

George Threatened With Contempt

CIA Ex-Aide Completes Final Day on Stand in Iran-Contra Trial

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A federal judge angrily threatened yesterday to hold former CIA spy chief Clair E. George in contempt for ignoring repeated instructions to stop his speechmaking on the witness stand and answer questions put to him at his trial here.

George, 62, who had constantly interrupted prosecutor Craig A. Gillen during two days of cross-examination, hurriedly apologized and concluded his testimony on a subdued note. His lawyer acknowledged that George's "bad habit" was not well-received by the jury.

U.S. District Judge Royce C. Lamberth ordered George several times Thursday to answer the prosecution's questions instead of trying to make points of his own. When George continued his interruptions yesterday, the judge said, "Mr. George!" in an angry voice, slammed down his gavel and sent the jurors from the courtroom.

Turning to defense lawyer Richard Hibey, the judge said, "I would have hoped you would have talked to your client last night about summary contempt proceedings. Do you want me to tell him or do you want to tell him how to comply with an order of this court?"

Hibey said he would take care of it during a break. "It's a bad habit," the lawyer said. "This does not help before the jury. We all know that."

Minutes later, when the jurors resumed their seats, George told them, "I regret interrupting Mr. Gillen, and I apologize to the jury."

On trial for allegedly lying at congressional and grand jury investigations and obstructing their inquiries into the Iran-contra affair, George tried to depict himself as a man who tried to do his best in the political crisis spawned by the scandal and was now being made a scapegoat almost six years after the fact. But his pugnacious manner

often offset his effort to appear the beleaguered bureaucrat.

At yesterday's session, George's third and final day on the stand, Gillen continued to attack George's veracity. The prosecutor began by showing George had not been straightforward about when he learned of contacts between the CIA's station chief in Costa Rica,

Joseph F. Fernandez, and members of the covert resupply network for the contra rebels in Nicaragua run by then-White House aide Lt. Col. Oliver L. North.

Gillen recalled that George, who headed the CIA's operations directorate from 1984 to 1987, had told the Senate and House committees investigating the Iran-contra scandal in 1987 that he learned of direct contacts between Fernandez and North in late October 1986. A three-page memorandum about Fernandez's activities, entitled "Possible Impropriety in San Jose," was submitted to George on Nov. 26, 1986.

But a few days later, in an appearance before the Senate intelligence committee on Dec. 3, 1986, George denied three times that he knew of any CIA official cooperating with North to help the contras.

Asked about those responses, George said his testimony that day was "disjointed, poorly put together and terribly uncreative." As for Fernandez, he argued, "It was my job to protect my people."

George bristled when asked about his chief accuser, former Central American task force chief Alan D. Fiers, who testified that he told George in the summer of 1986 that profits from secret arms sales to Iran were being diverted to the contras. George said, "This is absolutely, positively untrue."

George said he had a vivid memory of hearing about a possible diversion at a big meeting in mid-November 1986 in the office of then-CIA Director William J. Casey. De-

tails of the Iran-contra operations were about to be made public, and agency officials were scrambling to draft testimony about the scandal for Casey to give to Congress.

"Someone . . . suddenly spoke up and said, 'But Bill, there are stories that money from the arms sales to Iran have been given to the contras,' and Director Casey very quickly said, 'I know nothing about it,'" George recalled.

George was indicted in connection with his Dec. 3, 1986, Senate appearance, not for his denials concerning Fernandez, but for insisting that he "never laid eyes" on Richard V. Secord, North's chief operative in the arms-for-hostages deals and the contra resupply network.

"This was was a mistake," George said, adding that he would

have been "fool" to lie intentionally when there were witnesses to the fact that he met Secord in the White House Situation Room in January 1986. He attributed his lapses at the Dec. 3 hearing to the pressures of the scandal and an attack of kidney stones that sent him to the hospital soon thereafter.

"I was sick. I was worried. The agency was in chaos," George said. "The director [Casey] was dying. . . . The deputy director [Robert M. Gates] didn't know what was going on."

He argued that he had no motive to lie about Secord, a man with a controversial reputation and the last person George would want to protect.

Gillen suggested that George had to lie about Secord at the Dec. 3 hearing because he had already lied about him at congressional hearings in October. George denied it, saying, "I was trying throughout that period to protect the CIA, not Clair George."