

Trial Starts Of 20 Settlers Accused Of Acts Of Terror

JERUSALEM (WNS) — The trial of 20 suspected members of a Jewish terrorist underground resumed in district court here after a two-and-a-half month recess. Yaacov Bazak, the presiding Judge, rejected a defense request for further postponement.

Indictments were returned last April against 27 men, mostly West Bank settlers, who included several rabbis, a reserve military officer and leaders of the Jewish settlement movement in the West Bank, are accused of a variety of terrorist acts against Arabs in the territories and Jerusalem over a four-year period beginning in 1980. They were also charged with an attempt to bomb Arab-owned buses in East Jerusalem and conspiracy to blow up Moslem shrines on

the Temple Mount, both acts foiled by the police.

Five of the accused, tried separately last spring, were convicted and sentenced to prison terms ranging from 18 months to 10 years. Two other suspects, both former officers in the West Bank military government, will be tried separately next month. The trial of the remaining 20 was suspended last June 27, with the consent of the prosecution, to be resumed recently when the courts reconvened after summer recess.

Several of the defendants asked for additional time to appeal to the Supreme Court and to obtain classified documents. The defense claims these will prove that some of the activities attributed to the underground were known at the time to the

authorities and even had their consent. However, the trial will proceed and defense attorneys are expected to argue later that there was no such thing as a Jewish "terror organization."

Menachem Livni, one of the key defendants and identified by some as the leader of the underground, is accused of coordinating the alleged acts of terror. These include car bombings in June, 1980 which crippled two West Bank Arab mayors and blinded an Israeli Druze police sapper; a machine-gun and grenade attack on the Islamic College in Hebron in 1983 in which three students were killed and 33 wounded; and the planting of bombs in five Arab-owned buses timed to explode when the buses were travelling through heavily Arab-populated neighborhoods in East Jerusalem last April.

Police acting on inside information, foiled the plot. The arrests and subsequent interrogations of suspects indicated a link between

that plan and an earlier attempt to plant high explosives at the Dome of the Rock and the El Aksa mosque on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, two of the holiest shrines of Islam. The suspects are also

accused of opening fire on a bus carrying Arab laborers from the West Bank to jobs in Israel, causing several injuries.

The trial, which is expected to last several months, is being held

before the Jerusalem District Court in an old courthouse in East Jerusalem. Security around the building is heavy and spectators were searched for weapons before they entered.

Jean Hanna Clark

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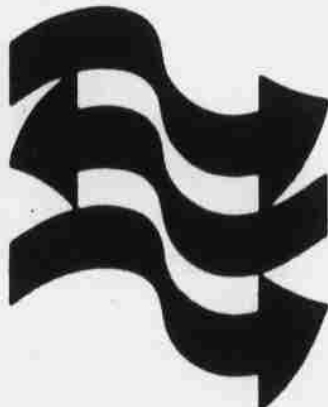
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