

Ex-FBI Operative Says He Infiltrated Vets to Hear Plans

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GAINESVILLE, Fla., Aug. 15—A former leader of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War testified today that he had been an FBI "intelligence operative" for the past two years, with the agency paying him on a regular basis for attending VVAW meetings across the country.

Charles Henry Becker III, now a department store detective in New Orleans, made the disclosure in the trial of eight VVAW members charged with conspiracy to riot at the 1972 Republican National Convention in Miami Beach.

Today's testimony and cross-examination were marked by frequent comments directed at defense attorneys by U. S. District Court Judge Winston E. Arnou, who threatened all of them with contempt citations at one point because they participated with defendants in a standing, minute-long observation of silence after the jury was called in this morning to draw attention to the end of the bombing in Cambodia.

As the day progressed, Arnou refused to allow the defense attorneys to question Becker about any agreements that were made at planning sessions during which the riot plans were allegedly discussed. The defense contends that such agreements would have to be formal, "more than just a bull session," for the defendants to be convicted on a conspiracy count.

"This is the heart of the charge," said defense attorney Morton Stavis.

"If we can't defend ourselves against the indictment—" began defendant William Patterson, before he was ordered by the judge to "sit down." The judge then told Patterson and Stavis that he may be forced to take "further action" if they persisted in arguing with him.

Becker said that he had been an informant for the New Orleans police department since 1967, and began working for the FBI on the VVAW case in January, 1971.

He said he worked for the FBI until a grand jury hearing on the case last June, at which time "my assignment ended." The defendants seized on Becker's use of the word "assignment," suggesting that this was an imputation that he was assigned to provoke violence and get the VVAW members indicted.

The defense is attempting to show that Becker and other informers acted as agent provocateurs, and that the case is an attempt by the Nixon administration to discredit the VVAW and provide a justification for the Watergate break-in.

"It was a loose use of the word," Becker said of the term "assignment." He said he had been "very nervous" in testifying.

"Have you used other words loosely in your testimony?" one defense attorney asked.

On several occasions today, defense attorneys attempted to link Becker to the Watergate scandal and the Committee for the Re-election of the President. Becker denied ever having reported to or been assigned by persons connected with the White House or the President's campaign group.

The defense attorneys were called to the bench by Judge Arnou at a mid-morning recess concerning their participation in the demon-

stration. He told marshals to "use force, if necessary" to make sure that the attorneys came forward.

The judge asked the attorneys to explain why they participated in the silent 60-second demonstration, and to tell him whether they had advance knowledge of the protest.

"The court is suggesting that if I answer that question, I should be prepared for a contempt citation," defense attorney Larry Turner said. Turner and others said they would refuse to answer the question, based upon their Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination.

"This is a question of contempt, not the Fifth Amendment," Arnou snapped back. However, after upbraiding the attorneys for what he considered unprofessional conduct, Arnou said he would "let the matter drop."

Becker, without a bushy beard that he wore while a VVAW member, calmly recounted the various sessions at which he said the defendants proposed illegal, violent acts. Much of his testimony was in narrative form, interrupted only by Assistant U.S. Attorney Jack Carrouth asking, "What next?"

Becker said that defendant Scott Camil told him that wrist-braced slingshots allegedly carried by veterans at rallies could be hidden in the groins and around the ankles of bell-bottom trousers. That statement was used by Carrouth in his opening argument and later shown to have been made by an FBI agent.

"Did Scott Camil demonstrate how this could be hidden in a groin?" asked defendant John Kniffin, waving the 6-inch-by-6-inch T-shaped metal slingshot in his hand.

"No, sir," Becker replied.

Becker corroborated much of the testimony given by FBI informer William W. Lemmer, who was on the stand for the last week. He recalled meetings at Camil's Gainesville home at which the slingshots were demonstrated and a crossbow fired.

At one point during the Gainesville meeting, defendant Peter Mahoney took him to one side and told him that "If you don't want to participate in violence, get out now," Becker testified.

Becker identified various defendants who were at the meeting by walking down from the witness stand and placing his hands on their shoulders. Mahoney later described Becker as one of his closest friends in New Orleans whom he often defended against charges that he might be an informer.

"It hurts," Mahoney said on discovering that Becker was, in fact, employed by the FBI during his entire membership with VVAW.

After defense attorneys began their intense cross-examination, Becker occasionally snapped his answers and often said "I don't recall" when asked specific details about conversations and meetings he attended with defendants.

Neither Becker nor Lemmer have been able to recall how much money they received from the FBI for their work.

On at least two occasions, defense attorneys made references before the jury concerning Becker's "selective memory." Arnou warned the attorneys about making such statements in court.