

# Scientology Leaders Guilty of Conspiracy

## Judge Convicts Nine Accused of Infiltrating Federal Agencies

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WASHINGTON—Nine Church of Scientology leaders were convicted Friday on charges stemming from a four-year church program to burglarize, bug and infiltrate various federal agencies with which Scientology has battled for two decades.

On two occasions during the four-hour court proceeding, a fragile plea-bargaining agreement between the defendants and federal prosecutors almost collapsed. But finally all the legal obstacles presented by defense attorneys were overcome and U.S. Dist. Judge Charles R. Richey pronounced all nine defendants guilty of one count each.

Seven of the defendants, including Mary Sue Hubbard, wife of Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard, were each found guilty of the umbrella charge of conspiring to obstruct justice, conspiring to obstruct a criminal investigation, fugitive and making false declarations to a grand jury.

Mitchell Hermann of Hollywood was convicted of conspiring to burglarize and steal government documents and bugging—technically called “intercepting an oral conversation.”

Sharon Thomas of Los Angeles, a Scientology agent who stole copies of documents from the Justice Department and the intelligence section of the U.S. Coast Guard, was found guilty of a misdemeanor charge of theft of government documents.

Scientology's own internal memoranda disclosed a carefully conceived plan to steal government files kept on Scientology and an equally elaborate plot to cover up two operatives' ties to Scientology after they had been caught in a Justice Department building in June, 1976.

Much of the data taken came from the Internal Revenue Service, which has battled for years with Scientology over its status as a tax-exempt organization.

The guilty verdicts were imposed by Richey through an unusual procedure in which the defense signed a “stipulation of evidence,” which detailed, through Scientology documents and a narrative by federal prosecutors, the scope of the four-year program, which ended two years ago.

Defense attorney's initially balked at having their clients sign the stipulation and later waiving any Fifth Amendment rights against self-incrimination.

But each time Richey insisted that, although he would not compel the defense to do anything, both actions were prerequisites for his accepting the plea-bargain agreement rather than going to trial.

Defense attorney Earl Dudley said the Scientology defense team did not deny that the 283-page submission by

the government was an accurate representation of the evidence that would have been presented at a trial. But Scientologists were unwilling to “admit to the truth” of the statements included, he said.

If the defendants had entered guilty pleas, they would have had to waive all rights to appeal. By allowing themselves to be found guilty by the judge on the basis of the stipulation, they can appeal the conviction without going through the attendant publicity of what was to have been a six-month trial.

“We do not admit guilt, we do not admit to any fact in the stipulation,” defense attorney Phillip J. Hirschkop told the court.

However, U.S. Atty. Carl S. Rauh saw the court action differently.

He said the convictions “establish that a multitude of serious crimes were committed against the United States over a four-year period by numerous high officials of the Church of Scientology.”

“Notwithstanding previous denials by these officials,” Rauh said in a prepared statement, “today they did not challenge either the accuracy or the sufficiency of the government's evidence.”

Sentencing by Richey is expected to take place within about six weeks and all the defendants but Miss Thomas could get up to five years in prison and fines of \$10,000. She could receive one year.

Also convicted Friday were: Henning Heldt and Duke Snider (no relation to the former Dodger baseball player) of Los Angeles; Richard Weigand of Van Nuys; Gregory Willardson of Beverly Hills; Cindy Raymond of Hollywood and Gerald Bennett Wolfe of Arleta.

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