

Attica Trial Witness Admits FBI Spy Role

By William Claiborne
Washington Post Staff Writer

BUFFALO, April 21—A 26-year-old Buffalo woman, who described herself as a paid informant for the FBI, repeatedly cried on the witness stand today as she told how she infiltrated the defense committee of Attica prisoners on trial here.

Mary Jo Cook, the informant, said that for 17 months in 1973 and 1974 she supplied as many as 40 reports a month to a local "contact agent" for which she was paid up to \$300 monthly. She said her code name was Jo Leroy, because she lived on Leroy Street here.

She said she was told that summaries of her reports, including "psychological profiles," were sent to FBI headquarters in Washington, and that Washington-based agents telephoned her twice and questioned her about them.

Referring to the persons she said she reported about, Miss Cook, who appeared pale and visibly shaken even before cross-examination began, said, "These people's names are in the files just because of me. I can't believe it . . . that's 1984."

At one point, Miss Cook sobbed as she described her activity as "a political crime," and State Supreme Court Justice Joseph Mattina called a recess. As she stepped from the witness stand, Miss Cook murmured, "it's my public shame."

Her testimony is being heard in connection with a motion to dismiss charge against former Attica inmate Bernard Stoble, who was accused of kidnaping and fatally stabbing two other inmates during the September, 1971, uprising at the state prison.

Attorneys for two other Attica inmates, John B. Hill and Charley Joe Permasilice, who



MARY JO COOK
... "paid informant"

were convicted in the killing of a prison guard on the first day of the riot have moved to upset the convictions on grounds that Miss Cook had access to defend secrets and strategies.

Miss Cook offered few specifics of the defense information she says she gave to the federal authorities, and she left unanswered the ques-

tion of whether or not any such information found its way to the Attica special prosecution force.

The FBI has acknowledged that Miss Cook was a paid informant from June 1, 1973, to Oct. 22, 1974, during which time she supplied information about another organization, the Vietnam Veterans Against the War/Winter Soldier Organization. The FBI said at no time did she furnish information on the Attica defense.

However, Miss Cook testified today she was "in constant contact" with the Attica defense team and supplied information about courtroom strategy, internal communications, defendants' "personal problems" and about a jury selection survey that preceded the Attica trials.

When pressed for details, she referred to "three secret facts" but following a conference in chambers, Justice Mat-

tina refused to allow public disclosure of them. Mattina said he would rule Tuesday on a defense request that FBI records and logs on Miss Cook's activities be admitted as evidence.

Much of Miss Cook's five hours on the witness stand was consumed by a rambling narrative of what motivated her to become an informant and then turn against her FBI contacts. Mattina frequently cautioned her to shorten her answers.

Miss Cook portrayed herself as an "overeducated" but politically naive graduate student at the University of Buffalo who became attracted to the life of an informant because of patriotism and a desire to earn money.

Referring to her FBI contacts, she said, "I believed these men were principled, moral men asking me to do something. I felt it was a job which would tap more of my capabilities and talent than ever before."

She said she first thought the Attica defendants were guilty and dangerous and that the Vietnam Veterans group was being manipulated by a "criminal fringe."

As time passed, she said, "I realized they were honorable and decent men." Later, she said, "I couldn't believe I had been that stupid. I took the job because I felt it was honorable, and it took a while to realize that they [the FBI agents] aren't honorable."

"By the summer of 1974, I realized I could seriously be undermining the courtroom process in the country . . . It was as if I were a TV monitor in people's lives . . . I don't believe that information will not be used against a lot of innocent people," Miss Cook said.