

Watergate Trial Opens; Jury Screening Begins

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 8—At least seven of President Nixon's White House aides and campaign workers were among 60 potential witnesses announced by the Government today as the Watergate trial opened in United States District Court here.

A panel of 254 prospective jurors, crowded into a large, windowless, sixth-floor courtroom, was trimmed to about 100 members after six hours of questioning by Chief Judge John J. Sirica. No jurors were finally seated.

The prosecution's witness list included none of the prominent figures in the Administration or in the Committee for the Re-election of the President who had been questioned during the Watergate investigation.

Two present White House officials were called. They are Bruce Kehrli, staff secretary to Mr. Nixon, and Fred Fielding, assistant to the legal counsel to the President.

Both men were involved in the search of a safe in the old Executive Office Building that had been used by E. Howard Hunt Jr., one of seven defendants in the trial and a former White House consultant.

Safe's Items Removed

A number of items, including an unloaded pistol and "a large amount of electronic equipment" identified by the Government as Mr. Hunt's property, were removed from the safe and sent to the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The search was carried out two or three days after five men, all of them among the defendants in the trial, were arrested inside the offices of the Democratic National Committee in the Watergate Office Building on June 17.

Mr. Fielding's superior, John W. Dean 3d, legal counsel to the President, was not among those identified as witnesses today. Mr. Dean conducted an investigation of the Watergate affair for the President.

Another witness connected with the White House is a former secretary, Kathleen Chenow. She is expected to testify about a telephone in the Executive Office Building on which Mr. Hunt is said to have talked with Bernard L. Barker, a co-defendant.

Officials of the President's campaign organization who are expected to appear are Robert C. Edle Jr., director of administration, Herbert L. Porter, scheduling chief; Hugh W. Sloan Jr., former treasurer, and Jeb S. Magruder, one-time deputy director.

Two of the defendants had formal ties with the re-election committee. G. Gordon Liddy was counsel to its finance arm, and James W. McCord Jr. was

ts salaried security chief. Both men were dismissed after the June 17 arrests.

Those eliminated as prospective jurors today were dropped after basic questions, such as whether there were young children or infirm adults who needed their care at home. Judge Sirica estimated the length of the trial at four to six weeks.

All the questions were posed to the prospective panel members in mass, at the bench, or in a small room behind the courtroom. The judge has said he could try to speed selection by advancing all questions himself.

The defendants, their lawyers, and the prosecutors filed into the courtroom, waving passes at the closely guarded door, after standing together in small knots long a hallway outside.

Mr. Hunt, a former agent of the Central Intelligence Agency who was wearing a gray topcoat with a fur-like collar and was clenching a pipe in his teeth, appeared pale and tense. His wife was killed in an airplane crash last month.

Mr. Liddy's relaxed appearance presented a sharp contrast. He waved jauntily to jurors in each section of the courtroom, and during part of today's session sat with his eyes closed and his head propped against a hand.

Aside from Mr. Hunt, Mr. Liddy, Mr. McCord and Mr. Barker, the defendants include Frank A. Sturgis, Eugenio R. Martinez and Virgilio R. Gon-



Associated Press

Henry B. Rothblatt, second from right, lawyer for the Watergate defendants, chats with four of the seven men during a pause in the trial. From left are Virgilio R. Gonzalez, Frank A. Sturgis and Eugenio R. Martinez; at right is Bernard L. Barker.

zalez, all friends of Mr. Barker's who live in Miami.

The seven are named in an eight-count indictment that accuses them principally of second-degree burglary and a conspiracy to bug and wiretap the Democratic headquarters last May and June.

The Government witnesses—none were named by the defense—ranged widely. They included a college student, Thomas James Gregory, of New Providence, R. I., and Morton B. Jackson, a prominent Los Angeles attorney.

Also named were France Rere, a waiter who is said to have seen a number of the defendants dining at a Watergate restaurant on the eve of the break-in, and David P. Quinn,

a Rockville, Md., banker.

A number of men and women whose articles have appeared in the newspapers were also called. Chief among these was Alfred C. Baldwin 3d, a former F.B.I. agent who has said he was involved in the bugging operation.

The courthouse atmosphere was relatively relaxed. There were several light moments today, including one when those familiar with the C.I.A. backgrounds of Mr. Hunt and several other defendants heard one prospective juror identified as an employe of the agency.