and they had given them to, I think probably six individual psychologists, to analyze.

Ash: They had not talked to each other until we got there. They had prepared, individually, what they thought this man was. They were almost unanimous in describing who this person was, from the standpoint of race, education, background, employment, these types of things. I don't think it ever led us anywhere. But, what I'm saying is, as far as I know, that was the first occasion by the FBI at any type of profiling.

Pimentel: Profiling.

Ash: And I don't want to imply that that incident lead to the FBI's later development of profiling, but as far as I know, it was the first attempt.

Pimentel: Right.

Ash: And also as far as I know, by the time I left Kansas City, that case has never been solved. The letters just stopped.

Pimentel: Right.

Ash: Organized Crime in Kansas City was very active. The Don there was a guy by the name of Nick Civella. Nick Civella was one of those who, in, I think it was, I can't remember when it was, but it was probably in the late fifties. He was one of those that was among the group that was at Appalachia, New York.

This solidified the fact that he was a major player in Organized Crime in the United States. It also awakened the Bureau to the fact that these criminal elements were not individual little elements but there was a national linkage of all of them.

The Civella group was also at that time very active in Las Vegas gambling casinos. As a result of the Appalachian affair, the Bureau, as I say, became very interested in this thing. For the first time, the Bureau really became proactive in attacking and trying to make cases against Organized Crime. The emphasis changed almost overnight.

Because there was an active group there in Kansas City, I became the first Kansas City supervisor of the Organized Crime desk. And that was a position I held at the time I was transferred out of there, which was in 1962.

Ash: I was transferred back to FBI Headquarters at that time as a Headquarters Supervisor. My first assignment was on the Selective Service Desk, which happened to be, for reasons unknown to me, in the Fugitive Section of FBI Headquarters. It was very active at that time. Nothing exciting ever happened in there but that's pretty much what I did.

Pimentel: Prosecuting Selective Service Act violations?

Ash: Yeah, there weren't a lot of prosecutions, but there were some. And you handled your own liaison with Selective Service Headquarters, with General Hershey, who was running it at that time. And we were sending all of our reports on Selective Service cases to them, which was highly unusual, but that was an agreement that had been made long before I ever got there. So I just followed suit.

I guess in July of 1964, I was a New Agents Class Counselor for New Agents Class Number 11 of 1964, consisting of 24 Agents, which was very interesting.

And after completing that assignment, I was assigned, that was another interesting thing, these things happened. There was a continual borrowing of Agents from Washington Field and FBI Headquarters without assigning them there. And they were only supposed to be at headquarters for 90 days, but as long as their supervisors could keep them, they kept them, sometimes way past 90 days.

One of these Agents, and usually these are Agents who, for one reason or another, were not eligible for advancement, usually for some personal reason. The one I'm going to talk about, his problem was that he had to be in Washington, D.C. because he had a child who was institutionalized there, and he was not eligible for transfer.

He was a very capable Agent so they kept borrowing him for assignment at headquarters and then they'd have to send him back to Washington Field Office, he was like a ping pong, he was going back and forth.

Ash: Anyway, when I finished being the Class Counselor, I was assigned to the Civil Rights section. Alex Rosen, at that time, was the Assistant Director of the Criminal Division, and Civil Rights was in that division. His Deputy was a man by the name of Malley, Jim Malley. Jim Malley interviewed me when I reported in, and he said, "Do you really want to be in Civil Rights?" I said, "Hell no, I don't." He said, "I know you've got a big background in bank robbery and we need somebody up here in the Bank Robbery section, wouldn't you rather be up there?" And I said, "Oh yeah, I'd rather be up there."

Well I was then told that, too bad Mr. Ash, but your transfer notice said that you were to report to the Civil Rights Section to replace Agent so and so, and I'm not going to give you his name. This was the only way that they were going to get him out of there and back to Washington Field.

So I had Civil Rights, which was an extremely busy pressure ridden problem at the time. I was in a unit there that was handling the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which had just been passed. That was the Public Accommodations Act, which indicated that you can't restrict service for the reason of race, creed, color, or national origin. Since I left there, sex has been added to the list.

But you know, the whole South was involved. The Department of Justice dispatched lawyers to the South and they were running around bringing complaints against service station owners because they didn't have open restrooms and this kind of stuff. Also on my desk were some major Civil Rights cases, one of which was Miburn, which was the Mississippi burning case and Bapbomb, which was the bombing of the Baptist church in Birmingham, where the three little girls were killed.

I was not there at the origin of those cases but they were ones that I picked up at the time. I was ready to get out of there.

Pimentel: I'm sure you were. That was a hot time there.

Ash: So, in due course, in 1967, I was transferred to the Minneapolis Division as the Assistant Special Agent in Charge, where I remained for four years to 1971. The Special Agent in Charge there at that time was Richard Held, whose son ultimately also became a Special Agent and Special Agent in Charge. But I was working for Richard the elder.

There wasn't a lot going on in Minneapolis. There was no Organized Crime to speak of there. Most of the criminal stuff was pretty routine. There were lots of Crime on Indian Reservations.

Pimentel: I imagine.

Ash: Because Minneapolis covers all of Minnesota and all of North and all of South Dakota, the territory is vast, people really don't recognize how big that territory is.

I can remember people calling from headquarters and saying, get somebody to go out to Rapid City and get something. I would say do you know how far it is from here to Rapid City. N. Well, you know, it's your territory. And I would say it's farther from Minneapolis to Rapid City than it is from Washington to Chicago.

Pimentel: Right.

Ash: No, they'd say. Well anyway, the biggest problem we had in Minneapolis, as I recall, was the New Left kind of activity. That was at the height of the anti-Vietnam era. And there are lots of liberal people in Minnesota. And there were lots of flag burnings and demonstrations, burning draft cards.

I can remember somebody, and it had to be the New Left group, planted a bomb at the downtown Post Office. We had break-ins of the Selective Service facilities, this kind of activity.

One interesting thing that I got involved in. Dick Held, because the territory was so vast, spent a lot of time on the road, and one time when he was gone, I was in the dentist office. We had a situation where a guy who used to wander around town, one of the anti-Vietnam people, he used to walk around in an Uncle Sam costume.

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Ash: He demonstratively burned his draft card, and somebody filed a complaint against him. A warrant was issued. And then he disappeared.

Anyway, I was in the dentist office and I get this call from one of the supervisors in Minneapolis. He said, we're starting to get all kind of calls from the press that this person, whose name I've long forgotten, is down at the Unitarian church and the press is wanting to know when we're going to arrest him. So I said, well I'll be right there. So I get rid of the dentist, and I run over there.

