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Hanssen pleads guilty to spying for Moscow

July 8, 2001 Posted: 3:33 AM EDT (0733 GMT)



From left: U.S. Attorney Randy Bellows, Hanssen attorney Plato Cacheris and Robert Hanssen.

ALEXANDRIA, Virginia (CNN) -- Dressed in a green prison jumpsuit, accused FBI spy Robert Hanssen pleaded guilty Friday in U.S. District Court as part of a plea agreement to 15 counts of espionage and conspiracy charges.

By entering such a plea Hanssen avoided a possible death sentence, said Hanssen's attorney, Plato Cacheris, after his client's court appearance.

"The death penalty is no longer an option in this case and the government receives, as a consequence, the full debriefings from Mr. Hanssen as to the breadth of his activities with the Soviet

Union," Cacheris said.

Hanssen's sentencing hearing is scheduled for January 11, 2002. Under the plea agreement he will receive a sentence of life in prison without possibility of parole.

As part of the deal, Hanssen's wife, Bonnie, will receive part of his pension if she continues to cooperate with the investigation. So far, the government has found no evidence of "criminal culpability" on her part.

Deputy U.S. Attorney General Larry Thompson said that accepting a plea deal was difficult, "given the gravity of Hanssen's betrayal."

Thompson said that in choosing that route, "we determined that the interest of the United States would be best served" by an agreement requiring Hanssen to tell what he knows about his activities.

Thompson said the plea deal "will enable our government to assess fully the scope and

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CNN's Kelli Arena reports on the details of Hanssen's plea agreement (July 6)



Play video (QuickTime, Real or Windows Media) Plato Cacheris, attorney for former FBI agent Robert Hanssen, talks about the guilty plea (July 6)



Play video (QuickTime, Real or Windows Media) From Time: Plato Cacheris, the courtroom impresario

Deputy Attorney General Larry



government to assess fully the scope and consequences of Hanssen's activities."

Thompson
comments on the [REDACTED]
Hanssen guilty plea (July 6)

9 Hanssen was arrested in February at a Virginia park minutes after he allegedly left a package under a wooden footbridge. Investigators say the bridge was a drop site for delivering documents to his Russian handlers.

[Play video](#)
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Spying began in 1979, attorney says

10 CNN Justice Department Correspondent Kelli Arena reported that Hanssen, whose jumpsuit had the word 'prisoner' stamped on it, appeared Friday to have lost weight. While in the courtroom, he held his hands behind his back, fidgeting as he answered questions from U.S. District Judge Claude Hilton.

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11 At one point during the proceedings, Hanssen turned around and looked FBI agents squarely in the eye and smiled, Arena reported.

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12 The indictment alleges that the 25-year veteran FBI agent took \$1.4 million in cash and diamonds in return for passing along U.S. secrets to Moscow. Those secrets included the identities of U.S. spies, highly classified eavesdropping technology and nuclear war plans, according to the indictment.

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13 Previously, government prosecutors believed that Hanssen began spying in 1985. But Cacheris said in court Friday that the government is not aware of many details related to Hanssen's espionage activities, which will be cleared up by the debriefings.

14 "As I said in court today, his activities commenced in '79 to '81 and that period the government knew nothing about and they will learn about that," said Cacheris, who previously represented Aldrich Ames, the former CIA employee who pleaded guilty to providing the former Soviet Union with the names of U.S. operatives.

15 Cacheris said Hanssen had stopped spying in 1981 and 1992 for personal reasons, but resumed in 1999.

Hanssen agrees to interviews by FBI, CIA

16 Prosecutors have described the damage to national security allegedly caused by Hanssen's spying as extremely grave. During plea negotiations, prosecutors had been seeking Hanssen's full cooperation in assessing the damage as a condition for sparing him from the death penalty.

17 As a result of the plea deal, sources said Hanssen will sit down for interviews with the CIA, FBI and other intelligence officials to determine the extent of the damage he caused. The government will set the date for these debriefings, and according Cacheris, the interviews could happen soon.

Cacheris said his client's reason to enter a guilty plea was more than just to avoid the death penalty.

Hanssen's Plea Agreement

- **Guilty plea to espionage and conspiracy**
- **Full cooperation with the FBI and CIA**
- **A life sentence, with no chance of parole**
- **Death penalty taken off the table**
- **Wife to receive partial benefits if she continues to cooperate with investigation**

"He very much wanted to make amends," Cacheris said, speaking of Hanssen. "That's a big reason for this disposition today. And he wanted to tell his former agency what he had done and how he had done it."

But federal prosecutor disagreed with Cacheris's assessment.

"Despite what Hanssen's attorney has said, he is not a winner," said U.S. Attorney Kenneth Melson. "He will spend the rest of life under the watchful eye of a prison guard."

CNN Justice Correspondent Kelli Arena contributed to this report.

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