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Eagleton Says George Hampered Senate Probe

CIA Aide Accused of Lying on Iran-Contra

By George Lardner Jr.
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In a confrontation with defense lawyers that had the jurors hanging on every word, former senator Thomas Eagleton (D-Mo.) accused former CIA spy chief Clair E. George yesterday of seriously hampering investigation of the Iran-contra affair by deliberately lying to him and other senators in the early days of the scandal.

Testifying at George's trial in U.S. District Court here, Eagleton charged that George intentionally deceived him and other members of the Senate intelligence committee at a hurriedly called set of hearings in December 1986, shortly after the scandal broke.

Under prosecution questioning, Eagleton declared that it was crucial for the committee to find out the role played by retired Air Force Maj. Gen. Richard V. Secord, who turned out to be a key middleman in both phases of the scandal: the sales of U.S. arms to Iran, and the diversion of profits from those sales to help resupply the contra rebels in Nicaragua.

George, who was then the CIA's deputy director for operations, was introduced to Secord at a Jan. 20, 1986, White House meeting called to discuss U.S. arms sales to Iran, being attempted to free U.S. hostages in Lebanon. Secord said in testimony earlier this week that he was introduced as a "third party" who would handle the sales.

When asked about Secord at the Senate hearing 11 months later, George said he had "never laid eyes on" him and could not tell the committee what role Secord played in the arms-for-hostages deals with Iran.

"No other single piece of information would have been more im-

portant to the committee than to know what Richard Secord was doing at the time," Eagleton said under questioning by prosecutor Craig Gillen. Eagleton said Secord was "the key link" who could bring together the covert arms sales and the administration's secret resupply network for the contras, which Secord also organized.

Accused of perjury for his statements to the Senate intelligence committee, George has contended that they were honest mistakes that he eventually cleared up in an April 1987 Senate deposition, acknowledging he had seen Secord in the White House Situation Room.

Under cross-examination that at times turned into a shouting match, Eagleton scoffed at the notion that George had simply forgotten meeting Secord, a man that George knew by reputation and held in low regard. When Secord turned up in the Situation Room, Eagleton asserted, George was seeing "a man he distrusted . . . a scum. He knew what kind of a person he was."

Defense lawyer Richard A. Hibey tore into Eagleton in angry tones, pointing out that former CIA general counsel Stanley Sporkin, now a federal judge, testified before George did at the Dec. 3 Senate hearing and told the committee that Secord had, in fact, been at the White House meeting.

"To be honest with you, I don't remember Judge Sporkin's answer," Eagleton replied, saying that he may have stepped out of the hearing room or gone to another hearing when Sporkin testified. Had he remembered what Sporkin said when George appeared, Eagleton said: "I would have said, 'Wait a

minute, Mr. George, your lawyer said Secord was there.'"

Hibey hammered away at Eagleton's inability to remember what Sporkin said. He suggested that Eagleton, in particular, had no right to brand George's testimony a lie instead of an honest mistake.

"You want to accuse me of perjury, go ahead," Eagleton said.

"No," Hibey replied, "I want to accuse you of a mistake."

Reading from other portions of George's Dec. 3 testimony, Hibey pointed out that George testified about being told "after the fact" that Secord was involved in the financial end of the Iranian arms deals.

Eagleton, a St. Louis lawyer who retired from the Senate at the end of 1986 after three terms, said George could have read as much in the New York Times. He said the reason George denied having met

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Secord was to avoid further questioning about him by the committee.

"I didn't put a noose around Clair George," Eagleton said. "Clair George put a noose around himself."

According to a transcript of the 1986 Senate hearing, George told the committee that he "didn't memorize all the days, the numbers, the players" involved in the scandal, but promised to provide the senators with every relevant Iran-contra document the CIA could find, even if it meant going through the trash.

On redirect examination, prosecutor Gillen pointed out that the committee never got a copy found in George's safe of a detailed January 1986 plan for the Iranian arms sales, drawn up by White House aide Oliver L. North and full of references to Secord under Secord's alias, "Copp."

George, the prosecutor added, told another Senate committee on Oct. 10, 1986, before the scandal broke, that he had had no contacts with Secord and did not know him.

"Obviously he locked himself in by his October testimony," Eagleton said. He said George "had to tell

the same lie" when he testified in December.

Retired CIA colleagues and supporters of George who turn up in the courtroom each day seemed quieter than usual, Gillen told the judge Thursday that a number of them had been "making disparaging and derogatory remarks" about the prosecution that the jurors might hear.

According to the transcript of a Thursday bench conference, Gillen asked Judge Royce C. Lamberth to tell the audience, outside the presence of the jury, "to refrain from making remarks of that nature," but Hibey said he would take care of it.

Earlier yesterday, a broad-shouldered CIA official whose name was kept secret but who headed the Iran operations branch under George, was questioned about a May 9, 1986, meeting that he, George and other officials attended in George's office.

According to notes that the branch chief made after the session, Secord was explicitly mentioned in connection with an upcoming trip to Tehran. In addition, the branch chief reportedly told the FBI last October "no one [at the meeting] was thrilled about Secord's involvement."

Yesterday, the branch chief said he had "no specific recollection of Secord being discussed at that meeting."