These are the kind of quandaries that people don't understand about this, what in the hell do you do now.

Pimentel: Right, right.

Ash: So I gather a bunch of Agents together. I decide that one Agent who was familiar with this guy and New Left activities and I would go down to that church and we'd get him. We'd go in there unarmed.

Prior to that time, they had had a similar situation up in New England somewhere, where they had had an awful confrontation, I think shots were fired which resulted in the FBI being castigated in the press.

And you know the press loves that you're shooting people up in church. I said, we're going to have these other agents out there on the perimeter. If this agent and I don't get out of there in twenty minutes, you come in.

We get down there, the television cameras are everywhere. I'll never forget it. We go to the back end of the church. Cameras were all out in front so we go to the back and bang on the door. And the minister comes out. I said, I'd like to come in. And he says, no. They're waiting for you out front. You go out there and he slammed the door. The TV cameras are rolling.

Ash: So you know, here's another thing, do you want to bash this guy in the teeth and go in or not. So we said, all right, and we go around the front. And in this church there had to be 300 people, singing protest songs. Up on the altar is Uncle Sam with his cohorts there and they're all tied together with rope. So this agent and I start to walk down the aisle. As we start down there, these protestors start a hymn. As we get down there, they start to push and shove.

We finally get down there and announce that he is under arrest. It starts to get to be quite a struggle, and finally, this subject, Uncle Sam, says I don't want any violence. So he gets up and with that they eased out a little bit and so they're still jostling us when we take him out. I told him he's under arrest and as we're going down the aisle, they're still jostling around. As we get to the back door, here comes these back-up Agents with guns drawn.

Pimentel: Laugh.

Ash So anyway, as a personal result of this, my daughter saw this on television, pushing Daddy around and it influenced her. That these kinds of people were nuts, protest people were not for her. Anyway, that has nothing to do with anything except that it was -

Pimentel: It was all safely, and no problems at all, no shots fired.

Ash: No, no. Just lots of bad press.

Pimentel: I'm sure.

Ash: And in due course in 1971, I was transferred back to FBI Headquarters as an Inspector. It's my recollection that Joe Ponder, by that time, was the Assistant Director, and I think Wasson Campbell was his deputy. I ran a number of inspections.

Pimentel: That was a year long assignment, wasn't it?

Ash: Well, you hoped it was, it depended on the vacancies that occurred above you as to how long. Some people prior to me had the experience where they had to go on sick leave and that delayed them. They had to start the rotation over.

Ash: The problem with that inspection assignment was that my wife and family were still in Minneapolis. I came in here under transfer. Your headquarters was transferred to Washington, so you're really divorced from your family for almost the entire period of time, except being able to get back there every once in a while on leave and be with them. But knowing the precedent for rotating off the Inspection assignment, I didn't want to cause any delay. However, on an inspection in Phoenix, I went out on the tennis court on Sunday and I ruptured an Achilles tendon.

I'm there and they fly me home to Minneapolis where I had this thing mended, operated on, and I'm dying to get back. I don't want to go through this delaying kind of thing. But it all worked out. There was no real significance to my inspection duties, they were all pretty routine.

In 1972, I was assigned as the SAC in Buffalo. This was a great assignment. Buffalo was a great office, very active, great talented Agents there, big time Organized Crime matters. I arrived in Buffalo on April 16, 1972. J. Edgar Hoover died on May 2, 1972.

This started a series of events, still playing out in the FBI, as far as I'm concerned. L. Patrick Gray, III was appointed as Acting Director. Gray had a tough time. Most of this tough time he created himself.

One of the things that happened was he had a conference of SAC's and Bureau officials, and at that conference, he asked for observations about creating a Director's Advisory Board, made up of people from outside the FBI. And then he asked each of us to send him their comments about it.

This gave me an opportunity for the first time to organize my thoughts about what the FBI really meant to me and to society and what their mission was and why they had been successful. And I sent a letter to Gray on May 26, 1972. I have a copy of that letter here if you want it. (See Appendix A.)

Pimentel: Oh yeah, that'd be great. I love to get that stuff. Like I indicated when we discussed the interview -

Ash: Yeah, I don't know whether you want me to read it into the interview.

Pimentel: No no, we can read it in later, it'll be a part of the interview anyway.

Ash: As everybody knows, Gray's confirmation was a disaster. He was not confirmed and his name was withdrawn by the President. At that time, all of the FBI officials at FBI Headquarters and all of the SAC's subscribed to a telegram to the President, President Nixon, urging him to appoint a Director from within the FBI. There's a copy of that. (See Appendix B.)

Pimentel: Oh great, great. This was sent to the President back on April 30, 1973, I take it.

Ash: Right.

Pimentel: President Nixon.

Ash: Right.

Pimentel: Okay, I'll make it a part of the interview here.

Ash: It seems to have come to no avail. However, it should be noted that although he didn't appoint somebody from within the FBI, he did appoint Clarence Kelley, who was then the Chief of Police in Kansas City, and Clarence had formerly been an FBI Agent. In fact, had been an SAC when he resigned to take the Kansas City Chief's position.

Kelley immediately set up a series of, I guess you'd call them seminars, and there were probably four or six of these things throughout the country. Every Bureau official and every field official down to the level of ASAC was required to go to one of these.

At those seminars, they had outside people, experts in various fields, talking about management procedures, personnel handling, management systems, and that kind of thing.

Ash: All of which were foreign to FBI administration at that time, which was really insular. I mean it was in and of itself. Paid no attention to whatever was going on in the rest of the world with regard to management. And it was an eye opening thing, and I think was a catalyst, not for immediate change probably, but in the long run for change.

The other thing that Kelley did which I think was significant. During J. Edgar Hoover's time, we were caught up in the statistical business.

Pimentel: Right.

Ash: You were judged in each office on the number convictions you had, the number of fines, savings and recoveries, that sort of thing.

Pimentel: Everybody had to be above average.

Ash: That's correct. And we were.

Pimentel: That's right.

Ash: Kelley didn't totally eliminate the statistical thing, but he changed the whole philosophy and instituted a program which became known as quality over quantity.

Pimentel: Right.

Ash: And that has led to, I think, where the Bureau is today. In pursuing those things that are of major significance and let the routine stuff be handled by other authorities or agencies, or local authorities.

Pimentel: Right.

Ash: With regard to my time as SAC in Buffalo, there were so many things happening all the time that I can hardly remember some of them, but one that I recall. When I first went there, we were living in temporary quarters, you know, sort of an apartment above a hotel, and I got a call in the middle of the night.

