

Watergate Bugging Trial

JAN 9 1973

1/9/73

150 Freed From Jury Duty

By Lawrence Meyer

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Chief U.S. District Judge

John J. Sirica excused more than 150 prospective jurors after they apparently told him that being sequestered for the duration of the Watergate bugging trial would cause them serious hardships.

After about 5½ hours of questioning the approximately 260 prospective jurors assembled for the trial, with Sirica giving a guess that it would last about six weeks, only 100 prospective jurors were left in

the sprawling ceremonial courtroom of the U.S. District Court here.

Before the proceedings began yesterday morning, the seven defendants in the case stood in small groups talking to each other and to their lawyers. They are charged with conspiracy, burglary and violations of federal wiretap laws in connection with the June 17 break-in and alleged bugging of the Democratic National Committee's headquarters at the Watergate here.

In court, Sirica briefly admonished the prospective ju-

rors to answer truthfully all questions asked them. Sirica then introduced the chief prosecutor for the trial, Earl J. Silbert, the 36-year-old principal assistant U.S. attorney who directed the three-month investigation that resulted in the indictments.

Silbert in turn introduced the other lawyers in the case and the defendants. G. Gordon Liddy, a former White House aide who was fired from the Committee for the Re-election of the President after refusing to answer questions by FBI

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WATERGATE, From A1 agents, was the first of the defendants to be introduced.

Liddy, a stocky man of medium height, rose and waved his right hand several times toward the jurors.

E. Howard Hut Jr., another former White House consultant and a defendant, looked pale and appeared to have lost weight in the last month. Hunt's wife was killed in a plane crash in Chicago several weeks ago.

The other defendants—James W. McCord Jr., Bernard L. Barker, Eugenio R. Martinez, Frank Sturgis and Virgilio R. Gonzales—all were introduced in turn and appeared relaxed as they faced the prospective jurors.

McCord, 53, the former security coordinator for the President's re-election committee, was arrested inside the Democratic Party's offices in the Watergate on June 17 along with Barker, Martinez, Sturgis and Gonzales.

Barker, 55, is a Miami real estate agent who served under Fidel Castro's guerrilla movement but became disillusioned and fled Cuba in 1959.

Sturgis, 48, often described as a soldier of fortune, fought with Fidel Castro's guerrilla army in Cuba and later reportedly helped train anti-Castro guerrillas.

Martinez, a real estate salesman in Barker's Miami office,

has been active in anti-Castro circles in Miami.

Gonzales, like Martinez, a Cuban refugee, works as a locksmith in Miami.

Silbert read a list of 60 prospective witnesses that the prosecution may call, including six present or former aides to President Nixon or the Committee for the Re-election of the President. The purpose of reading the list was to determine whether any of the prospective jurors knew any of the prospective prosecution witnesses. Defense lawyers said they had no witnesses to bring before the prospective jurors at the present time.

Sirica then informed the prospective jurors, who filled every available seat in the court except eight set aside for a press pool, that he would sequester the jury for the duration of the trial so that jurors would be insulated from publicity surrounding the case.

Jurors will be housed on the seventh and eighth floors of the courthouse and will not be allowed to go home until the trial is concluded, Sirica said. "In short," the judge told the prospective jurors, "you're going to be required to give up some of your usual activities, businesses or pleasure for the duration of this trial."

Sirica emphasized that he was sequestering the jury on his own initiative. "You should

not blame any single attorney on the defense or the government for this decision," Sirica said.

The prospective jurors were then asked if any of them had responsibilities at home to any aged or infirm person or to very young children or if there were any other reason that would pose serious problems for them if they were selected as jurors. Initially, only about 70 persons stood up, but this number doubled as a deputy marshal announced the name of each standing prospective juror.

Sirica and the prosecution and defense lawyers then went into a conference room behind the courtroom, where the prospective jurors who felt they could not serve were called in one at a time. The interviews took about three hours, with an hour break for lunch. At one point, Liddy dozed at the defense table, his head propped up on his arm.

The overwhelming majority of the more than 150 prospective jurors who had reasons for not serving were excused.

Sirica returned at mid-afternoon and asked if any prospective jurors had heard or read anything about the case. Only about 15 to 20 of the 100 or so jurors remaining did not stand up in response to this question. Sirica is expected to examine the effect of pretrial publicity on the

prospective jurors in more detail today when the selection process resumes.

Yesterday, however, Sirica concluded with standard questions concerning whether anyone knew any of the prospective witnesses, had relatives who were law enforcement officers, had served on juries before or could not, if selected, give a verdict based solely on the evidence.

Before dismissing the prospective jurors for the night, Sirica instructed them not to discuss the case with anyone and not to read anything about the case or listen to broadcasts or telecasts discussing the trial.



Attorney Henry Rothblatt (third from left) stands with Watergate trial defendants Virgilio Gonzalez, Frank Stur-

gis, Bernard Barker and Eugenio Martinez (from left). The trial is expected to last about six weeks.

By Margaret Thomas—The Washington Post