

Soledad-- A Most Unusual

By Harold V. Streeter

The six-week-old Soledad Prison murder trial on the third floor of the Hall of Justice is like no other in The City's long criminal court history.

It went into recess Monday because of a defense attorney's illness. It resumes Tuesday.

Nowhere else does the trial judge begin the court's day by tapping his finger on the mouth of his bench microphone to make sure the loud-speaker system is working.

That is because of a controversial bullet-resistant, \$15,000 glass and metal barrier. It separates the spectators from any physical access to the judge, the jury, the lawyers and the two defendants. The two, black inmates Fleeta Drumgo and John Clutchette, are charged with beating to death white guard John V. Mills at Soledad on Jan. 16, 1970.

The loudspeaker system has to be working if those in the audience — including all the news reporters — are to hear what is going on.

Heavy Security

The barrier is just one aspect of unprecedented heavy security ordered after four men died in the Aug. 7, 1970, shootout at Marin Civic Center and six more Aug. 21, 1971, in the outbreak at San Quentin. Authorities have related both violent incidents to the Soledad case.

The "microphone game" is an ever-present source of confusion and, sometimes, amusement.

Defense attorney Richard Silver, whose dark hair hangs down to his shoulders, moves in an impulsive moment of cross-examination to the witness stand — leaving

the microphone on his desk.

In the spectator section, a newsman cocks his ear to denote that he isn't hearing what was said. Superior Judge S. Lee Vavuris catches the signal.

"Mr. Silver," the judge reminds, "please pick up your microphone. The spectator's can't hear you."

Sigh Turns to Roar

Each time a convict eyewitness for the prosecution goes over to the scale model of Soledad Prison's Y Wing to point out something on the third tier, he has to hold the microphone in one hand and the pointer in the other.

One witness, after finishing his answer to a difficult question, breathed a huge sigh of relief. The resultant roar from the loudspeakers sounded like a young tornado.

Today it is a common sight to see pretty Mary Silliman walk from her spectator's seat during a recess to the point where two always-locked doors in the center of the barrier come together. There is just enough of a crack to permit her to talk into the cocked ear of her

husband, defense attorney Floyd Silliman, on the other side.

Often a friend of the defense will arise in the spectator section during a trial lull, walk to the barrier and hold up a scrawled message.

Defense investigator Dick Draper will read it, nod, and

Type of Trial

pass along the message to an attorney. The attorney then will either walk over to the "conversation crack" or write out the answer and hold it up to view.

The spectator section accommodates less than 100. But the courtroom seldom is more than half full because

of the security checks one must go through to get in.

The body search outside is equally remarkable. A woman, after obtaining an admission card on the first floor, shows it to a sheriff's deputy at a desk on the heavily guarded third floor. She gets

and dumping of all the contents of her purse.

For a man, the procedure is the same, but his examination is out in the open. He puts all the contents of his pockets — coins, keys, cigarettes, pocketbook, papers — on a table. A sheriff's deputy hand-feels him from shoulders to his feet. Then he is turned around and has to lift one foot and then the other for a check as to whether anything might be concealed in the soles.

a number. On large cards fitted into a wall slot, the number is set up. She stands beside it for a photograph by a police cameraman.

Then she goes behind a screen for a body search by a matron who requires removal of intimate apparel