

Humiliating 'Skin Searches' For Women at Magee Trial

By Harold V. Streeter

Newswomen and women spectators at the kidnap-murder preliminaries for San Quentin convict Ruchell Magee at the Hall of Justice are being subjected to humiliating personal searches before admittance.

Before a woman is allowed inside the heavily guarded third floor courtroom, she has to go behind a partition, take her panties down, loosen her brassiere, take off her shoes and hold them up for inspection by a police matron.

Magee, 33, faces trial over the Aug. 7, 1970, shootout at Marin County Civic Center, which was touched off by guns smuggled into the courtroom trial of a convict. A judge, two convicts and the gun smuggler were killed. Magee is charged with killing the judge.

Record Security

The present security for Magee at the Hall of Justice exceeds that put into effect at the Marin Civic Center after the shootout. It also exceeds that at the San Jose trial of Angela Davis, self-admitted owner of the smug-



Drawing shows how a woman spectator is searched before being admitted to court

Sketch by Rosalie Ritz

gled guns.

Neither at Marin Civic Center in San Rafael nor at San Jose, where Miss Davis was acquitted of kidnap-murder-conspiracy, were men and women subjected to separate examination. Women in those two trial spots did not have to remove clothing.

This week at the Hall of Justice, an Examiner woman reporter with 26 years of San Francisco newspaper experience was required to submit to the standard "skin search" — despite her police identification card and the fact she is widely known at the Hall of Justice.

'Take It Off'

She was taken behind the examination partition where a police matron said, "Please remove your girdle."

"I am not wearing a girdle," she replied. "Just pantyhose. Do I have to take them down?"

"You do," the uniformed matron said.

"But what if a woman was menstruating? Would she still have to be examined this way?"

"She would."

"Would she have to remove the sanitary napkin?"

"Yes."

This (male) Examiner staffer — 47 years in newspaper work, 31 in San Francisco — has been assigned to the Magee case since it was transferred from Marin County. Some deputies and some police greet him on a first name basis.

Body Search

But each time he goes out of the courtroom, even for just five minutes to make a telephone call, when he returns he must remove everything from his pockets and undergo a body search.

Male newsmen and spectators are examined out in the open corridor in front of the women's partition.

Unlike the women, they do not have to take off any clothes or remove their shoes. But they must empty their pockets, including pens and coins.

Metal Detector

Then they are hand-felt from shoulders to ankles, including inside the legs from crotch to shoe tops. Finally, they must turn around and kick back so that the soles of

their shoes are completely visible.

A spectator obtains an admittance card on the first floor after going through a metal detector to make sure no weapon is being carried into the courthouse.

Card in hand, the spectator takes the elevator to the third floor where security police stand guard with long riot sticks and holstered weapons.

The card-carrier moves past signs reading, "Restricted area. No loitering," and along a roped-off area to a desk. There a sheriff's deputy assigns a seat number. The number is put on a wall of the corridor. The spectator stands beside the number and is photographed by a police cameraman.

After that — the body search.

Glass Shield

Then a sheriff's deputy escorts the spectator to the assigned seat. The spectators are separated from the judge, the attorneys and the defendant by a \$15,000 bullet-resistant glass panel and must hear proceedings over loudspeakers.

The 20 policemen, three sergeants and a lieutenant assigned to security have a total daily salary of \$1331.

More than 15 uniformed sheriff's deputies are seen in and outside the courtroom.

Floor-Wide Ban

No cameras, no television crews, no tape recorders are allowed anywhere on the third floor. Professional sketching is permitted inside the courtroom. That's all.

Three pages in large type, signed by Superior Judge Morton Colvin as of June 5, spell out the rules.

Justification

Judge Colvin's 15 point order merely repeated one first put into effect last year by Superior Judge S. Lee Vavuris for the John Clutchette-Fleeta Drumgo trial over the killing of a Soledad

prison guard.

Judge Vavuris said in court that the Aug. 7, 1970, shootout and the Aug. 21, 1971, killing of six men at San Quentin warranted the stringent regulations. Judge Vavuris said it might be

even necessary to examine the inside of a woman's vagina to make sure she was not concealing an explosive.

Yesterday afternoon when Judge Colvin was asked about the necessity of repeatedly examining a veter-

an news staffer who is well known in the courthouse, he replied:

"I wasn't aware of any problems about repeated searches. Come in and see me and I will take any appropriate steps."