

Nixon Backs Off On Trial Comment

By FRANK CORMIER

WASHINGTON (AP)— President Nixon has backed away from an off-the-cuff comment that Charles Manson, the California hippie-cult leader, was guilty, directly or indirectly, of "eight murders without reason."

While Air Force One circled Washington for nearly a half hour last night on a flight from Denver, Nixon drafted a statement that declared, "The last thing I would do is prejudice the legal rights of any person, in any circumstances."

Hours earlier, Manson's defense attorneys had asked Los Angeles judge to declare a mistrial, alleging prejudicial publicity. The court denied the initial motion "without prejudice," wanting to make certain what Nixon actually said.

THE DEFENSE was free to renew the motion under that ruling, which it said it would do today.

If such a motion were approved, a new start would be required in the trial of Manson and other defendants in the celebrated Sharon Tate murder case.

Stopping in Denver en route back to the White House from a working holiday in San Clemente, Calif., Nixon went before newsmen prior to conferring in the Colorado capital with state law enforcement officials and said of Manson:

"Here is a man who was guilty, directly or indirectly, of eight murders without reason."

"**HERE IS A** man, yet, who, as far as the news media coverage was concerned, appeared to be rather a glamorous figure. . . ."

Many reporters who heard Nixon, an attorney, were aware immediately that the chief executive had assumed Manson guilty before completion of his trial. Some thought they saw a quick facial reaction from Atty. Gen. John N. Mitchell, who was standing at

the President's side.

Fellow lawyer Mitchell, however, made no move to suggest that Nixon amend his impromptu remark.

Shortly afterward, press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler stated, after extended questioning by newsmen, that Nixon "failed to use the word 'alleged,'" in referring to Manson's case.

THE EIGHTH "murder"

Nixon referred to presumably was that of musician Gary M. Hinman of Malibu. Manson is charged in that slaying last summer along with a co-defendant in the Tate case, Susan Atkins.

Nixon said in Denver he was concerned with "the attitudes that are created among many of our younger people and also perhaps older people as well, in which they tend to glorify and to make heroes out of those who engage in criminal activities."

"This is not done intentionally by the press," Nixon continued. "It is not done intentionally by radio and television, I know. It is done, perhaps, because people want to read or see that kind of story."

The President said he noted while at his San Clemente home last week that the newspapers in California reported the Manson trial on the front page each day and that "it usually got a couple of minutes in the evening news."

ZIEGLER SAID the newspapers whose coverage of the trial had been read by Nixon were the Los Angeles Times and the Los Angeles Herald-Examiner.

Deputy press secretary Gerald L. Warren subsequently was asked to cite specific newspaper accounts or television-radio broadcasts to which Nixon took exception. He said he could not supply that information.

The President also complained about news media coverage of the overnight jailing last week of two defense

lawyers found in contempt of court.

He spoke of "two lawyers in the case, two lawyers who were, as anyone who could read any of the stories could tell — who were guilty of the most outrageous contemptuous action in the courtroom, and who were ordered to jail overnight by the judge, seem to be more the oppressed, and the judge seemed to be the villain."

IN THE statement issued upon arrival last night at nearby Andrews Air Force Base, Md., Nixon said:

"I've been informed that my comment in Denver regarding the Tate murder trial in Los Angeles may continue to be misunderstood despite the unequivocal statement made at the time by my press secretary.

"The last thing I would do is prejudice the legal rights of any person in any circumstance."

"To set the record straight, I do not know, and did not intend to speculate as to whether the Tate defendants are guilty, in fact, or not."