

Praise for Sirica

Court Upholds Liddy Conviction

Washington

A unanimous U.S. Court of Appeals, praising trial Judge John Sirica, upheld yesterday the burglary, wire-tapping and conspiracy conviction of original Watergate defendant G. Gordon Liddy.

The seven judges said Sirica acted "in the highest tradition of his office as a federal judge" in cross-examining witnesses on his own in the original Watergate trial before the magnitude of the scandal was known.

All seven of the original Watergate defendants have appeals pending before the U.S. Court of Appeals. Liddy's was the first appeal to be acted on.

In their 33-page decision, the judges said a trial judge has the right to ferret out any testimony "he believes to be perjurious or highly questionable."

Some Watergate principals — among them former Nixon re-election committee

deputy director Jeb Stuart Magruder — have admitted lying at the trial in trying to cover up the original June 17, 1972, break-in at Democratic National Committee headquarters.

During the first trial, Sirica not only extensively questioned Nixon finance committee treasurer Hugh Sloan when the jury was out of the room, but read Sloan's testimony to the jurors when they returned.

In supporting Sirica's aggressive role during the trial, the appeals court said that obtaining truthful testimony is particularly important when "the case involves the integrity of the nation's political system."

The appeals court noted that while there were some legal errors committed by Sirica as he questioned various witnesses, the mistakes "were not of a kind that deprived defendants of a fair trial."

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