

Post 2/6/76

Hammer Case Moved To L. A.

The Watergate special prosecutor's criminal case against ailing millionaire oilman Armand Hammer was transferred yesterday from a federal court here to one in Los Angeles.

U.S. District Court Judge George L. Hart Jr. said he was "reluctant" to transfer the case, but felt he had no choice after hearing two court-appointed doctors testify that the court proceeding was having a "serious and adverse" effect on Hammer's condition.

The doctors agreed that the case should end as soon as possible, and that Hammer probably would not be well enough to travel to Washington for some time.

Hammer, 77, has been hospitalized in Los Angeles with a serious heart ailment for the past three weeks, according to his attorneys and doctors.

The transfer of the case is the latest in a series of sometimes unorthodox courtroom proceedings that followed Hammer's guilty plea to charges of illegally donating \$54,000 to the 1972 reelection campaign of Richard M. Nixon. Hammer is the chief executive officer of the Los Angeles-based Occidental Petroleum Corp.

After his initial guilty plea before U.S. District Court Chief Judge William B. Jones on Oct. 1, Hammer wrote a letter to the probation office in which he seemed to repudiate that plea.

Jones then ordered Hammer's guilty plea withdrawn and the case set for trial. Hammer's defense attorneys asked the U.S. Court of Appeals to order the plea reinstated, and the appellate court sent the case back to Jones for another review.

Jones, in turn, transferred the case to Hart. On Jan. 23, when Hammer was scheduled to appear before Hart to reaffirm his guilty plea, his attorneys told Hart the oilman was hospitalized in Los Angeles.

Hammer could be sentenced to three years in prison and fined \$3,000.