

Nation/World

CIA official faces trial for Iran-Co

WASHINGTON (AP) — The CIA's former spy master — Clair George — goes on trial this month in the Iran-Contra scandal, charged with covering up the Reagan White House's secret arms network to the Nicaraguan Contras.

If testimony begins as scheduled next week, Mr. George would be the highest-ranking CIA official to ever be tried on charges related to his job. Closed hearings on the use of classified information are taking place this week.

Mr. George was deputy director for operations — in charge of all the CIA's overseas spy networks — when he told Congress late in 1986 that the agency didn't know who was supplying guns and ammunition to the rebels fighting the leftist government of Nicaragua.

That statement and others Mr. George made

were lies, an indictment charged. It accuses him of three counts of obstructing Congress and a grand jury and six counts of perjury and making false statements.

It was Mr. George's boss, CIA director William Casey, who moved the Contra support system over to a then-unknown White House aide, Lt. Col. Oliver North, after Congress barred the CIA from assisting the Contras militarily in 1984.

It was "a handoff, just like in basketball. . . . You got the ball, go on with it," Mr. North testified at his own trial in 1989. Casey died in 1987 before he was questioned in detail.

Iran-Contra prosecutors plan to show that many CIA officers including Mr. George had a

wealth of data on Mr. North's network in 1985 and 1986, according to pre-trial court papers released in the case.

The chief witness against Mr. George is Alan Fiers, former chief of the CIA's Central American Task Force. He will allege that Mr. George orchestrated a cover-up by ordering Mr. Fiers to remove references to Mr. North's operation from a statement to be given Congress.

Mr. George's lawyers will argue that he was too busy with worldwide CIA responsibilities to pay attention to information about Mr. North and the Contras, according to the court papers.

Mr. George would be the third major figure to go on trial in the 5½-year-old Iran-Contra investigation, which has cost over \$30 million

ntra affair

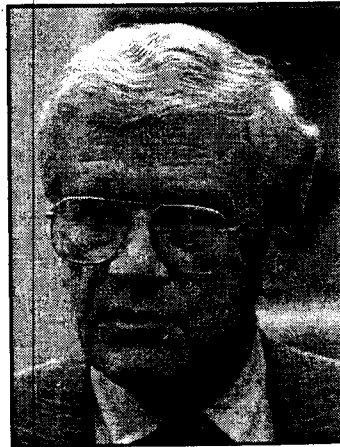
and resulted in last month's indictment of ex-defense secretary Caspar Weinberger.

Former national security adviser John Poindexter was found guilty of five felonies and Mr. North of three, but their convictions were overturned or set aside on appeal.

The George case in effect began on Oct. 5, 1986, when one of the supply planes in Mr. North's secret operation was shot down over Nicaragua.

Congressional committees wanted to know what operation the plane was part of.

"What we know at this point is . . . from the press," Mr. George told a congressional panel nine days after the plane was shot down.



CLAIR GEORGE