

GUILTY!

3 Cops, 5 Others in Heroin Conspiracy

By PAMELA JOHNSON

"We did what had to be done," said a somber-faced George Bennett as he was leaving the courtroom. "We got the core."

The Deputy Chief of Police, who has spent five precarious years of his life investigating and pursuing charges of police collusion in Detroit's flourishing narcotics traffic, was offering comment on the results of his efforts: guilty verdicts against eight men, including three of his fellow cops, for crimes that could send them to prison for five to twenty-five years.

After more than five months of testimony and argument, the 10th Precinct conspiracy trial, the longest and most complex proceeding in the history of Detroit's Recorder's Court, was finally over. And the eight men and four women who comprised the jury had finally announced their verdict on the nine Detroit police officers and six civilians charged with conspiring to sell narcotics and to obstruct justice.

It had taken the jury nearly 40 hours of deliberation over more than four days to reach their decision by late Saturday afternoon, December 20th, and the strain of passing judgment on fifteen of their fellow human beings was etched deeply in their weary faces as they filed out of Judge Justin Ravitz's courtroom for the last time.

The "core" referred to by Deputy Chief Bennett consisted of three Detroit cops who were named repeatedly, in sworn testimony from the witness stand, as being at the center of a loosely structured conspiracy to deal in heroin and cocaine, involving more than 40 people in the 10th (Livernois) Precinct—a six-square mile area on the city's west side.

Sgt. Rudy Davis, who headed the precinct narcotics unit in the 10th; Patrolman Robert "Mustache" Mitchell, who worked for 18 years in Number 10 and was also a member of the PNU; and Richard Herold, at one time a member of the Central Narcotics Section and later a patrolman in the 10th, had all been charged on two counts: conspiracy to sell narcotics (which carries a maximum sentence of twenty years); and conspiracy to obstruct justice (which specified a number of crimes, including bribery, kidnapping and murder, and carries a five-year maximum term).

Only Mitchell was found guilty on both counts, and thus faces up to 25 years in prison when Judge

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—Deputy Chief George Bennett



Defendants in the 10th Precinct Conspiracy Trial: (from left to right) Rudy Davis, Richard Herold, Charlie Brown, Willie Peeples, Robert Mitchell, Daniel O'Mara.

sketch: Barbara Weinberg

Ravitz pronounces sentencing sometime within the next two or three weeks. Davis and Herold were each convicted of the conspiracy to obstruct charge, but acquitted on the first count of conspiring to sell.

For Rudy Davis, it was the second time in the past year and a half that he has been found guilty on a conspiracy to obstruct charge. Last year Judge Ravitz gave him three to five years in another case (also stemming from George Bennett's investigation), which included testimony that Davis had taken a \$5,000 bribe from a Detroit dope dealer.

As for the civilian defendants, the only one to escape conviction was Robert Neely, who was described by his attorney, Sienna LaRene, as a master gambler and not the cocaine merchant he was alleged to be by several prosecution witnesses. Four of the other civilians were found guilty on the conspiracy to sell charge, and face incarceration for up to twenty years. They are Guido Iaconelli, Harold "Boo" Turner, Morris Bivens and Harold "Rook" Davis. Erskine Haslip, a shoe store owner who was charged with aiding in the bribery of police officers, was convicted on the second count.

Haslip's conviction, coupled with the acquittal of two police officers he was alleged to have paid off—David Slater and Willie Peeples—tends to substantiate the view held by some close observers of the case that the jury indulged in compromise and trade-off in their effort to reach a decision on all nineteen of the verdicts they were charged with rendering.

For while the acquittal of Sergeants William Stackhouse and Carlos Gonzales and patrolmen Daniel O'Mara and Charlie Brown came as no great surprise, because of the limited amount of testimony against them, the not-guilty verdicts for Peeples and Slater indicated that the jury of eight blacks and four whites did considerable picking and choosing in their search for credible testimony. Apparently they chose to accept the testimony of convicted dope dealer Milton "Happy" Battle on the subject of Guido Iaconelli.

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Is U of D Leaving Us?

By DENISE CRITTENDON

At the University of Detroit, which has caught the fiscal flu, one might say "anything goes" these days—anything but improvement, that is.

In an effort to compensate for a current \$1.2 million deficit in the U of

10th Precinct

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nelli and Erskine Haslip (who would probably not have been convicted without Battle on the stand). At the same time, they apparently decided not to believe Battle when he told of thousands of dollars in pay-offs to Slater and Peeples through Roy "Alabama Red" McNeal, another key witness for the prosecution, at Haslip's shoe store.

Beyond whether the ends of justice have been properly served in this extremely long and expensive trial (estimates of the cost range from \$2 to \$4 million), the vital question now is whether the convictions will have the effects desired and hoped for by the prosecution team as it opened its case back in July.

George Bennett and his special Detail 318, along with the Wayne County Organized Crime Task Force, headed by Roy C. Hayes and chief trial lawyer Walter Gibbs, especially wanted convictions against the cops they felt were most deeply involved in narcotics-related corruption in the 10th Precinct. Their intention was to send a tough warning to cops throughout the city that the kind of collusion that has allowed the narcotics plague to run unabated in Detroit will no longer be tolerated, and that the department now has both the will and the means to clean its own house.

But further, it was hoped that convictions with sufficiently heavy sentencing might lead certain of the cops—Davis, Mitchell and Herold in particular—to rip the so-called Blue Curtain, which has tra-

ditionally kept cops from copping on each other, and to name the higher-ups in the DPD who have often been rumored to be on the take in connection with the illicit drug business that has been spilling the life blood of this city over the past several years.

After the jury had announced its verdict, Judge Justin Ravitz told those who had been found guilty that he was going to be a "stern judge" in passing sentence on each of them. "Not a day goes by in this city," he said, "where little people don't get hurt mortally and otherwise by heroin." The eight convicted defendants, said the judge, had "contributed very serious damage and injury to this jurisdiction and community."

The Judge added that those who wish to begin to compensate for what they've done should start by telling the full truth to the Probation Department representatives who would be interviewing them shortly. And in order to give them "a period for sober reflection," the judge immediately remanded all of those convicted to the Wayne County Jail to await sentencing.

Only time will reveal the genuine effect of this extraordinary trial on the troubled life of this city, but George Bennett, who has spent the past five years under threats to his life while pursuing his investigation, announced to reporters after the verdict that his effort is far from completed.

"I want to serve notice," he said, "that this is only the beginning, that this community will not tolerate narcotics conspiracies such as this one, nor any kind of criminal police conspiracy."