

Watergate innocent pleas

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WASHINGTON — Seven men who were once at the top with Richard Nixon stood in a court room yesterday and, one by one, answered "not guilty" to charges of conspiring to cover up Watergate.

They were released without bond to await a trial now scheduled to begin early in September.

The arraignment, which took only five minutes before Chief U.S. District Judge John Sirica, brought together for a strange reunion some of the most powerful men of the first Nixon administration.

Seated around the long defense table were H.R. "Bob" Haldeman, former White House chief of staff; John Ehrlichman, former top domestic policy adviser to the President; former Attorney General John Mitchell, once Nixon's campaign manager; Charles Colson, former special counsel to the President; Robert Mardian, former assistant attorney general and Nixon campaign official; Gordon Strachan, a former Haldeman aide; and Kenneth Wells Parkinson, an influential Washington attorney and former lawyer for the Nixon campaign committee.

The defendants, appearing relaxed but somber, began arriving in Sirica's second floor court room about 20 minutes before the judge, in his black robe, mounted the bench.

Mitchell was the first to enter the paneled chamber packed with reporters and spectators, and he took a seat on the side normally reserved for prosecutors.

"Nice to see you, Mr. Attorney General," said a U.S. marshal, shaking Mitchell's hand.

Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski also shook hands with Mitchell and said, "Hi, John, how are you? Good to see you again."

As members of Jaworski's

staff filed in, Mitchell rose and went to the other side of the room, the side for defendants.

At 10:58, two minutes early, a marshal ordered everyone to stand and announced that court was in session.

Sirica entered, and James Capitanio, deputy court clerk, called out Case Number 74-110, the case of the United States of America versus John Mitchell, Harry R. Haldeman and the others.

"As I call your name please state to the court how you plead to the charges," said Capitanio, as the seven men and their lawyers stood before the bench.

Mitchell, charged with six felony counts, in the indictment, was first in the unprecedented rollcall.