

'Best Friend' of Gainesville 8 Defendant Testifies

By JOHN KIFNER

Special to The New York Times

GAINESVILLE, Fla., Aug. 17 — The "best friend" of the alleged ringleader of a plot to disrupt the Republican National Convention testified today that he had reported to the Federal Bureau of Investigation "every conversation" the two had had after the "ringleader" and seven others were indicted.

The trial of seven antiwar veterans and a supporter was halted as Federal District Judge Winston E. Arnow ordered a hearing into whether the informer's activities constituted a penetration of the defense camp.

Such an invasion, the defense attorneys insisted, would be grounds for dismissing the charges.

The informer is Emerson L. Poe, who, Scott Camil said, was his closest friend and who was the second-ranking officer of the Florida branch of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

As the prosecution moved to call Mr. Poe as a surprise witness this morning, Government statements turned over to the defense showed that he had been an F.B.I. informer since January, 1972, when he met Mr. Camil.

Still F.B.I. Informer

At the hearing this afternoon, Mr. Poe, a baldish man with a goatee and an electric blue shirt and tie, said that he was still an F.B.I. informer.

Under questioning by defense attorneys, he repeatedly said that he was unable to remember much of anything of conversations he had heard or meetings he had attended.

He said, however, that he had not spied on the defense preparation for the case.

His testimony was contradicted later by a young woman from the defense team.

Mr. Poe was one of the 23 witnesses subpoenaed before the Tallahassee grand jury in July, 1972, which handed up the indictment charging the eight with plotting an assault on the Republican National Convention with automatic weapons, slingshots and cross bows.

In arguing for a hearing today, one of the defense lawyers, Doris Peterson, said that a list of the names of their clients, including Mr. Poe, had been submitted in the Tallahassee proceedings, and the Government had been ordered by the court to say if any were agents or informers.

Guy L. Goodwin, the special prosecutor who directed the grand jury, had sworn that none were, Miss Peterson said, holding a transcript of the court record.

Mr. Goodwin, then, chief of the Special Litigation Section of

the Justice Department's Internal Security Division, is a specialist in bringing grand jury indictments against radicals.

Defendants Are Upset

The disclosure of another informer in their midst upset the defendants, and there were bitter jokes that the next prosecution witness "will come from the defense table."

A fellow employee of Mr. Poe's at the local Veterans Administration hospital recalled him as a supporter of Gov. George C. Wallace who bragged of his F.B.I. connections.

At the hearing this afternoon, a defense attorney, Morton Stavis, charged that "Guy Goodwin stood before the bar of this court and swore under oath" that Mr. Poe was not an agent, thus permitting him to infiltrate the defense camp.

"In no case in the history of litigation has there been such direct misrepresentation by the Government," Mr. Stavis said.

Under examination by the defense attorneys, Mr. Poe said:

"Every time that I had contact [the indictment], I reported it to Claude Meadow."

Mr. Meadow is the head of the Gainesville office of the F.B.I. at the prosecution table, and as work in this case. He sits daily and supervised the investigative work with Scott Camil after that Mr. Poe testified he took notes.

Legal Assistant Testifies

Mr. Poe was followed on the stand by Mr. Camil's girlfriend, Nancy McCowan, who is working as a legal assistant for the defense.

She testified that she and Mr. Camil had discussed the defense strategy with Mr. Poe "at least 15 times" and had gone to his house trailer in nearby Archer "several times" to work on the case.

She added that he had picked up mail for the group—there have been complaints of mail tampering by the defendants—and that he had suggested to her that he hide Mr. Camil's guns at his house when the veteran went to Miami for the Democratic convention.

Mr. Camil, an intense, bushy-bearded former Marine sergeant appeared stunned by the disclosure.

Mr. Camil and his girlfriend, Miss McCowan, became fast friends — they thought — with Mr. Poe. They visited each other's homes, played bridge together and when Mr. Poe was ill, the two visited him in the hospital and helped to care for his family. A surprise birthday party was given for Miss McCowan at Mr. Poe's home.

Mr. Poe, a Navy veteran, became the Florida state coordinator of the V.V.A.W. and Mr. Camil's assistant and close confidant. On Mr. Poe's farm

outside Gainesville is a rifle range. Mr. Camil, it was learned, went there frequently for target practice.

And, it was further learned, Mr. Camil has discussed the case with Mr. Poe and often worked on his defense in Mr. Poe's home.

During the jury selection, Mr. Poe, who works at the Veterans Administration Hos-

pital as an inhalation therapist, gave the defense background information on several potential jurors who worked at the hospital.

When Mr. Poe and Miss McCowan were released from their subpoenas at the Tallahassee grand jury the same day, he drove her home to Gainesville.

It was the second time this week that a man a defendant

c 11

to Being F.B.I. Informer

had regarded as his best friend turned out to be a Government informer.

On Monday afternoon, Charles H. Becker, who described himself as an "undercover security agent" for a New Orleans department store specializing in liquor, took the stand as an F.B.I. informer.

A defendant, Peter P. Mahoney, who won a Bronze Star in Viet-

nam, recalled the days when the witness had red, frizzy hair and a beard and said that he had been his closest friend.

"It hurts," Mr. Mahoney said. Both Mr. Becker and his predecessor on the stand, William W. Lemmer, an F.B.I. informer, had risen to become state coordinators and members of a national steering committee of the V.V.A.W.