Ash: That somebody, who turned out to be Charles Smith, had kidnapped a baby and was holding the baby hostage at knifepoint aboard an aircraft in the Buffalo Airport, demanding passage out of the country. So I tear out to the airport, not knowing what in the world I'm going to do. And, as often happened in those days, and maybe still happens, as soon as I showed up on the scene and identified who I was, the police who had already been on the scene said here, Mr. Ash, the problem is yours, and they disappeared into the woodwork.

And so for the next three or four hours, I'm trying to coax this guy off the airplane. Back in those days, you know there was no security at the airport. He had taken this child, which was his own child, and he got into a big argument with his wife, they were estranged. So he takes the baby and takes off and he's holding the baby at knifepoint. The baby's crying like hell by the time I got out there. But he ran right into that airport down on the tarmac.

This plane was sitting there being readied for a flight later, and he just ran on it. So I'm in there trying to coax him off.

So anyway, to make a long story short, ultimately I convinced him that the plane wasn't going anywhere and he was going to hurt the baby, and he's about to come out the door. At the same time, we had Agents down under the airplane, who crawled in through the wheel well and got up into the pilot's place and came in behind him. So as he's giving himself up, these agents are right down the steps behind him. Lots of good pictures of this incident. Somebody recovered the baby. It was interesting. He ultimately was tried and convicted for some crime aboard an airplane or whatever.

Another memorable case that occurred while I was the SAC at Buffalo involved a kidnapping. One wintry night in January 1973 or 1974, I received a telephone call from the Resident Agent at Jamestown, NY who advised me that a young 14 year old boy, Danny Ebersole, the son of a medical doctor in Lakewood, NY, had been kidnapped. He further advised that the kidnapper had telephoned the doctor and was demanding \$15,000 for his son's release. The kidnapper said he would call later to arrange for the ransom payment and the release of the victim.

Ash: I told the Agent that I and other Agents would proceed immediately and would meet him and the father at his Resident Agency at 8 a.m. I also told him that I was dispatching three sound trained Agents directly to his office and he was to escort them to the victim's resident to maintain a 24 hour surveillance and to record all incoming telephone calls. At that time, "sound training" was the name used to describe training given to Agents to perform wire taps and other technical surveillance techniques.

The Buffalo Office was one of the few offices which, at that time, had a separate surveillance squad. They were located at a remote site, drove nondescript vehicles and were highly trained in surveillance techniques. This squad was used primarily in organized crime cases and was under the direction of the Organized Crime Supervisor, Don Hartnett. Upon receiving the call about the kidnapping, I contacted Hartnett and told him to proceed to Jamestown with the surveillance squad and I would meet him and the squad at the Jamestown Resident Agency.

Those at the meeting the following morning at the Resident Agency were the victim's father, the Jamestown Resident Agent, the Olean Resident Agent, the President of the local bank and the Agents from Buffalo. The Olean resident Agent together with the banker and the victim's father were dispatched to make up the \$15,000 ransom package which the Agent would mark and record for future investigation and testimony if such was necessary.

We then made a discreet survey of the town and surrounding roads and made contact with the local police and the Sheriff's office. It was snowing. The snow was deep and covered all of the exposed areas including the roads. We placed the surveillance Agents at remote locations in radio contact. We set up a headquarters at a local motel and awaited the next call from the kidnapper.

Some 24 hours later, he made the telephone call which was answered by the victim's father. It was recorded. He again demanded \$15,000 and said to place it the following day in a boat that was parked behind one of the car dealerships. He named the dealership but I don't recall what it was. We then went into action to cover the ransom drop and the subsequent pickup by the kidnapper or his associate.

Ash: And, by that time, we had Agents all over and we brought some high powered photographic experts from FBI Headquarters. It just so happened that there was a camper parked beside this boat. So the photographers were in the camper, and at the appointed time, some guy comes along and picks up the package. We took those pictures in the middle of the night someplace and got them developed, and you could tell it was a young person. So, we had the Agents lay low and we waited.

Because we were waiting for the victim to be released after the \$15,000 was paid. But he wasn't, no sign of him, just dead, dead silence.

And so we take the pictures to this school and immediately the people at the school said this is so and so. And then we let them listen to the voice on the tape, and they said that's not this guy, that's Martin Whitmore, they even knew the voice. We immediately, through the legal channels, rounded these guys up. We recovered most of the \$15,000 at Whitmore's residence. Whitmore had paid his accomplice to pick up the package. He thought it involved a drug transaction and he had spent the few dollars Whitmore paid him.

Still didn't know where the victim was. And they wouldn't tell us. This resulted in a massive search, the type that you see on television to locate the victim.

Pimentel: Right.

Ash: Snowmobiles, the Boy Scouts, frog men, the whole bit. One humorous thing happened. By that time we had taken over almost all of the motel, and we had helicopters and snowmobiles in the parking lot of the motel, just massive law enforcement. In the middle of this comes this car with a sign on it, *Just Married*. The man and his bride had made reservations at this motel, you know, they're in there, they're the only civilians at this motel.

Anyway, in due course, I got an anonymous call, I still don't know who called. You ought to look here for this boy, in the woods. We go up there and we found him in deep snow tied to a tree, dead. He had been tied to the tree, beaten about his head with a club and left to die.

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Ash: Martin Whitmore and his accomplice, both under 21 years old, were tried in State Court. Both were convicted but neither was ever tried for murder. Whitmore has been in and out of prison ever since. He never admitted he killed Danny Ebersole until many years later at some sort of unrelated judicial proceeding where he was pleading for a reduction of sentence for one of his many subsequent crimes.

Pimentel: Yeah.

Ash: One of the interesting things to me about that case was the victim's father could not have been more gracious. He went out of his way to thank agents, wrote letters, and it was an amazing thing to me. But that occurred there. That was just one of the things.

But the main thing that I want to bring up in this interview is that in 1974, as I indicated, there had been a number of active arrests by FBI of Mafiosi types in Buffalo. The whole time I was there, they kept making cases.

In 1974, we were able to get an Agent by the name of Richard Genova, who was assigned to the New York Office, to come over and go undercover. And he was introduced into the mob by an informant that the Buffalo Office had developed. He almost immediately, much to my amazement, was able to ingratiate himself with the acting Don of the mob there and became his driver. And as a result, all the other wiseguys accepted him.

Although they'd question him and they would test him, he was wearing a wire of course, on him, and, got tremendous information.

