

Vincent Hallinan Is Dead at 95; An Innovative Lawyer With Flair

By Bruce Lambert

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Vincent W. Hallinan, a lawyer who invented a new defense trial strategy, reformed San Francisco's corrupt jury system, defended the union leader Harry Bridges and ran for President from jail, died on Friday at his home in San Francisco. He was 95 years old.

The cause of death was not specified. His family said he had been in failing health.

Mr. Hallinan, whose 70-year career continued until this year, was renowned in legal circles for meticulous preparation, innovative strategy and a flair in presentation. He often represented unpopular causes and notorious criminal defendants. He once sued the Roman Catholic Church for fraud, demanding that it prove the existence of heaven and hell.

Sometimes he displayed such superior medical knowledge that doctors testifying as expert witnesses looked like fools. He concluded withering cross-examinations by saying: "That's all. You can crawl down off the witness stand now." He referred to one prosecutor as the greatest incompetent "since Caligula made a consul of his horse." Reputation as Fighter

When such legal tactics did not succeed in the courtroom, he literally resorted to sparring with opposing lawyers in the adjacent corridors. By his count he had 23 such fights.

Judges frequently ruled him out of bounds. When one asked if Mr. Hallinan meant to show contempt for the court, he said, "No, Your Honor, I'm trying to conceal it."

Mr. Hallinan's contribution to trial strategy was to transform the traditionally short and subdued opening statement to the jury into a passionate and detailed outline of his entire defense. Rather than wait until the summation, after the prosecution's damage was done, he preferred the pre-emptive strike.

He also had a lasting effect with his one-man crusade against a corrupt local court system that led to juries filled with employees of insurance companies and others unsympathetic to negligence suits. Even when he overcame the odds and won cases, they were appealed to a trio of judges who invariably overturned the awards.

Although the legal establishment at first denied his accusations and shunned him as an outcast, he persisted, and as a result, the system eventually changed.

Mr. Hallinan's most celebrated case was the defense of Mr. Bridges, the leader of a longshoremen's union, in a 1950 trial on charges that he had lied in denying being a Communist. He was convicted, but that was overturned by the United States Supreme Court. Jailed for Contempt

Mr. Hallinan did not fare as well. The judge sentenced him to six months in jail for contempt. While he was jailed in 1952, the Progressive Party nominated him for President, and he received 140,000 votes.

But soon he was indicted for income tax evasion. Although a juror said the the prosecution was in retaliation for the Bridges defense, Mr. Hallinan was convicted and jailed for 18 months. In prison he was true to form, becoming chairman of the inmates' council and forcing integration of the dining hall.

In the tumultuous 1960's, Mr. Hallinan boasted that his entire family had been jailed for social protests. He opposed not only the Vietnam War but also the Korean War.

Mr. Hallinan was born in San Francisco to a large, poor family. After their house was destroyed in the great earthquake of 1906, the family lived for a time without gas, electricity or water.

While studying at Ignatius College, he worked in a law office and passed the bar examination in 1919, two years before graduating from law school. He interrupted his education to serve in the Navy at the end of World War I.

Mr. Hallinan was an amateur boxer before his courthouse bouts and continued to box into his 60's. He was also football captain as a student and a semi-professional player. He was noted in "Ripley's Believe It or Not!" for playing rugby with the San Francisco Bats at the age of 73.

His law practice and real estate investments made him a multi-millionaire.

He was married for 60 years to the former Vivian Moore, who wrote about the family in a book, "My Wild Irish Rogues" (Doubleday, 1952). His other survivors include five sons, Terence, an elected supervisor of San Francisco, Patrick of Kentfield, Calif., and Matthew, Conn and Daniel, all of Berkeley, Calif., and 17 grandchildren.

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