

Watergate Trial Starts Today for 5

Washington

U.S. District Judge John J. Sirica will begin the Watergate coverup trial today with five defendants instead of six.

Yesterday Sirica granted a request from Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski that former White House aide Gordon Strachan be given a separate trial.

The renewed request from Strachan's lawyers that the conspiracy, obstruction of justice and perjury charges against him be dismissed was turned down by Sirica.

The five remaining defendants include three of former President Nixon's closest advisers — H. R. Haldeman, John D. Ehrlichman and former Attorney General John N. Mitchell — and former assistant Attorney General Robert Mardian and Kenneth Parkinson, attorney for the Nixon re-election committee.

Meanwhile, Sirica tried in a closed hearing yesterday to clear up remaining legal issues.

Among those apparently called to testify at the closed hearing was former White House chief of staff Haldeman, whose lawyers are questioning the accuracy of transcripts of White House tapes prepared by the special prosecutor's office.

Another issue is whether the 33 presidential tapes the prosecutors want used as evidence can be authenticated without an appearance in the courtroom by Mr. Nixon.

While the transcripts question is likely to be cleared up before Sirica begins questioning a pool of 1000 prospective jurors, the authentication issue is likely to be hedged off for a week or 10 days.

Inside the courtroom, technicians were busy placing finishing touches on the listening system that will allow the jury and everyone else to hear the White House tapes on individually installed earphones.

Strachan's separate trial is unlikely to begin before the end of the main Watergate trial, expected to take a



AP Wirephoto

GORDON STRACHAN Separate trial

minimum of three months. In his order, Sirica said the legal issues Strachan raised merit a separate pre-trial hearing, for which there is no time before the main trial begins.

At issue in Strachan's case is testimony he gave to a Watergate grand jury in exchange for what he believes to be the promise that he would not be prosecuted.

The former personal aide to Haldeman claims that when the immunity deal fell through, the special prosecutor's office improperly used the grand jury testimony as part of the evidence in the indictment.

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