

# Sirica predicts cover-up case to last months

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Watergate cover-up case went to trial Tuesday with the judge predicting it will be months before the jury renders its verdict upon men who once sat in the high councils of government with Richard M. Nixon.

Every effort will be made to conclude the trial before the holiday season, but this cannot be guaranteed, U. S. District Judge John J. Sirica said on the first day of the time-consuming process of selecting a jury.

By day's end the first pool of 155 prospective jurors had been whittled to 65 and each one will be questioned in more detail and privacy on Thursday. In the meantime, a second panel of 175 will go through the initial weeding-out process on Wednesday.

Before Sirica as defendants in a criminal conspiracy case were three men once counted as among the most powerful in government, John Mitchell, Richard Nixon's law-and-order attorney general; H. R. Haldeman, Nixon's chief of staff; and John D. Ehrlichman, through whom all domestic programs were checked to determine if they were already having their names checked.

Along with co-defendants Robert Mardian and Kenneth W. Parsons, who were employed by the Nixon re-election committee in 1972, they were accused of trying to break in through "deceit, craft, bribery and dishonest means."

As the defendants whiled away their time writing letters, doodling and talking with friends, Sirica heard and excused 90 jury prospects who had to be let out of service.

They pleaded mostly the care of children or home or problems of health.

The remaining 65 then underwent mass questioning for 1½ hours, asked if they or any member of their family ever had any dealing with nearly 100 witnesses the defense may call or the 44 expected to testify for the government.

The judge asked the prospective jurors whether any had ever worked for the Department of Justice, or the House Judiciary Committee, or the U. S. Attorney's Office, or the Senate Watergate Committee or special prosecutor's office — all of whom have investigated some aspect of Watergate.

The judge asked about prior jury experience, about prior involvement in any lawsuits and whether

any potential juror was unable to accept the law in its entirety or had any "moral, ethical, philosophical or religious" reason for not wanting to sit in judgement of others.

Finally, Sirica asked: "Is there anyone who cannot presume that the defendants who stand before you are innocent men?" None of the panelists stood in answer to that question.

The thoroughness of the proceeding made it certain that no jury will be empaneled before Friday at the earliest.

Sirica has not said how many challenges-without-cause he will

permit the government and the five defendants, and the final pool depends on that decision.

There will be 12 jurors and six alternates for the trial.

The judge admonished the potential jurors to stay away from news accounts of the day and to refrain

from discussing the case at home, saying, "You have a very sacred duty to perform — perhaps one of the most important in your life."

All but Mardian are accused of obstruction of justice in addition to the conspiracy charge that is common to all of them.

Mitchell, Haldeman and Ehrlichman also face multiple charges of lying to investigators about Watergate.

## Hostages held for ransom

SANTO DOMINGO, Dominican Republic (AP)—Terrorists who took over the Venezuelan consulate in this Caribbean nation are holding firm to ransom demands for the release of an American woman diplomat and six other hostages, a negotiating churchman said Tuesday.

The six terrorists demanded the release of 37 imprisoned guerrillas and \$1 million in ransom after they seized American Barbara Hutchison and the others Friday.

Santo Domingo Bishop Hugh Polanco Brito, who has been conducting negotiations with the terrorists, contradicted earlier reports that the terrorists were weakening in their demands.

The Dominican government has refused to release any prisoners or pay any ransom and has offered the terrorists only safe conduct out of the country.

