

2nd Iran-Contra Trial Of Ex-Spy Chief Opens

U.S. Accuses George of Lying to Congress

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Special prosecutors, promising a few new twists in their case, yesterday began their second attempt to convict former CIA spy chief Clair E. George of lying to Congress and a federal grand jury about his knowledge of the Iran-contra scandal.

George's lawyer denounced the effort as an attempt to pillory him "for answers he did not give to questions that were never asked."

"Clair George lied to no one," defense attorney Richard A. Hibey protested as George's second trial got under way in U.S. District Court here. "He told the truth as he knew it. When he was wrong, he was corrected. When he was mistaken, it was an honest mistake."

Chief prosecutor Craig A. Gillen charged in his opening statement that George willfully lied at three congressional appearances in late 1986 when the scandal was unraveling and then again nearly five years later when he was questioned by a grand jury about the preparation of his opening statement before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 1986.

George gave the false testimony, Gillen contended, partly to protect a \$100 million resumption of aid to the contra rebels in Nicaragua, then on the verge of final passage in Congress, and partly to hew to administration denials about a secret resupply network then being run by White House aide Oliver L. North.

The first prosecution of George ended in a mistrial last August when jurors deadlocked on each of the nine counts against him. A majority of the jurors felt the government had failed to prove George guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. Independent counsel Lawrence E. Walsh pressed for a retrial on a

trimmed, seven-count indictment.

The chief witness against George again will be Alan D. Fiers, former chief of the CIA's Central American Task Force, who agreed to cooperate with prosecutors after pleading guilty last year to two misdemeanor counts of illegally withholding information from Congress.

Hibey assailed him as "an admitted perjurer" who turned on George to win lenient treatment for himself.

But Gillen also promised several new witnesses.

George is charged with lying to the Senate Foreign Relations when asked in October 1986 about the contra resupply network. He had been called to testify in the wake of the Oct. 5 crash in Nicaragua of an arms-laden contra resupply plane that was part of the secret supply operation.

The indictment accuses George of lying when he denied knowing the individuals "involved in this affair which led to the downing of the airplane," because he did know that North, North's chief operative, retired Air Force general Richard V. Secord, and Felix Rodriguez, another operative stationed in El Salvador, were involved in the resupply network.

George is also accused of lying to the House intelligence committee on Oct. 14, 1986, about what he knew of various aspects of the contra resupply network and of perjuring himself before the Senate intelligence committee on Dec. 3, 1986, about his contact with Secord and about Secord's role in the arms-for-hostages deals with Iran.

Hibey maintained the prosecution was based on distortions and words wrenched out of context. He was especially scornful of the charges stemming from George's April 5, 1991, grand jury appearance. George is accused of perjury and obstruction for saying that he could not recall editing drafts of his Oct. 10, 1986, Senate testimony and that he did not know who directed excision of a certain sentence.

"Surprise, surprise! He can't remember," Hibey scoffed. "This was not the Gettysburg Address. This was not John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address." Rather, he said, it was just one of 30 to 40 occasions on which George testified before Congress in 1986.

The trial is expected to last about four weeks. The first witness, Secord, told yesterday of meeting George at the White House on Jan. 20, 1986, at a session called to discuss direct U.S. arms sales to Iran.