



# Fact and Fiction

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(Below) Director Clarence M. Kelley (Original Bureau application photo).

## The FBI Badge Part I

Last year, Director Sessions approved a new policy which will affect every Special Agent who remains in service until retirement. As of June 30, 1989 all retirement plaques will have both credentials and badge mounted on them. Previously, badges were reissued to new Agents going through Quantico. Now, when Agents retire, a bit of FBI history will leave with them. Our current badges, the fourth design since 1908, date back to June 1935 when the first thousand were purchased. The second thousand were purchased in early 1940. Since then our inventory has grown and today we have over 10,500.

Since 1935 FBI badges have been made by several different companies but to the same basic specifications. The badges are 14 karat gold-filled (front only) in 14-gauge stock, meaning there is very little of that precious metal in them. Underneath a thin layer of gold plating is, for most of them, a base metal of copper alloy. During World War II, copper, like Lucky Strike Green (Cigarettes), went to war. The use of copper was restricted to essential war materials and FBI badges were not in that category. The supply problem was compounded by an increase in Agent complement from 898 in 1940 to 4,370 in 1945. It was decided that a sterling silver base would be used and a large number of these were purchased. Most all

are still in service. Once during the war we tried to get an exemption from the Copper Section of the War Production Board but were turned down. After years of wear many of these wartime badges are showing their silver lining. Quite a few have been replated but can still be identified by the word "sterling" stamped on back. In 1935 the badges cost about \$3 apiece, the file isn't clear on this. Today the price varies. If we supply the manufacturer with the gold, under the Department of Defense precious metals recovery program, the price is \$57. If not, the price is \$77.

The policy on badge presentations has changed throughout the years. In July 1937, a memo was sent to Director Hoover recommending that badges be presented upon an Agent's retirement, or to his widow if he were killed in the line of duty. Mr. Hoover wanted to maintain strict accountability over badges and advised that a slain Agent could be buried with his badge, otherwise none would leave the Bureau. He softened his policy as time went on, allowing widows, retiring Agents with 35 years' service, and retiring Assistant Directors or higher, to keep them. In January 1959, he rescinded presentation to Agents with 35 years of service. Badges have also been presented to a number of "Honorary Special Agents" over the years including several U.S. Presidents.

In the early days the badge was not intended for everyday use. One Director's airtel to all SACs in late 1934

cautioned "employees engaged in investigative work against the promiscuous use of the badge" and that "the Commission Card supplied a Special Agent should be used in ordinary interviews and the badge used and displayed only in cases of emergency or of the utmost necessity." This was in sharp contrast to a 1971 suggestion by an Agent that badges be eliminated because the public usually demands more positive proof of our identity.

So what about this little piece of metal that many Agents will walk away with after 20-plus years? Most of the badges through number 8,000 have been carried previously by one or more Agents. They, for the most part, spent their years in anonymous, loyal service to

their country. Others have personal histories that would be of interest to Agents with those badges now. But first:

### The Directors

J. Edgar Hoover was issued badge number 1. It is now locked in a safe at FBIHQ. His Associate Director, Clyde Tolson, had number 4, which was presented to him upon retirement. L. Patrick Gray, III and Clarence M. Kelley both carried number 2 and it was presented to Mr. Kelley when he left. William D. Ruckelshaus only served briefly and there is no record that he received a badge. William H. Webster had number 3 and it was presented to him when he left to head the C.I.A. Director Sessions has a newly made badge with number 1 and his name on the back.

### The Story of Clarence Kelley's Badge

Prior to serving as Director from 1973 to 1978, Clarence M. Kelley had completed a 21-year career as a Special Agent and retired. He first entered on duty October 7, 1940 and had several assignments in the field, as well as a stint at Quantico as a firearms instructor. During those years he carried badge number 1160, now assigned to SA Georgia Lynch, Los Angeles Office. In July 1944 Mr. Kelley took military leave to join the U.S. Navy. Upon his return to the Bureau in April 1946 he was issued badge number 2536. Mr. Kelley went on to numerous assignments and retired on October 24, 1961 while SAC in Memphis. At that time he turned in



number 2536, now carried by SA Bennett F. Cale, Charlotte Office. From his retirement until being appointed Director by President Nixon, Mr. Kelley was Chief of Police in Kansas City, Missouri. Upon becoming Director he carried badge Number 2.

Next month we continue our history of Agents and their badges.

