

Former chief White House 'hatchet man' tells why he quit

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see that everybody on the staff is doing work.

Q.—IN THE present, at least, your job took on a role of dirty tricks man, or hatchet man, and you often mentioned that that happened to you. Why do you suppose it did?

A.—Well, for a variety of reasons. First of all, I didn't play the Washington game. Guys on the White House staff can drop little choice tidbits with this friend and that in the press and build up their own image . . . own constituency in the press. I didn't do any of that.

Secondly, I have strong feelings that a White House aide who becomes more concerned with his own image than with the man he is serving begins to lose some of his effectiveness. I think as a result I became the target of a lot of press barbs that I might have avoided had I elected another course. It also started with the 1970 campaign. After that I think if there had been a kidnapping on 14th street in Washington the first reaction of the press would have been "Colson must have done it."

Q.—ARE YOU saying there is nothing in the nature of your job that would cause your name to be linked with things like the I. T. T. and the Watergate, or is it something the press has got against you for not cooperating with them?

A.—My thesis is that once you become that lightning rod you stay that way. I don't think there was anything necessarily peculiar about my job except for the fact that I did not grant press interviews and, with some very rare exceptions, I did not accept social engagements. I thought

mine was kind of an inside job.

Q.—You didn't have to take the heat all yourself on the Watergate. At least two or three I can think of whose names did become involved in it have left the White House since the election: you, Dwight Chapin, Jeb Magruder. Did that have anything to do with your leaving?

A.—They would have to answer for themselves. I don't think it had anything to do with their decisions. I know in my case I had made up my mind long before the 1972 election that I would leave after the President was reelected.

Q.—THEN IS it a coincidence that everybody connected either rightly or wrongly with the Watergate happened to leave the White House within the first month or two after the second term began?

A.—I AM NOT sure that everybody whose name has been mentioned has left. At various times I've seen everybody's name. I'm not going to try to draw conclusions for other people. I know why I left, and I know how long before the Watergate I had made up my mind for my own personal reasons.

Q.—WOULD YOU be willing to discuss those reasons?

A.—Yes, sure. One is when I came into the White House I left a law firm that I was a senior partner in, which was considerably more remunerative than government service, and I have children in school and parents that I help, a lot of financial reasons. Second, I have a very strong feeling that you burn out after a while. I did not take a vacation in three and a half years in the White House. You get tired and stale.

A.—ONE OF THE things that tied you to the Watergate was

E. Howard Hunt. Could you explain to us just what your relationship has been with Mr. Hunt?

A.—I have known him for many years and at the time that the White House was considering bringing a consultant on board to handle some security problems that arose out of the Pentagon papers, I recommended him along with some others. He was hired and for a while was responsible to me. But then he was assigned to others in the White House

Q.—WHY DID YOU send him to Denver to interview Dita Beard in the I. T. T. case? And why did he wear a wig, if in fact he did?

A.—Let's just say I'm not going to go into that, period. I'm not going to go into that issue.

Q.—WHERE DO YOU know him from?

A.—We happened to be graduates of the same university and had been active in alumni affairs of Brown University in Washington. I knew him socially, too.

Q.—WOULD YOU tell us why you don't want to get into this area?

A.—I don't wish at this time to go beyond the testimony I have already given in the U. S. District Court for the District of Columbia for the Democratic National Committee civil proceeding. My deposition which took two and a half hours is now a matter of public record, and that answered all the questions that Edward Bennett Williams [counsel for the Democratic party] wanted to ask. I gave a deposition for the grand jury, and I answered all the inquiries the FBI had, so at this point I don't wish to go into the issue further.

Q.—WOULD YOU testify be-

fore the Senate Watergate committee if subpoenaed?

A—I would be governed by the decision of the White House.

Q—ARE YOU saying then that it would be up to the President to decide whether executive privilege would be applied to you in this case?

A—That's right.

Q—YOU SUPPORT the President's position that he has the right and responsibility to invoke executive privilege in this case?

A—I don't think there is the slightest question about it. But executive privilege is a misnomer. What you are really talking about is the separation of powers, and the genius of

the American democratic system is that we have three coordinate equal branches of government each one of which has respected the independence of the other.

