

Judge Sirica Felled by Heart Attack

Washington

U.S. District Judge John Sirica, who gained national recognition for his dogged pursuit of the truth in the Watergate trials, suffered a massive heart attack yesterday.

His condition was critical.

But hospital spokesmen who disclosed the diagnosis said that within a few hours of the attack Sirica was awake and able to breathe unaided.

"All things considered, he is doing as well as one can hope for so soon after a massive heart attack with cardiac arrest," said Dr. Joel Gorfinkel, associate director of George Washington University Hospital's coronary care unit.

Sirica, a month shy of his 72nd birthday, pitched over the lectern while speaking on lawyers' obligation to professional ethics. His audience was 270 alumni of George Washington University Law School, including many fellow judges.

The hospital said that an electrical shock was administered to Sirica while he was in the emergency room and "the shock caused his heart to resume effective pumping action."

A statement in early evening said that Sirica "appears to have suffered no neurological damage as far as his doctors can tell. His blood pressure is normal and does not require the support of medication. His condition remains critical."

The first 24 to 48 hours after a heart attack are deemed the most crucial period.



AP Wirephoto

JOHN SIRICA
He presided at Watergate trial

For two years, beginning with the trial of the Watergate break-in defendants in January, 1973, through the Watergate coverup trial, Sirica was almost totally occupied with Watergate.

It was he who ordered former President Nixon to turn over the covertly recorded White House tapes, a ruling that eventually was upheld in the Supreme Court and was instrumental in Mr. Nixon's resignation.

Sirica put pressure on the Watergate burglars to testify before a grand jury.

It was to Sirica that James McCord Jr. addressed the letter that resulted in the Watergate coverup falling apart.

Sirica has been a federal judge since April, 1957, when he was appointed by President Eisenhower.

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