

Ex-CIA Official Goes on Trial For 2nd Time

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Former CIA spy chief Clair E. George, accused of lying to Congress, went on trial yesterday for the second time as 90 potential jurors answered a questionnaire about their knowledge of the Iran-contra affair.

The man who once headed CIA spy operations is charged with testifying falsely about his own knowledge of key players in the affair—those who sold arms to Iran in the mid-1980s in hopes of freeing U.S. hostages and ran a military supply network for the Nicaraguan contra rebels.

Last summer, George's case ended in a mistrial. The jury foreman said afterward that jurors were never close to convicting George because they did not believe his answers to congressional committees constituted a crime.

The trial yesterday got off to a low-key start, as a relaxed George watched U.S. District Judge Royce C. Lamberth instruct jurors on filling out the 35-page questionnaire. The jury pool will be questioned individually beginning today, a process that could last a week.

"Do you have any opinion about the efforts of the Reagan administration to sell weapons to Iran in 1985 and 1986 in exchange for assistance in freeing American hostages in Lebanon?" the questionnaire asked.

"Do you have any opinion about the efforts taken by Congress to approve or restrict U.S. government support for the contras?"

Jurors were asked whether they had heard of key players and events, particularly the trial of former White House national security aide Oliver L. North.

North played a key role in the arms-for-hostages sales to Iran and ran the secret network that funneled military aid to the contras when most government involvement in such assistance was banned

by law.

North was convicted on three counts in a 1989 trial. But the verdict was set aside after a federal appeals court ruled that North's immunized congressional testimony may have tainted trial witnesses.

The questionnaire scrutinized how much the jury pool had read about the Iran-contra affair, mentioning a number of books, including one written by North and another by former Air Force Maj. Gen. Richard V. Secord. Secord was recruited by North to provide the private arms and transportation network that was active in both the arms sales and contra aid.

The questionnaire also pointed out that lawmakers will testify and asked, "Do you feel that the testimony of a member of Congress is entitled to greater or lesser weight than the testimony of others . . . ?"

George has pleaded innocent to a seven-count indictment. He is charged with lying to congressional committees in 1986 about: his knowledge of individuals involved in contra resupply; his contact with Secord; and his knowledge of Secord's involvement in both the arms sales and resupply network.

He also is accused of lying to and obstructing a grand jury on April 5, 1991, regarding his preparation of testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1986.