

# 7 Give Pleas Of Not Guilty In Cover-Up

George Lardner Jr.  
Washington Post Staff Writer

The most powerful men of President Nixon's first administration stood with their defense lawyers in U.S. District Court here yesterday and pleaded not guilty to conspiring to obstruct justice in the Watergate scandal.

Their titles gone, they clustered before the bench in Chief Judge John J. Sirica's courtroom as the clerk called their names one by one in a routine, unceremonious monotone.

Two of them, former White House domestic affairs adviser John D. Ehrlichman, 48, and former White House special counsel Charles W. Colson, 42, were arraigned at the same time on another set of conspiracy charges stemming from the 1971 break-in at the offices of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist. Again they pleaded not guilty.

The entire hearing lasted only four minutes and 55 seconds. All seven defendants were released on their own recognizance. A crowd of about 200 waited for them outside the courthouse on John Marshall Place with signs that said "Law and Order" and "Nixon's Next."

Former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, 60, was the first to plead and one of the first to leave. Police escorted him to his car past shouts of "Sieg, Heil" and "Preventive Detention for Mitchell."

Suddenly one demonstrator wearing an outsized papier-mache Nixon mask decided to drop his pants. Police wrapped a coat around him before he could streak and hustled him off on a charge of disorderly conduct. "He just had the urge," police said later. Someone in the crowd borrowed his mask.

The other defendants drifted out sporadically: H. R. (Bob) Haldeman, 47, former White House chief of staff; former White House aide Gordon Strachan, 30; former Assistant Attorney General Robert C. Mardian, 50, and Kenneth W. Parkinson, 46, attorney for the Committee for the Re-election of the President.

Sirica gave their lawyers until May 1 to submit pretrial motions in their defense. Wat-

ergate special prosecutors have until June 3 to reply. The Watergate trial has been tentatively set for Sept. 9.

See **ARRAIGN, A13, Col. 1**

## ARRAIGN, From A1

The indictment stemming from the Ellsberg break-in in Los Angeles has been assigned to Judge Gerhard A. Gesell, who has yet to fix a trial date. Colson and Ehrlichman were arraigned before Sirica on these charges for the sake of convenience, at Gesell's request.

The grand jury that indicted the seven men for the Watergate cover-up—which Sirica intends to try himself—also issued a secret report summarizing evidence concerning Mr. Nixon's possible involvement and asked that it be sent to the House Judiciary Committee for use in its impeachment inquiry.

Sirica said after the hearing yesterday that he hoped to decide that issue as soon as possible with "a clear and unambiguous opinion."

In a letter filed with the court, White House special counsel James D. St. Clair asked for the right to review the report on Mr. Nixon's behalf if Sirica should decide to forward it and a briefcase full of documents to the House Judiciary Committee.

St. Clair also asked for permission to copy any of the grand jury materials "if I deem any to be relevant." The White House lawyer said he felt this would be "in accordance with the concept of fundamental fairness."

Watergate prosecutors indicated at a hearing before Sirica last week that the grand jury report covers not only documents and tapes

obtained from the White House, but also evidence obtained from other sources.

Sirica made no comment on St. Clair's request. House Judiciary Committee Chairman Peter W. Rodino (D-N.J.) asked the judge in another letter simply to send the committee whatever the grand jury turned over to him.

"The committee has been proceeding and will continue expeditiously with its impeachment inquiry in a manner that takes fully into account the interests of individuals and the orderly conduct of other governmental processes," Rodino wrote.

Rodino hinted strongly that he felt the judge had no other choice but to turn over the report. "Central to the committee's procedure," Rodino said, "and to our system of government, is the essential dominant responsibility and power reposed by the Constitution alone."

In a reply dated Friday, Sirica said Rodino would have an answer shortly, but emphasized that the controversy was, for the moment, before the courts.

The White House has said it will go along with whatever Sirica decides, but lawyers for the new Watergate seven have protested that release of the secret grand jury report to the House committee could destroy their rights to a fair trial.

Yesterday's arraignment itself was dry, but the gathering was full of little ironies and double takes. Currently on trial on other conspiracy charges in New York, Mitchell walked in and spotted Frieda Reiter, a sketch artist for ABC television, in the front row. Her identical twin, Ida Den-grove, has been sketching the former Attorney General every day for NBC at Mitchell's New York trial.

"The two of you sure look alike," Mitchell said.

A few minutes later, Watergate Special Prosecutor Lone Jaworski came in. He walked over to Mitchell, shook his hand and said cheerily: "John, how are you? It's good to see you again."

Mitchell said he was feeling "fairly well." His face was wan. His hair seemed much grayer than it was two years ago when he was the nation's chief law enforcement officer.

Judge Sirica opened the session at 10:58 a.m. by the courtroom clock, two minutes before the appointed hour, and called the defendants to the bench. All waived a reading of the 50-page indictment accusing them of trying to block the original Watergate investigation with lies to the FBI.

the Watergate grand jury and the Senate Watergate committee and with the payment of hush money to the original seven Watergate defendants.

Clerk James Capitanio called the roll. Mitchell, who faces six felony charges, came first.

"Not guilty as to all counts," he pleaded.

The rest followed suit, in the order prescribed by the indictment: Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Colson, Mardian, Parkinson, Strachan. Then Colson and Ehrlichman were arraigned again on charges of conspiring to violate the civil rights of Ellsberg's psychiatrist, Dr. Lewis Fielding, in that break-in.

Thirty charges in all have been lodged against the seven men in the two cases. All are felonies carrying maximum prison terms of five years each—except for the civil rights conspiracy charges against Ehrlichman and Colson, which carry a 10-year maximum penalty.

Watergate Assistant Special Prosecutor Richard Ben-Veniste offered no objection to Sirica's releasing the defendants without bail money, but asked that they be required to surrender their passports. The order produced two from Strachan, neither of them currently valid, and one from Mardian.

The defendants were not taken downstairs for the fingerprinting that usually follows arraignments, but Sirica told reporters later that all seven "were finger printed." He did not say when.

"They didn't get any preferential treatment," Sirica said.

None had any comment on the charges against them. But as he left the courtroom, Mitchell again ran into ABC artist Frieda Reiter. "Mr. Mitchell, give my sister my love," she told him.

"I will. We talk to each other every day," Mitchell replied.

"She says you're lovely," she said.

"She's right," Mitchell said.