

Corruption was rampant
in the Bureau of
Investigation in 1924
when its 29-year-old
assistant director was
summoned to a fateful
interview with
the Attorney General

a slothful, inefficient, corrupt organization—a mockery of all that the administration of American justice should stand for. I would want no part of it.

"What are your conditions?" he asked.

I thought I could detect a fleeting quizzical look on Mr. Stone's face. But he listened, his keen analytical mind attuned to every word.

The words came tumbling out of me like ocean waves: "The Bureau *must* be divorced from politics. It must no longer be a catchall for political hacks. We must base every appointment on merit. We should make promotions on proved ability only, and the Bureau should be responsible to no one but the Attorney General."

I hadn't intended to make a speech, but I guess it came out that way.

With No Strings Attached

Stone scowled again, but only momentarily. Then a flash of his underlying warmth appeared as he said: "I wouldn't give it to you under any other conditions. That's all for now. Good day."

As I returned to my office, I walked with a buoyancy born of knowing that the Attorney General had confidence in me—a confidence which I must continue to merit. I resolved then and there to dedicate my full energies to making the FBI an organization which was efficient at all times, where employment was based strictly on merit, and where political string-pulling could not exist. I knew that only in this way would the FBI win and hold the respect of the people.

The moment lives with me still. I feel today, as on May 10, 1924, the challenge to be a servant of my fellow man and my God. For behind that challenge lies a basic truth of the universe: good will triumph over evil; fidelity, bravery, and integrity will make men great.



Attorney General Stone looked at me intently from behind his desk, his eyes penetrating my innermost being. I had seen this remarkable man before, but this meeting was different.