

Watergate Trial Begins--Slowly

Washington

The trial of the Watergate coverup case began here yesterday, finally bringing to a court of law the events that caused a two-year national trauma and forced Richard M. Nixon from the White House.

Judge John J. Sirica convened the case at 9:29 a.m., one minute before schedule, in the huge and stark ceremonial courtroom at the U.S. Courthouse here.

He spent most of the next 7½ hours going through the first stages of trying to select a jury — a task that yesterday's proceedings showed will be vastly more difficult than in a normal trial.

By day's end, after only preliminary questioning, much of it closed to the public, he had eliminated 90 of the 155 prospective jurors on the first panel summoned for the case.

On trial before him were five men who once worked for Mr. Nixon, either at the White House or at the Committee to Re-Elect the President.

They face possible prison terms ranging from five years for one defendant to 30 years for another. Each is charged with the basic count of conspiracy — of plotting to obstruct the investigation of the June 17, 1972 break-in of the Democratic national headquarters at the Watergate complex and some of them facing additional counts charging such crimes as perjury.

Former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, faces the heaviest possible penalty, 30 years. Next are H. R. Halde- man and John D. Ehrlich- man, who were Mr. Nixon's two top aides at the White House. They face possible penalties of up to 25 years each.

Kenneth W. Parkinson, the

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attorney for the Committee to Re-Elect the President, is the fourth defendant, facing a possible maximum term of 10 years. Robert C. Mardian, once assistant attorney general in charge of internal security is the fifth, facing a possible five-year sentence.

At the start of the proceedings Sirica summarized the 12-count indictment, listing the charges against each of the five, to the full panel of prospective jurors. Then, late in the afternoon, he had the defendants stand one by one to be introduced by name to the 65 prospective veniremen who had remained after the initial screening.

In the two years and three months since the break-in, the men who actually committed the burglary have been prosecuted; the office of the special Watergate prosecutor was established; the Senate Watergate Committee held its nationally televised hearings; the first special prosecutor, Archi-

bald Cox was fired; Congress started impeachment proceedings, and Richard M. Nixon resigned.

During that time the Watergate scandal dominated the nation's consciousness and the story of the coverup — emerging in bits and pieces — shocked many Americans' confidence in their system of justice.

The grand jury that returned the indictment in the case last March 1 named Mr. Nixon as a co-conspirator in the coverup and would have indicted him, had it not been for legal questions surrounding the indictability of an incumbent President. Mr. Nixon escaped possible prosecution only through the pardon he received from President

Ford.

His White House tape recordings will be the basis of the prosecution's case; his former aides will be witnesses.

The first day of the cover-up trial was, perhaps more than most trials, a mixture of the dramatic and the tedious, of the solemn and the humorous.

It began with a minor anti-Nixon, anti-Rockefeller demonstration by a scattering of pickets whose only audience, when the pickets arrived, was the huge press contingent gathered for the trial.

As Ehrlichman arrived with his wife a few minutes later, one of the pickets, who had been holding up a placard saying "support Nixon's bloodclot," spat upon Ehrlichman. The placard also bore the designation "Pal," which the demonstrators said stood for "Phlebitis action league." Ehrlichman continued into the courthouse.

Inside the courtroom, the five defendants greeted one another. At least a few of them are expected to try during the trial to show that the others were the responsible ones in the coverup, but yesterday morning, the greetings were at least outwardly friendly.

Judge Sirica started the proceedings in the usual manner for criminal trials, warning the jury panel members to answer questions truthfully, summarizing the indictment, and telling the jurors that if selected they would be sequestered and that the trial might last through Christmas.

Then he asked the prospective jurors a first, basic question: Did anyone think he or she would be uncomfortable to be on a sequestered jury in this case, or that service on the jury would interfere unreasonably with something he or she was obligated to do. He asked anyone who answered affirmatively to stand up.

More than 90 answered it by standing up.

Judge Sirica read a list of nearly 100 possible defense witnesses, including such names as Henry Kissinger and Mr. Nixon, asking if the panel members knew any of

them.