That is a very different issue from being totally cooperative and providing information. What everybody seems to overlook is that everybody in the White House was instructed to cooperate fully in the investigations of the FBI and the grand jury. So every bit of information that there was to make available was made available.

Q—DO YOU believe executive privilege should extend to former aides like yourself and for how long? Do you expect to go to your grave in the mantle of executive privilege?

A—In certain areas, yes.

Q—WHAT DEFINES those? Not national security.

A—Oh, no. You are talking about the relationship between the President and the media and an immediate adviser to the President. If the confidentiality of that relationship were automatically terminated when the employment was terminated then it would be meaningless.

Q—WELL, CONVERSELY then, if the President's aides have no responsibility to the public about their work for the President and they are in fact connected, let's say, to an inci-

dent like the Watergate, does that mean they have no individual, legal responsibility? Would that connection be not theirs but the President's?

A—No, not at all! I separate the question of possible criminal conduct on the part of somebody in the White House which would obviously not be shielded by executive privilege, and that's why everybody in the White House was under very strict instructions to cooperate fully with the investigative bodies. Once you get past the question of criminal conduct, which is one issue, then you are into the delicate balance and the political relationship between the coordinate branches of government. That's quite a different question.

Q—DO YOU think the criminal side of this matter is finally settled?

A—I don't know. I have no knowledge of the investigation.

Q—HOW FAR UP do you think responsibility for the Watergate extends?

A—I have no idea.

Q—YOU SAID earlier that you have not seen the FBI

files, so I take it you could not have shown them to Mr. Segretti as was suggested?

A—I have never met Mr. Segretti nor seen Mr. Segretti nor had I heard of him until I read about him.

Q—THE IMPRESSION that has been left with a lot of people by the separation of White House assistants like yourself from the Watergate situation and the pleading guilty by the people directly involved is that these people were sacrificed in order to obscure whatever link may have existed between them and the White House to get the White House off the hook. How do you respond to that?

A—It is not the case.

Q.—ON THE I. T. T. case, the files that came out Monday left the impression that I. T. T. was very grateful to



Charles Colson . . . "I was from time to time a trouble-shooter."

you personally for your role in helping them do whatever they did, whether it was settle the case or not. The names said "Mr. Colson has been very nice" or "I want to thank him."

A.—I never saw any memo that said that.

Q.—WELL THOSE files showed memos from one I. T. T. man to another saying "Mr. Colson was very cooperative" or "thanks to Mr. Colson for setting up a meeting with Mr. [John] Mitchell [former attorney general]" or something to that effect. Did you not set up a meeting for them at all with anyone?

A.—I attended one meeting that I know of. It's entirely possible with people coming in and out of my office that I saw them more than once. But . . . there is only one meeting that I recall that was for the purpose of discussing this case, and that was in August when Mr. [Harold] Geneen [I. T. T. board chairman] came in and met with Mr. [John] Ehrlichman [Presidential domestic affairs adviser] and myself in Mr. Ehrlich-

man's office.

I might possibly have been present at other meetings with I. T. T. people on this or on other issues, I don't remember. But to me what's wrong is that anybody who reads that who doesn't know anything about it is left with the clear impression [from the press] that Agnew, Connolly, Stans, Colson, Peterson, Ehrlichman have arranged the anti-trust settlement favorably to I. T. T. I can't control what people write or what they want to impress their boss with when they write a memorandum, but that kind of reporting is really outrageous.

Q.—DON'T YOU think that in the five years in office the Nixon administration has been unusually plagued by things like this, I. T. T., the Watergate, the dairymen's campaign contributions? Is the Nixon administration being persecuted by the press? Are they completely lily white in all of these things?

A.—I've seen one controversy after another in every administration. There always has to be some hot issue that really obsesses the press. I think the fact that these have been the kinds of issues that have dominated the concern of a lot of people in the press and the President's opponents on Capitol Hill testifies to the bankruptcy of the issues on the part of his opponents, because that's the most important thing they have to argue about in a political campaign.