Another interesting thing back in those times of the FBI, we did not have many female Agents. I can remember or recall one occasion when he was invited with the other bad guys to go to the racetrack, and they were all supposed to bring their wives or girlfriends. So this created a little bit of a problem, who was he going to take. And, we ended up sending one of the stenographers.

Pimentel: Yeah, that's what usually was done.

Ash: And when you think about that though, you know, what is that father going to say to you if something happened to his daughter.

Pimentel: Right, right, and liability.

Ash: Oh, but anyway, it all worked out fine. It got to the point where they wanted to make him a made guy, but the test was he had to do a hit. We found no way to really satisfy that.

So shortly after I was transferred out of Buffalo, he surfaced. He was undercover for about nine months. The result of his activity ended up in the conviction of something like 22 people. And solving two or three murders.

There's a couple of things I want to say about that. As far as I know, he was the first long range undercover operation by an FBI Agent in the mob. Donny Brasco and Joe Pistone went a lot longer than he did, but it was after he did. I think the lessons learned from Genova were helpful to the New York Office in Donny Brasco's situation.

The other thing I want to say is that in those days, we were ill-prepared, and I don't know whether the Bureau even is today, to deal with the psychological problems that are created by these guys when they go under cover. They get to the point where they're living with these guys, they're talking their talk, they become one of them, and to revert back is difficult.

In Genova's case, I don't know what happened to him, but the family fell apart. You know, the whole time he was there with us, I think we were only able to get him back to see his wife once in that nine-month period. They may have been having trouble anyway, I don't know that. I don't know, I never followed up on this, but I know he died at a very early age. We were involved in new territory on this. There is a tendency to work the case and not worry about the people so much. There needs to be a lot of psychological help.

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Pimentel: As a matter of fact, I believe, and of course, my information is dated, but before somebody goes undercover now, they go before, almost like a review board, with psychologists, psychiatrists. Then they monitor them constantly during their undercover period.

Ash: That's right, that's right.

Pimentel: And then when they come out, because of the very problems that you raised. One of the more outlandish examples was a man named Pat Livingstone, who played the role so well that he couldn't give it up. And in fact, I don't think till this day he's been able to give it up.

Ash: Oh I think that happens.

Pimentel: And anyway, he was arrested for shoplifting in Kentucky or something like that, and he was fired by the Bureau because he couldn't, even though the Bureau tried to counsel him, he just couldn't forsake the role he had been playing for a couple of years. But anyway, it was very difficult.

Ash: I'm glad to hear that, that was a concern. The other thing that happened with regard to that case, which as I indicated, he didn't come out from undercover until I had been transferred back to the Bureau as an Assistant Director. After that, I was instrumental in getting the Buffalo Organized Crime supervisor, Donald Hartnett, and Dick Genova, back to FBI Headquarters where they made a presentation before the Executive's Conference, consisting of the Director and all the Assistant Directors.

Pimentel: Assistant Directors, right.

Ash: And to talk to them about what they accomplished, but also about their problems. Of course, this was really news to most of these Assistant Directors who had never been involved in that kind of case.

Ash: And I think also was helpful probably again in developing some of the things that have happened since then.

Pimentel: Over the years, they keep improving the vintage I guess.

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Ash: I hope I'm doing what you want.

Pimentel: No, this is exactly what I want.

I'm here with Dick Ash, second part of this interview, on his years in the Bureau, and we left off where you were about to be transferred back to Headquarters around 1974, from Buffalo.

Ash: That's right. But I want to back up a minute. Where when I was an Inspector in 1971.

One rather interesting thing. I came in, back to Headquarters from some inspection somewhere, and I had a message in my mail folder to see Wasson Campbell, who was a Deputy in the Inspection Division at that time. The note indicated that I was to interview all of the Assistant Directors and above, within 24 hours, and get a signed statement from them to the effect that they had no personal official confidential files in their office. The order came directly from Director Hoover.

Pimentel: This was when now?

Ash: 1971.

Pimentel: 1971.

Ash: And reconstructing this since, or at this time probably, this had to do with the Bill Sullivan flap with J. Edgar Hoover. After he left the Bureau, it was found that he had a number of files stored in his own office, which was apparently not known to the hierarchy. My questions when I got this assignment were two. One, what are personal confidential official files? And the answer to that was, they will know. And the other was there is no way for me to do this in 24 hours.

I can't get over to Ident Building at 2nd and D Street to talk to Bucky Walters and get back hardly within 24 hours. But the assignment was interesting, because as I went around, you got different reactions. Now these men knew I was coming, or somebody was coming. And these were all superiors to me.

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Ash: In an effort to speed up the process, I prepared a statement to the effect, "I have no personal confidential official files in my possession," to give to each executive and have them sign and date it.

My first contact was with Bucky Walters, Assistant Director in Charge of the Identification Division. Bucky said he wouldn't sign my prepared statement but he would write his own. His was to the effect that "at 3:15 p.m. on such and such a date, I have none>"

This kind of thing. I ran into this everywhere. Well the other part of this assignment was, if you find any, they have to be moved into Mark Felt's Office. Now Mark Felt at that time had become the Special Assistant to Clyde Tolson. Tolson, the Deputy Director, was really in poor health, and Mark was in there operating for him. Mark Felt's office was tiny. So when I got to John Moore, who at this time was another Deputy to Hoover, Moore said "Yeah I have a file cabinet full of stuff, now here they are over here." I said, "Well you're supposed to move them into Mark Felt's office." His comment was, "Have you seen Felt's office, there's no way they can get in."

Well anyway, these kinds of things happened.

Pimentel: This is when you were on the inspection.

Ash: Yeah, right.

Pimentel: You were an Inspector?

Ash: I was an Inspector. I got to Dwight Dalby, who was an Assistant Director in Charge of the Legal Affairs Office, and he said, "I'm not signing anything." And I said well, that's your option, but you better talk to Mark Felt. So he picked up the phone and called Felt. I couldn't hear the other side of the conversation, but I could hear Dalby say, I'm not going to sign any kind of, what is the idea of sending this man in here, you know, blah, blah, blah. Then there was silence on his side, so finally he grabbed this piece of paper, and signed it.

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Ash: But this all resulted from the Sullivan affair. Sullivan apparently was running on his own and had no authorization for many of the things he was doing and many of his activities were recorded in files that he kept in his own office. Anyway, to get back to where we were.

Pimentel: That's a good story.

Ash: As I said previously, I got transferred back to headquarters as an Assistant Director in 1975.

At that time, Clarence Kelley was the Director of the FBI. I was transferred in for reasons that are a mystery to me to be the Assistant Director in Charge of the Identification Division.