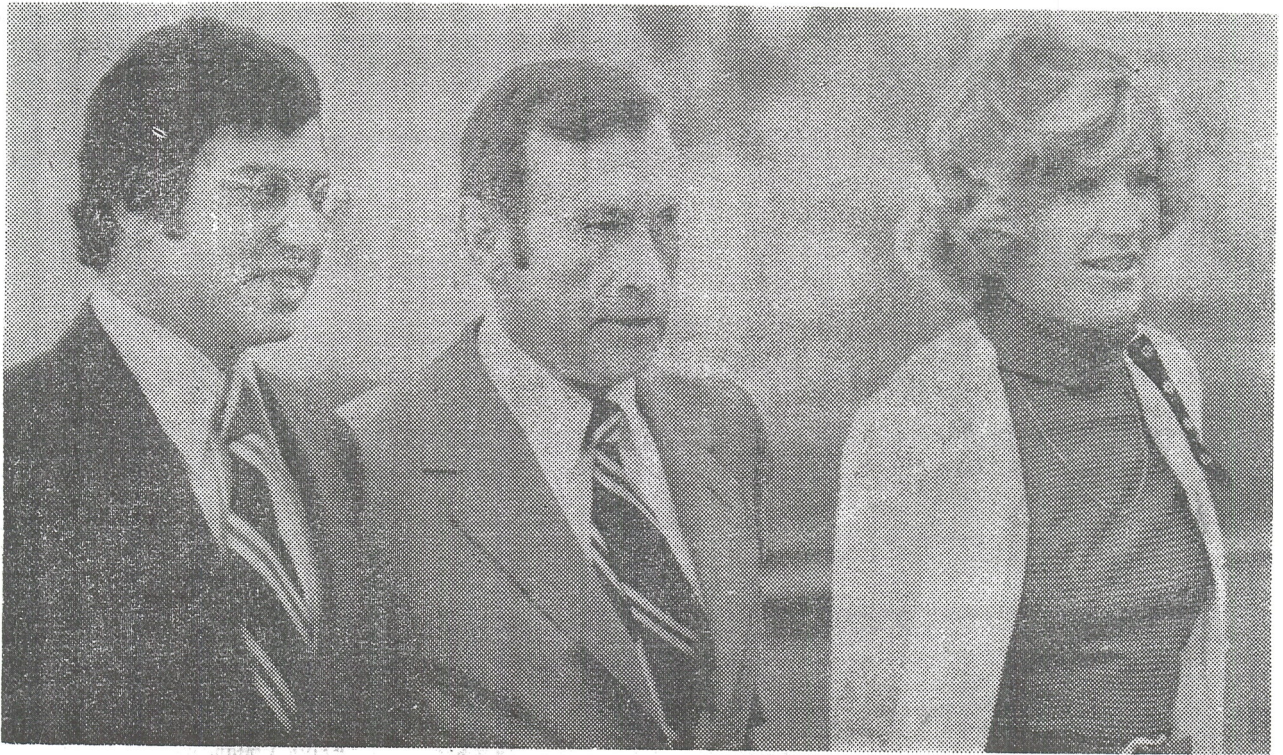
The questioning produced no one who did.

Judge Sirica also asked if anybody in the group had been arrested. In one of the few light moments of the day, a man named Peter Hatt got to his feet and of-

ferred "My mother's arrest for a Pentagon sit-in."

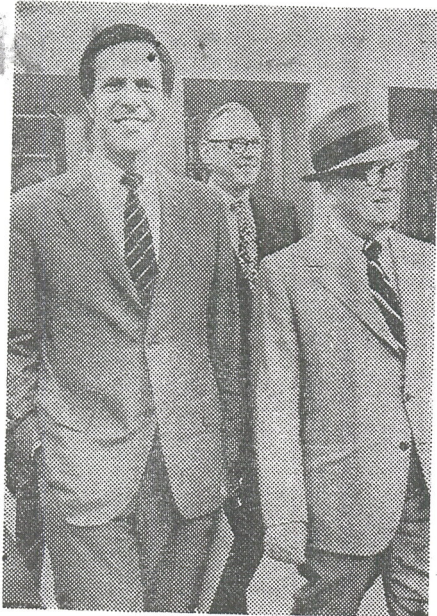
A second panel of 150 prospective jurors is scheduled to come to court today to go through a similar preliminary screening.

New York Times



UPI Telephoto

Special prosecutors in the Watergate trial are (from left) Richard Ben-Veniste, James Neal and Jill Volner



AP Wirephoto

H. R. Haldeman and his attorney John Wilson left courthouse yesterday.



AP Wirephoto

John Ehrlichman and his wife arrived for beginning of coverup trial.



UPI Telephoto

JOHN MITCHELL
A tedious start



AP Wirephoto

ROBERT MARDIAN
Ex-Mitchell aide



AP Wirephoto

KENNETH PARKINSON
Campaign lawyer