

Diplomat Called Insane at

By Paul G. Edwards
Washington Post Staff Writers

The personality of Alfred Erdos, a foreign service officer charged with murder, was characterized yesterday as "fertile territory" for a mental breakdown, and some of the qualities that called "abnormal" were called "abnormal defense mechanisms" that masked his anxieties.

This analysis of Erdos's mental makeup was given by Dr. Leon Yochelson, former chairman of the psychiatry department at George Washington University Medical School.

Yochelson and another psychiatrist testifying for the defense said Erdos was in the fourth day of his trial in

stabbed his administrative assistant at the U.S. Embassy in Equatorial Guinea last Aug. 30.

Two psychiatrists called by the government said they do not believe Erdos was insane at the time of the slaying.

The testimony of the four psychiatrists, crucial to Erdos's defense of insanity, came in the fourth day of his trial in U.S. District Court in Alexandria on a charge of murdering Donald J. Leahy, 47.

The government has accused Erdos, 47, of slaying Leahy in a homosexual attack. Testifying in his defense, Erdos, who is married, has denied ever engaging in a homosexual act with anyone.

He said he killed Leahy while under the delusion that his aide was a Communist agent working with other American officials and the Equatorial Guinean government in a plot against him, his family and the U.S.

Both Yochelson and Dr. David H. Fram, who also testified for the defense, said a homosexual act would not be inconsistent with the acute paranoid psychosis they said afflicted Erdos. They said that his denial of the act could result from amnesia caused by personal disgust with sexual aberrations.

Drs. George Weickhardt and E. F. Hodges, the psychiatrists who testified for the prosecution, said they do not believe

Erdos has told them the truth about the slaying, but has tried to cover up his motives by feigning mental illness.

Yochelson presented the most detailed analysis of Erdos and was the only one of the four to link the defendant's childhood life, four-year marriage and State Department career to the mental breakdown he said took place at the time of the slaying.

"In his case, the disorder did no occur out of the blue," he said, but developed in the "fertile territory" of a personality that, beneath a calm exterior, was "rigid and isolated."

The psychiatrist said that Erdos's motherless home, where the "total emphasis was

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on economic survival" and where there was an absence of "emotional give and take" affected the development of his personality.

He said that Erdos "is the kind of person who has spent his lifetime trying to appear normal" and has resorted to excessive attention to the details of his work to avoid dealing with normal anxieties.

Dr. Yochelson cited a 1956 psychiatric examination of Erdos by a State Department doctor that found him to be "complicated" and "isolated." Erdos, he said, was examined after complaining of inability to concentrate but then passed off the episode as "spring fever."

Yochelson said that Erdos's

marriage and the birth of his son made new demands on him that he met with "an extravagant" use of his defense mechanisms—primarily attention to the minutiae of his work.

Other witnesses have testified that Erdos was chosen for the difficult assignment as charge d'affaires in Equatorial Guinea, where the government has harassed Americans, because of his "steady, reliable record" and "unflappable personality."

Yochelson said that this exterior calm began to collapse in mid-August of last year, less than four months after Erdos had taken charge of the embassy in Santa Isabel. At that point, he said, the arrest of Africans working at the embassy, restrictions placed on him by the government and awareness of terrorism in the country affected the coherence of his reports to Washington.

Finally, he said, Erdos slipped into a paranoid delusion on Aug. 28 enabling him to explain all the harassment in terms of a massive plot against the U.S. and himself. By the day of the slaying, Yochelson said, Erdos was psychotic—unable to distinguish reality and not responsible for his actions.