I had absolutely no experience in Identification. It turned out that I really didn't need any because the number of old pros in there had been handling identification matters for 30, sometimes 35 years, most of whom were not Agents. There were probably only five or six Agents assigned to that division at that time, as the Managers, and they all had previous experience, so it really didn't make any difference. There were 3000 employees in the Identification Division at that time, and we were still located in what was known in those days as the Identification Building, which was at 2nd and D Southwest.

Pimentel: Right.

Ash: During the time I was there, we made the move up into the new J. Edgar Hoover Building, which was a big time operation. We had Agents and personnel in Ident planning for that move for a number of years, and made the complete move of all those files in one night.

Pimentel: One night?

Ash: Yeah. So we really didn't have to interrupt the operations all that much.

Ash:

I spent very little time, while I was an Assistant Director, really doing anything with the Identification Division, very little. First thing that happened was that we were in an era where people, including the Congress of the United States, started delving into and making issues with a lot of the activities that the FBI had been involved in in the past. Things that they would have never delved into as long as Hoover was there.

But there were people who had gripes and were trying to make political hay out of surfacing what they described as misdeeds of the FBI. A number of these involved the Cointelpro program, which were operations that the FBI operated against the Communists and New Left organizations. Also, since they opened this thing up in the Church and Pike Congressional committees, all sorts of people came forward and complained about various and sundry things which had to do with J. Edgar Hoover. The committees did their thing up there and finally either ran out of money or ran out of steam, and then dumped a lot of the complaints that they had not acted on back to the Department of Justice.

Many of those had to do with so-called personal misdeeds of FBI officials, such as people doing personal favors for them, and this sort of thing. Some of these complaints were referred by the Department over to Kelley, the Director, for his pursuit, and they of course were referred to the Inspection Division. The Inspection Division did whatever they did, and sent a report back to the Attorney General. This was not received kindly at the Justice Department.

And one of their major complaints was that in the hierarchy of the FBI, the report that was prepared by the Inspection Division was cleared through the Deputy Director who was at that time Nick Callahan. Some of the complaints involved Nick Callahan, so the Attorney General could not quite understand this procedure, and raised all kind of hell.

I had no real knowledge of any of this, but I got a call from Kelley to meet him in his office one afternoon. When I was there, the Deputy Attorney General, Harold Tyler, was there.

Ash:

I think the Assistant Attorney General in the Criminal Division, who was Rudy Giuliani, was there, who later became famous as the Mayor of New York at the time of 9/11; and an attorney by the name of John Dowd was there. Dowd had made his name in the Department as an aggressive pursuer of the mafia. Anyway, I'm there, not knowing why I'm there in the conference, and they're telling Kelley that they're not happy with the way he had handled this thing before and that the Attorney General decided to give him one more chance to really pursue these matters.

And for the first time, I found out why I was there. Mr. Kelley said, well Mr. Ash will make a task force and he will pursue these matters. I didn't even know what the matters were. Anyway that's byplay. As a result of that, I got Kelley's permission to pick the people I wanted to be on this thing. I had maybe fifteen people that I assembled. I brought two SAC's in from the field because I wanted to get the field involved. I didn't want it to be a Headquarters versus the field affair.

For nearly a year, we pursued these allegations. They started out with the allegation that the FBI was buying recording equipment from a firm known as the U. S. Recording Company, and this investigation became known as U. S. Recording. U. S. Recording was a technical supply place that John Moore had made the contact to buy electronic and radio equipment as a cutout to protect the FBI as the source. And there were all kinds of allegations about bribery and violation of Federal Rules and Regulations with regard to requisition, et cetera.

But this thing blossomed into the misuse of whatever they called the recreation fund in the FBI, which was supposed to go to the Agents, that they had alleged were being used for National Academy affairs and this sort of thing. And it got involved in Colt, giving guns to certain Agents at the Firearms Range, you know, this kind of allegation.

But they also included all kind of alleged Hoover misdeeds, about Agents allegedly building a portico on his house on Bureau time, and decorating his home, and providing automatic windows, et cetera.

Ash: What amazed me, and still does, a number of these inquiries had to be with the Laboratory personnel who provided these kind of services. A number of these Agents had already retired from the Bureau, and we were running all over the country interviewing them. The Agent being interviewed would say, "Wait a minute." And, he would go over to his files, pull out a log about all these things they had done, because it was eating at them that they were being used that way.

Anyway, it was a big fat mess. I got myself crossways in this thing because one of the things that surfaced was that at Christmas time, Agents or officials of the FBI had given a Christmas present to Kelley, which may have involved each Assistant Director contributing \$10, for a Christmas present and he'd given all of them a Christmas present in return. This was the same thing that happened with Hoover. Hoover used to give out Christmas neckties.

Anyway, somebody in the Department kept leaking this stuff to the press. And the Kelley situation got to the point, you know, how can they investigate themselves, kind of thing. I can remember some reporter calling me on the phone. Well you're doing this job now, you're also an Assistant Director, did you contribute to this gift, and I said hell yes. Well, headlines in the paper, and anyway, it was a trying time for me. Because the Department set up a Grand Jury, and some of these Agents and FBI officials were going before the Grand Jury. People, depending on which side you were on, you know, you were upset about all this or couldn't understand it.

This investigation kept growing. There was lots of publicity and leaks to the press which generated more complaints from people with gripes about the FBI. The Department continued to refer these petty complaints to me for further investigation. It seemed never ending. So, I started to look for some way to get this matter concluded.

Then a memorandum came over during the course of this thing from the Department saying that we should not restrict this to just these people, but you should look into this on a larger scale.

Ash: So I started interviewing, or having interviewed, the FBI Agents on the Attorney General's security detail, and we were interviewing all these people and asking about what they had done for the Attorney General. It turned out he had been buying them cufflinks for Christmas and this sort of thing, and then we found out that the FBI had put locks and security devices on the Attorney General's apartment. The FBI paid for them, the FBI Laboratory put them in, and he finds out about this, the Attorney General does, during the course of inquiry. The Attorney General reimburses the FBI for the lock installation.

Pimentel: Which Attorney General is this?

Ash: Edward H. Levi.

Pimentel: Oh yeah, Levi.