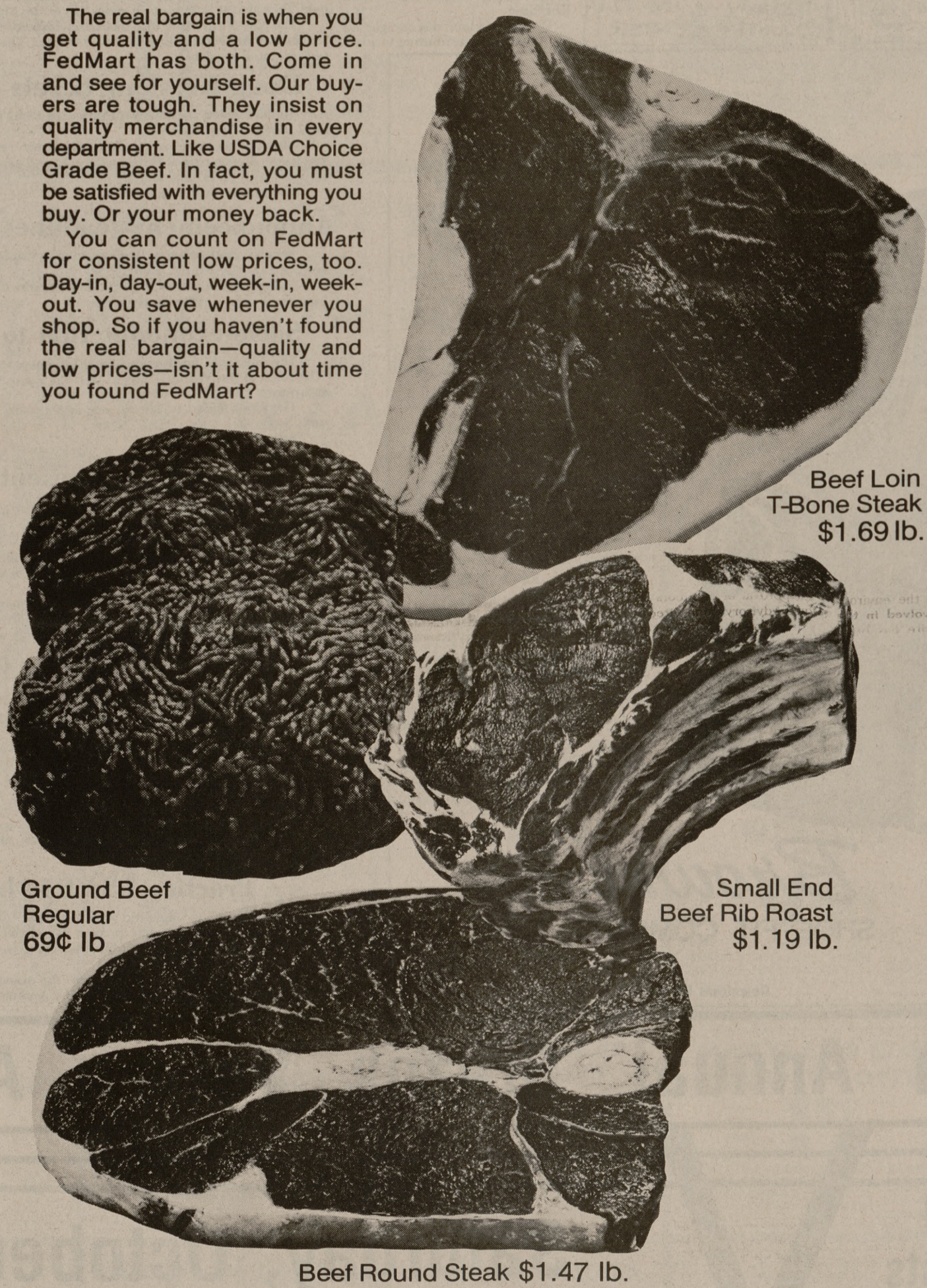
The United States government has also declined to pay ransom for release of Miss Hutchison, director of the U. S. Information Service in the Dominican Republic.

Reporting later to newsmen, Bishop Polanco Brito said he had definite word that one of the kidnapers was wounded but did not describe the nature of the wound. According to one report, one of the guerrillas accidentally shot himself in the foot Friday.

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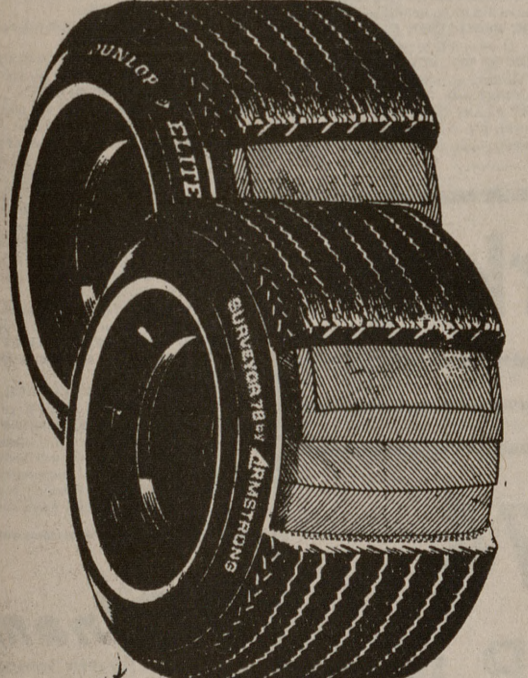
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