

CIA Ex-Aide Cites Distrust Of George

Testimony Concludes Offering of Evidence

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A former CIA officer who worked on the Senate intelligence committee said yesterday that he would not trust former CIA spy chief Clair E. George "even under oath" because of their dealings with one another on Capitol Hill.

The testimony by Rob Simmons, a former staff director for the Senate panel called as a rebuttal witness for the prosecution, concluded the presentation of evidence by both sides at George's Iran-contra trial in federal district court here.

George's lawyers rested earlier in the day after informing the court of a surprise decision not to call CIA Director Robert M. Gates to the stand. They fought a hard and successful fight last week to uphold a subpoena for Gates, but decided over the weekend to forgo his testimony. They declined to say why.

U.S. District Judge Royce Lamberth said the case would go to the jury on Thursday. He plans to hold a hearing today on final instructions for the jurors. Closing arguments are expected to be heard Wednesday.

Simmons, who headed the Senate committee staff from 1981 to 1985, testified tersely about his dealings with George, who was the CIA's chief congressional relations officer during a bitter dispute in the spring of 1984 over the covert mining of harbors in Nicaragua.

The committee accused then-CIA Director William J. Casey and George of concealing the mining from the senators. Simmons was

later quoted as saying, in a May 1992 article in The Washington Post, that George "withheld information" from both Simmons and Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.), then the committee chairman.

Under angry cross-examination by defense lawyer Richard A. Hibey, Simmons acknowledged that he "felt betrayed" by George. Simmons added that his "bottom line" on George was that "you can be a good soldier in the Cold War and a very bad American."

"I think the essence of being a good American is allowing the democratic system to work," Simmons testified.

Now a state legislator in Connecticut and visiting lecturer at Yale, Simmons was allowed to testify

over Hibey's sharp protests. Hibey contended, outside the presence of the jury, that Simmons "somehow holds" Casey and George responsible for the loss of his Senate job and "apparently harbors a grudge" against George, who considered him "a lightweight."

The judge held that Simmons could testify because George had left the door open for an attack on his credibility by taking the witness stand last week.

Simmons told the jurors that "I believe, in my experience with him, he [George] was not truthful. . . . I would have some difficulty believing him, even under oath, testifying about these matters" such as the mining of the harbors.

"Do you know Clair George considered you a lightweight?" Hibey asked at one point.

"I was not aware of that, no," replied Simmons, who worked at the CIA from 1969 to 1979.

George, former CIA deputy director for operations, is standing trial on nine felony counts of lying to congressional and grand jury panels and obstructing their inquiries into the Iran-contra scandal, a tangled affair involving the Reagan administration's secret arms-for-hostages deals with Iran and its covert military resupply network for the contra rebels in Nicaragua.

In pressing last week to subpoena a reluctant Gates as a witness, George's lawyers said they wanted to show how Gates, as deputy director for intelligence and then deputy CIA director in the mid-1980s, was kept in the dark by Casey about details of what was going on in Nicaragua—much as George contends he, too, was.

The defense, however, may have concluded that Gates's testimony, especially on cross-examination, could be more harmful than helpful. According to Joseph Persico's biography of Casey, Gates said Casey and George were alike in their attitude toward Congress.

"Their attitude towards Congress was screw 'em," Gates was quoted as saying. "And that attitude communicated itself throughout the operations directorate—don't tell Congress anything unless you're driven to the wall."