Ash: And I accompanied Clarence Kelley, the Director, to a conference of the International Association of Chiefs of Police at Miami where I was to make a speech about fingerprint identification matters. One of his aides was a man by the name of Bill Reed, who was not an Agent, and Reed was there. After the evening functions, we went up to Kelley's suite in the hotel, and a telephone call comes in there. Reed takes the call. It was the Attorney General. I could hear him say, Yes General, yes General, yes General, yes General. Finally Reed gives the phone to Kelley. Kelley, when he was on the phone, he was making notes. Kelley was always really great with people like that. He would placate them, and talk to them. I retrieved his notes and the sum and substance of this thing was that he said there was a rogue elephant that was out of control. He said, "I know they interpreted this memorandum that way but that's not the way we meant it."

I was trying to figure some way to stop this investigation. Shortly after the Miami telephone call to Kelley from the Attorney General, they finally just started to call it off. The result of all that investigation was they asked one FBI official for his resignation and one other poor Agent in the Administrative Division who appropriated for himself, you know, these lifts for cars, if you run the car up onto.

Pimentel: Yeah, yeah.

Ash: And you can work on them, change the oil, whatever. The Bureau had bought one set of those and he had taken those. And he had copped out to this. Anyway, he was prosecuted and dismissed, which was a sad, sad thing.

: Anyway, during that period of time, other than the fact that Kelley would also have me running off making speeches about the Identification Division, I didn't really have much to do with running it. My Deputy was Frank Still at that time, who knew all facets of it, and really ran it. Then, the next thing that happened, I no sooner get done with that, and . . .

Pimentel: So you spent a year on all those little . . .

Ash: Yeah, it was nine months to a year on that particular operation. It was intense.

Pimentel: Yeah, I'm sure, checking out every misdeed, or alleged misdeed.

Ash: Yeah, right, I get back into Ident. The Attorney General changed, I don't know whether the administration changed or whatever happened, but the new Attorney General was Griffin Bell, and he came in with President Jimmie Carter. I think this happens to every Attorney General, they don't really know what they're getting into. You know they wake up some morning and they say, oh I thought the FBI was the only investigative agency I have and I find out I've got Narcotics, Bureau of Narcotics. Oh anyway, he gets surprised, well why do I have two.

So, the Attorney General wanted to know if he should put the FBI and the DEA together, and the Attorney General says he wants that resolved in 90 days. And so what happens, I get another call from Kelley and he says I want you to assemble a group of good Agents and look into this. Now that was really interesting. So I accumulated again a bunch of Agents and we went over to DEA headquarters.

Pimentel: Was the DEA known as DEA by then, or. .

Ash: Yes, it was DEA, Drug Enforcement Agency. So we took over some space in their place and we started looking at the problem, up and down. We traveled overseas. I went to Europe, we had Agents going to South America, we had Agents going to the Far East, and seeing their operations on the ground. We found that the culture at that time, between the two agencies, more importantly the requirements, the entrance requirements for their agency and ours were entirely different. The pay scale was entirely different. We were extremely critical of the fact that they were looking at these things as individual cases, rather than looking at them as an organization, sort of organized crime situation. And that they had very few wiretaps running, which would have been something the FBI would have done right off.

Anyway, we write a big report and send it over to Griffin Bell, and both Bell and Kelley were extremely disappointed that we recommended that they not be brought together.

Then of course, I was required to retire in 1975. At the time the legislation went into effect that you couldn't work past age 55, which now has been changed to 57, so I was forced out in December of 1977.

And that's pretty much it, unless you've got something else.

Pimentel: Other than the DEA report that you worked on. Ninety days, that was pretty quick to put together and do your investigation. And put together your recommendations.

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Ash: In fact, when we went over to discuss it with the Attorney General at the time we submitted the report, he obviously was very surprised that we did it in 90 days.

Pimentel: Yeah. Did you get involved in the Cointelpro quite a bit? How about the Sispits. That may have been after you left. That was a group in Texas, Salvadorians.

Ash: I don't know.

Pimentel: You came in in '48 and you were only out for about nine months.

Ash: Yeah.

Pimentel: And then you came back in.

Ash: Right. As a matter of fact, in all the bios that I submit, I don't even talk about being out.

Pimentel: Yeah, you were out for such a short time.

Ash: But it did accomplish what I wanted to do, it got me back on the East Coast.

Pimentel: Sure.

Ash: And I also then went all over everywhere.

Pimentel: Yeah. It seems in those days it was easier to get back in because you're not the first individual that I've spoken to that resigned for similar type reasons. Either a parent was ill, and Mr. Hoover would not, or the SAC would not acquiesce to having them move back East, or vice versa. I guess in that case this other individual also resigned and then re-upped, I guess, a few months later, in the East Coast, a similar type situation.

Ash: Yeah. Well, I don't quite understand the other situation because there were lots of people that I knew who would pay their own way back on the basis of some real or alleged personal problem, and Hoover usually acceded to those.

Pimentel: Yeah, right, he normally did.

Ash: If you approached him right, he was a very compassionate man. I think a lot of the problems that people see today with regard to Hoover weren't Hoover, it was the people under him who were guessing what he really wanted to do.

Pimentel: Right, right.

Ash: And it became a problem.

But the Sullivan affair, interesting. When I was doing this so-called U. S. Recording thing that Kelley had got me involved in, we sent two Agents up there to interview Sullivan. He was living in, I think it was New Hampshire.

Pimentel: He was no longer in the Bureau?

Ash: No, and as I recall, we didn't really get very much out of him. Those two Agents, I still see today, they talk about that interview because apparently the place he was in, living in, was rustic and they were up there in the winter time and the place was cold and if they moved away from the fire, they couldn't stop shivering. One Agent accused the other one of continuing this interview longer than needed. But they interviewed Sullivan and he was willing to talk, made his complaints, but they were not substantive to what we were doing.

Pimentel: Well, what do you think the gist of that was, that it was just a personality conflict between he and the powers that be.

Ash: My guess is, and I may be influenced by things that I've read since, that he really wanted to become the Director of the FBI.

Pimentel: Yeah.

Ash: And he was in close contact with a man named Houston who worked in the White House and was President Nixon's coordinator of intelligence activities directed toward the New Left, Anti-Vietnam protesters, and others who were attempting to disrupt the orderly processes of government.

Ash: Houston had proposed an aggressive plan which included a wide use of wiretaps and surreptitious entries to better neutralize their activities. Director Hoover was resisting these plans because they had little or no legal sanctions. Even though Hoover objected to the Houston plan, Bill Sullivan endorsed many of Houston's ideas and on his own, without Director Hoover's authorization or knowledge, began implementing some of these strategies.

When one looks at the whole wiretapping issue and its uses in a historical perspective, it is interesting. Also, through the years, until most recently, the FBI's involvement in intelligence and espionage investigation seems to have had very little statutory authority.

