

Day of reckoning in cover-up trial

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WASHINGTON — Since October the jurors at the Watergate coverup trial have sat silent and inscrutable, a mute testament to a judicial system that can and does call to account even the most powerful men in the land.

When they finally speak, probably later this week, it will be with a single voice — to convict or acquit each of five defendants who once served President Nixon and now stand charged with plotting to cover up the bugging scandal that drove Nixon from office.

Judge John Sirica will deliver instructions to the jurors tomorrow, probably including a charge that they should not let Nixon's pardon enter into their decisions.

The nine women and three men may be out for two or three days. But there is little likelihood of a hung jury.

"I've never seen such a strong-minded, independent group in my life," one defense attorney said.

The jurors must consider

the testimony of 85 witnesses, more than 12,000 pages of transcript, nearly three dozen White House tapes, several score documentary exhibits and final arguments from eight lawyers that ran 21 hours.

The defendants are John Mitchell, former attorney general and Nixon's campaign manager, H. R. Haldeman, former White House chief of staff; John Ehrlichman, once Nixon's No. 2 aide; Robert Mardian, former assistant attorney general and official of the Nixon-Re-Election Committee, and Kenneth Parkinson, Washington lawyer hired to defend the committee after Watergate.

They are charged with conspiracy to obstruct justice and defraud the United States.

All but Mardian also are charged with actual obstruction of justice. Mitchell, Haldeman and Ehrlichman are faced with perjury counts as well.

All took the stand to protest their innocence and all blamed others — primarily former White House Counsel John Dean.