

# Noriega convicted on major charges in historic trial



MIAMI (AP) — Manuel Noriega, the dictator who defied a superpower, was convicted of eight of 10 drug and racketeering charges Thursday, two years after the long arm of America plucked him from Panama in a bloody invasion.

The ousted Panamanian leader's conviction included the key counts of racketeering and racketeering conspiracy. The eight counts carry a possible maximum sentence of 120 years. Sentencing was set for July 10.

U.S. Attorney James McAdams said as soon as Noriega is sentenced, he will be taken to Tampa for a trial on marijuana smuggling charges. If convicted in that case, he could be sentenced to 35 years in prison.

The defense said it would appeal the verdict.

President Bush called the conviction "a major victory against the drug lords.

"I hope it sends a lesson to drug lords here and around the world they will pay a price if they continue to poison the lives of our kids in this country or anywhere else," Bush said.

The trial marked the first time the United States in-

vaded a sovereign country and brought back its leader for a criminal trial. On Dec. 20, 1989, the United States invaded Panama. U.S. forces tracked Noriega to a Vatican mission in Panama City, surrounded it and blasted him with rock music until he surrendered.

Defense attorney Frank Rubino was bitter, and said the appeal would be based on issues including Noriega's prisoner-or-war status and the invasion.

"This, in our opinion, is the modern day version of the Crusades, that the United States will now trample across the entire world, imposing its will upon so-called independent, sovereign nations," Rubino said. "Unless the foreign governments are willing to kneel once a day and face Washington and give grace to George Bush, they, too, may be in the same posture as General Noriega."

Noriega was acquitted of cocaine distribution and conspiracy to import cocaine.

The U.S. District Court trial lasted seven months, during which the government painstakingly built its case against a head of state it called "a small man in a general's uniform" who was "just another crooked cop."

The defense maintained Noriega was a victim of U.S. politics, saying the case "smelled all the way to Washington." The attorneys portrayed the government's witnesses — confessed drug traffickers in many cases — as unscrupulous thugs looking only for a "get-out-of-jail-free card."

Much of the defense case lay in poking holes in the sometimes inconsistent testimony of prosecution witnesses. Defense lawyers also showed how few witnesses ever dealt directly with Noriega, and how many of those based their testimony on a single, whispered exchange at a party or reception.

Also, the defense enlisted the unwitting help of the CIA and the Drug Enforcement Administration to cast doubt on the prosecution's version of events.

Summaries of secret CIA cables backed Noriega's account of the Darien lab incident. The cables said Melo, not Noriega, kept the \$4 million.

And former DEA chief Frances Mullen, who headed the agency throughout most of the period covered by Noriega's indictment, said he never saw any credible evidence connecting the Panamanian leader to drug trafficking.

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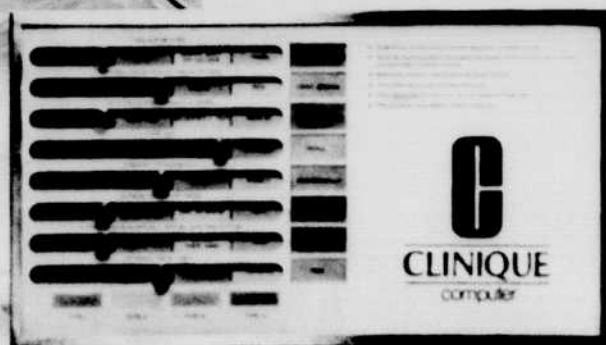
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