Because they wanted to do things that Hoover disapproved of, you know the whole wiretapping issue, when on look at the history of this thing, it is interesting. The fact that the FBI's involvement in security or espionage matters had very little statutory authority.

Pimentel: Right.

Ash: And you may know a lot more about that than I do, but we got involved originally as you've been interviewing these Agents under SIS. You know, President Roosevelt asked Hoover to do that, and that resulted in a lot of the authority that the Bureau in subsequent years had to rely on as their authority for doing any of these intelligence investigations.

Pimentel: Right. Exactly.

Ash: The Bureau's policy vacillated with regard to putting those wires in, but I can remember putting these things in with what I thought was very little authority.

Pimentel: Or probable cause.

Ash: Yeah, or concern. I mean, no, you had the probable cause.

Pimentel: Oh okay.

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Ash: But, but you wouldn't have had to show the probable cause to anybody except some FBI official.

Pimentel: Okay.

Ash: You know, I can remember, we were looking for a top ten fugitive in Kansas, and there was an informant who kept telling us that he was in touch with him and that he would meet with him. The Bureau kept writing back and saying "informant is up a tree." So Mark Felt, who was the SAC at that time, sent me and a couple of sound-trained Agents out to that town to verify what this agent is saying. We walked into that town, rented a room in a motel, walked into the telephone company, said this is what we want to do.

Pimentel: Yeah.

Ash: And the telephone company said okay, it's going to cost you so much for a week's line and we'll run it for you. No questions asked. Now those days are long gone.

But in that case we were able to verify these calls. And that's another one of those cases where we never caught him but he was found upside down in a well, the guy we were looking for.

Pimentel: Oh okay, yeah. I want to thank you very much. I think you've covered your career there and your, how many, 30 years career, a little more than 30 years.

Ash: Twenty-nine. Well it's been interesting to me because it reminds me of these things, some of which I try and forget.

Pimentel: And that's it. It's now 1:04 in the afternoon of March 30th, and thank you very kindly Dick Ash.

END OF MARCH 30TH INTERVIEW

**Interview with Former Special Agent of the FBI
Richard H. Ash (1948 – 1977)
Interviewed by Stanley Al Pimentel
On July 15, 2004**

A follow up to an interview with Mr. Ash on March 30, 2004

*Edited for repetitions, spelling, etc. by Sandra Robinette on December 5, 2004
Final Edit for Mr. Ash's corrections on April 10, 2005.*

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Pimentel: Once again this is Stanley Pimentel with the Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI Oral History Program, having an interview with Richard H. Ash, also known as Dick Ash, at his residence. This interview is a follow-up to the interview that I originally conducted on March 30th of 2004. Today is July 15, 2004. Dick, could you say a few words and to see if I can pick it up.

Ash: Yeah, I'm glad to see you again and hope everything's going okay with you, hope the Oral History Program's going fine, and hope everything is recording satisfactorily.

Pimentel: Going over the last interview, which was very interesting, Dick, by the way, and very informative, there are a couple of questions that came up. I think, even going back before the Bureau, I think it would be worthwhile if you would tell us a little bit about how long you were in the Army and what infantry unit, if you wish to discuss that.

Ash: Oh sure, I don't mind at all. I went into the Army in 1943 under what was known as the ASTP Program, Army Specialized Training Program, which was a program the Army set up to take college students, put them in the Army, give them basic training, and then let them continue their education, with the idea that ultimately you would end up going to Officers Training School. In that program, I took my basic down in Texas, and then was sent to the University of Tennessee. I had completed two years of Engineering courses at Bucknell University before I entered the Army and so I continued the education there at Tennessee.

In the winter of 1943, while at Tennessee, the casualties in the European theatre were so great the Army needed replacements. Anyway, at that time at Tennessee, they discontinued the ASTP Program. I was sent from there to Camp Atterbury in Indiana to join as a replacement in the 106th Division of the U. S. Infantry Division. I was assigned to Company B of the 424th Infantry Regiment and continued training there with them until about October of '44 when we, the whole division went overseas.

Ultimately, we were dispatched into Europe and were put in the line just shortly before what has become known as the Battle of the Bulge. And the 106th Division was completely overrun. Two of the regiments, as a matter of fact, were forced to surrender intact and became prisoners of war.

My regiment was not one of those and the 424th became pretty much decimated and it was a really chaotic situation. Anyway, I don't want to get too much into war stories.

But I ended up having frozen feet and was evacuated from Europe, back over to the United States.

Pimentel: Oh okay. That's all, I just wanted to clarify that little point there. You had also indicated in San Francisco, Bill Simon was the SAC, I believe, or your supervisor?

Ash: He was my supervisor.

Pimentel: And you say he was notorious, and I was just curious.

Ash: Well, he became notorious because he then went up through the ranks of the FBI and ultimately became the Special Agent in Charge at San Francisco. But after his retirement, he became a member of a law firm. I'm not sure that it wasn't his own law firm, but they were early on involved in purchasing, I think, cable kind of franchises, and he became a very wealthy man.

Pimentel: I thought maybe there was some story aspect.

Ash: No, I can't remember any.

Pimentel: Okay.

Ash: He was notorious in my mind,

Pimentel: Okay. You also mentioned a little bit about the formation or the establishment of the FD-302, about the Report of Interview and the destruction of notes, and all of that.

Ash: Yeah.

Pimentel: I think you covered that very well.

Ash: I don't know whether I talked about it, but shortly after that, I was a witness at a trial where a big deal was made by the defense attorney of my destruction of the notes. And relying on the 302.

Pimentel: Oh, okay.

Ash: It got him nowhere, but it got a lot of press.

Pimentel: Yeah, and of course, later on, the destruction of notes, we were told to put the notes in a 1-A, as.

Ash: Right. Exactly.

Pimentel: As a backup to the.

Ash: Because of all that.

Pimentel: Right, because of all of that I'm sure, yeah. One of the big things, I guess, is that you had mentioned the Cointelpro program. I think, not too many people, well it has been written up and all of that. If you don't mind, I'd like to have your take on the Cointelpro program, what you knew of it.

Ash: Well unfortunately, I don't know a lot about it. I was never in a position, I think this is true, where I actively was participating or was an administrator in an office where there was a considerable Cointelpro program. I was aware of it, of course.

But what has always interested me about it is that, you know, way before there was a Cointelpro program, the FBI, through it's investigative techniques, was using similar kind of activities. I can remember as far back as in probably about 1950, being in the Seattle office, where they were active in proactive kind of activities against the Communist Party. I was not a part of that, but I was aware of it.

