Julius Hoffman: On the Bench

By Pamela Reeves

CHICAGO (UPI)—Federal Judge Julius J. Hoffman sometimes thinks he has more trouble with beautiful women trying to influence his decisions than he did with Jerry Rubin or Abbie Hoffman at the Chicago Seven trial.

But the women, Hoffman said in a rare, two-hour interview, used slightly more subtle tactics than the Yippie leaders who disrupted his courtroom for five months and put him in the national spotlight.

Settled in a black leather chair in his Federal Building office, the 76-year-old judge, now completing his 25th year on the bench, recalled all his adversaries with no little amusement.

His career as a judge, which started in 1947 in the state superior court, was highlighted by the 1970 conspiracy case in which five of the seven defendants were convicted of crossing state lines to incite riots at the 1968 Democratic National Convention. Hoffman, in a controversial decision still on appeal, gave them all lenghthy contempt-of-court sentences at the end of the trial.

He has drawn more than his share of hard cases to try.

In 1965, the judge presided at the second-longest trial on record, the nine-month Krebiozen (cancer cure) case ("We stopped the sale of Krebiozen even though all the defendants were acquitted").

He handed down the first federal court school desegregation order in the North in the 1968 South Holland, Ill., case, and he presided at the tax trial of Chicago crime syndicate chief Tony Accardo. The prosecutor in the Accardo case was Richard B. Ogilvie, now governor of Illinois.

It was in 1970, however, that the "woman trouble" cropped up. It came during the less-well-known trial of businessman Patrick Hoy, a handsome Chicago socialite charged with fraud.

"I tried him for three weeks," Hoffman says. "The government rested and then he pleaded guilty. Now, Pat and I were on a first-name basis for many years. But we had to impose a sentence . . ."

"I couldn't go out socially before, during or after that trial without being besieged by women, for the most part very good-looking women, who would ask, 'What are you going to do to darling Pat?' " he said.

"I'd say, 'Haven't you heard, he's innocent until proven guilty? Right now he's innocent,' "

"They'd say, 'Ohhh, you know Pat's been a naughty boy. But what are you going to doooo to him?' "

Hoffman shook his head at such a lack of manners. "It is strange how some otherwise intelligent and fine people are presuming enough to discuss a thing like that when you're out socially."

He described "a very beautiful and rich widow" who called him at home one night during the Hoy trial complaining that her family's business was in financial trouble. She asked if she could see him.

Hoffman says he asked, "Don't you think you ought to call a bank?"

But the woman didn't take the hint, and showed up the next morning, Hoffman remembers vividly, "in a very beautiful white dress and, addressing me by my first name, asked if I knew their business was in a terrible way."

The woman told Hoffman her company could survive if it got Hoy's business, and she wondered if the judge could make some allowances in Hoy's trial.

"It wasn't a unique approach," Hoffman says laconically. "I mention it because some people have the notion that this only happens with the so-called ward politicians. But it doesn't happen here except on rare occasions."

Hoffman sentenced Hoy to two years in prison, surprising those who had expected the sentence to be probation. Afterwards, the judge says, acquaintances would comment gruffly, "Pretty tough on Pat, weren't you?"

Hoffman frowned. "Now judges are human beings," he said, "and all human beings vary. Some, I imagine, find it difficult to resist doing courtesies for friends. I've never had that difficulty."

"But I dislike very much being introduced as a person of unflinching integrity as though a man is entitled to a bold star for not stealing. I don't think anyone should be given any credit for being honest."

He is invariably introduced as "a man of unflinching integrity," and his office is full of mementos which testify to the respect he owns as a jurist.

His office chambers are furnished with upholstered couches and chairs in a style fit for the corporate vice president which Hoffman was (at the Brunswick Company) before he became a judge.

Dressed in a neatly fitting brown worsted suit with a gold watch chain across his vest, Hoffman looks every bit the distinguished jurist as he moves around his roomy chambers commenting on his pictures and keepsakes.

"Good picture of Eisenhower here," he says. "That was when he was President of Columbia University. That's Earl Warren up there. I love him too much ever to be critical of him at all."

He also pointed out a framed letter from late FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover in honor of Hoffman's taking senior judge status last November; a framed 1969 editorial in the Racine (Wis.) Journal Times commending him on the conspiracy trial, and a 1953 letter from then Vice President Richard M. Nixon congratulating Hoffman on his appointment to the federal bench.

"When I was a young lawyer," he says, "the very expression federal court or judge of the federal court was awesome. For a considerable number of years thereafter my knees shook when I appeared before certain judges."

Word has it that the quick-tongued Hoffman, appointed a federal judge by President Eisenhower in 1953, elicits from some of today's young lawyers the knee-knocking he experienced before such as Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis, a personality so powerful he was able to give baseball men the shakes when he was baseball commissioner.

Hoffman says the respect he first felt for the court has never worn off, and he is proud to be part of it.