They would publish publications that would seem like they were coming from the Party and they were being written by FBI Agents, that were totally disruptive kind of things. So I think that there was a genesis for these kind of programs. It became the Cointelpro program, which became institutionalized and then resulted in a lot of scathing attacks on the bureau.

Pimentel: Sure.

Ash: But I was never in a position where I was personally involved.

Pimentel: Okay, and how about the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement or the Civil Rights investigations, were you familiar or became involved in those, or not as much as some of the other Agents.

Ash: Well, the early activities of the FBI in the civil rights business were as a result of extending what were known as the Civil Rights law, I mean the Civil War laws, to do whatever they could do, in the early civil rights problems with the Klan in the South.

But in 1964, they passed the Public Accommodations law, which stated that you could not deny service to people because of race, color, creed, or national origin, and later they added sex to that. About that time when that law was passed, I was assigned to the Civil Rights Unit at Headquarters. Because of that, I was knowledgeable about the activity in the South with regard to public accommodations. Most of those activities that I was familiar with did not have to do with the Klan. However, at one point in time, I was the supervisor at Headquarters of Bapbomb, which was the bombing of the church where the three girls were killed in a Sunday School. But this was later in that investigation.

Pimentel: Oh okay.

Ash: And I also had MIBurn, which was on my desk. This also was after the fact. MIBurn being the killing of the civil rights workers.

Pimentel: The civil rights workers.

Ash: Yeah, in Philadelphia.

Pimentel: Yeah.

Ash: Philadelphia, Mississippi.

Pimentel: Mississippi, yeah.

Ash: But I, as an investigator, I never really was involved.

Pimentel: Yeah okay, okay. We discussed the Cointelpro program.

Some of the complaints about the Department of Justice, dumped many other complaints of the FBI or about, to Mr. Kelley and then Mr. Kelley called you in. You and the Inspection staff had to resolve.

Ash: It was not the Inspection staff.

Pimentel: Oh no, okay.

Ash: In fact, I had that, I use the word dumped on me because the Inspection staff submitted a report over Callahan's signature, Callahan being at that time the Associate Director of the FBI, which sort of whitewashed some of these things. Decidedly, this caused all kinds of problems at the Department of Justice. They came over and I think had threatened that they were going to send their own inspection staff in there to do the job. And I think Kelley persuaded them that he would take it out of the Inspection Division and give it to an independent group and I got elected.

Pimentel: And the DEA, looking into the possible merger of DEA and FBI, that was interesting. I was reviewing that last night about the 90 days, how you were able, you and your staff were able to come up with recommendations on that in such a short time.

Ash: Oh yeah. I'm sure that I made this comment. Our findings were not popular with either the Attorney General or the Director of the FBI. They both sorta thought that the FBI should replace DEA and take over their investigative responsibilities.

Pimentel: Yeah.

Ash: But, and those controversies are existing even today.

Pimentel: Oh even till this day, and I know that out in the field, and I think about that time, I don't know, that was '77 or somewhere in there.

Ash: Yeah, that's about right.

Pimentel: I was in Mexico and I know that was a big topic of discussion among the Agents, and we were all of the opinion, no we don't want them to merge, please tell us.

Ash: Yeah, right. Well the cultures at the time were so different that it was extremely difficult to meld these two together without eliminating one.

Pimentel: Of course not, yeah, of course not. Oh, you were also in the Bureau at the time that, and I know that there's other individuals that are more familiar with the Church and Pike committee results. But in your mind, if you could, you went through that era, and I was wondering if you might discuss what, how that impacted on you at the time, you were back here at Headquarters at that time.

Ash: Well the Pike, well both of those committees, they sort of separated. The results were sort of separated between the so-called security aspects and the other things.

Pimentel: Yeah, the criminal act.

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Ash: And the Cointelpro complaints were the security aspect. But there were a whole bunch of miscellaneous accusations which came out, most of which had to do with complaints about J. Edgar Hoover. Most of these were miscellaneous kind of things that came up.

And, as an example, the U. S. Recording thing was alleged to be a bribery complaint where John Moore, who was then an Assistant to the Director, was supposedly getting paid off to give this fellow contracts, non-biddable contracts, to the U. S. Recording Company to give sound equipment to the FBI. This was not true. These kinds of complaints were all bundled together. That's what I was asked to look into when they formed this special group to look at the U. S. Recording. All of that material came out of those committees.

Pimentel: Yeah.

Ash: The committees, when they finally went out of business, dumped these miscellaneous complaints back into the Department and told them to do something about them, and that's how it resulted in this unending investigation. Wild.

Pimentel: Oh okay.

Ash: Wild. But the effects of those activities of those people in these committees are being felt in both the CIA and the FBI today.

Pimentel: Of course.

Ash: And these recent findings of this stellar commission are coming out now criticizing the FBI for not being more aggressive in gathering domestic intelligence. Whatever failings they find there, a lot of them can be directly attributed to those two committees and the resulting guidelines the Attorney Generals put on the FBI and the CIA after that time, which severely limited their actions.

Pimentel: Yeah, right, right. That's amazing. That's what, 30 years later that, more than 30 years later, is being impacted. I know the SIS of course was before your time. But do you know of anything of it?

Ash: No, in fact, no, when I think back on that, when I went through training school in 1948, one of the major instructors there taught us about the manual of rules and regulations and the manual of instructions. I don't even know where those manuals still exist.

Pimentel: Yeah, the MIOG and the MAOP.

Ash: But he, and I can't remember his name, but he had just returned from duty as an SIS Agent in South America. He didn't talk about it. I don't remember anybody talking about it. In other words, you know, that was before and during World War II.

Pimentel: Right.

Ash: And this is now after World War II, everybody wanted to get on with it, you know.

Pimentel: I think a lot of it was so hush-hush too. For so many years.

Ash: Exactly right.

Pimentel: That nothing's ever really been written about it, and that's what we're trying to do is to come up with more of those things. Did you want to add anything else?

Ash: No, I don't even know what I said. I might want to retract some things.

Pimentel: No, I don't think so. You kind of went down your history which was very good. I just caught a couple of things that I wanted to clarify. Your task force that Kelley asked you to form up to pursue all those miscellaneous complaints and stuff, but if you don't have anything else to add?

Ash: I don't think I do Stan.

Pimentel: Okay, okay.

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Ash: I wish I did, but I don't.

Pimentel: Okay. Well I appreciate your time, and it's now 11:06.

Ash: Good, thank you.

Pimentel: Okay, thank you.