

Colson Knew Hunt Wrote Fake Cable

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 1 — Charles W. Colson, former special counsel to President Nixon, has confirmed that four months before the Watergate burglary he discovered that one of the conspirators, E. Howard Hunt Jr., a friend he had recommended for a White House job, had written a fake cable implicating President Kennedy in the assassination of South Vietnam's President Diem.

According to William Lambert, formerly a reporter for Life magazine, who interviewed Mr. Colson over the weekend, Mr. Colson made the discovery in February, 1972, but did not disclose the fabrication until the weekend interview.

Mr. Colson, reached at his law office here this afternoon, said that he would have no comment other than to say that he had great respect for Mr. Lambert as a journalist. He said that he saw nothing to be gained from adding to the controversy.

Asked why he had not taken steps to dismiss Mr. Hunt or warned superiors about him, Mr. Colson repeated that he had no comment.

Mr. Lambert, an investigative reporter who spent most of 1972 trying to confirm Mr. Hunt's fake document for a Life article, said today that Mr. Colson had never told him directly that the cable was a fraud.

A Subtle Indication

Mr. Lambert did say, however, that Mr. Colson had indicated subtly—so subtly that Mr. Lambert did not get the message—that he should look for other sources for a story on official American complicity in the murder of Ngo Dinh Diem by Vietnamese generals in October, 1963.

At a meeting at Mr. Colson's house in suburban Virginia over the weekend, Mr. Lambert said today, Mr. Colson satisfied him that he had honestly tried to steer Mr. Lambert off a story on the fake cable.



The New York Times/Mike Lien

Charles W. Colson in his Washington law office last week

Mr. Lambert was never convinced that the cable was genuine, and Life never published anything about it.

As late as Sunday, however, Mr. Colson still denied that he knew the cable was a fake. Finally, in a telephone conversation yesterday, Mr. Lambert said, he pressed Mr. Colson into admitting that he had known for more than a year that Hunt had manufactured the language that seemed to make the assassination of Diem an order from President Kennedy.

Mr. Lambert, who says that he still regards Mr. Colson as a friend and a valuable source, conceded today that Mr. Colson had taken adequate precaution to keep the story out of public print. But he did not yet understand why Mr. Colson had not told him openly of the fraud.

"I suspect," Mr. Lambert speculated, "that he didn't want to tell anybody that a guy that he had recommended for a sensitive job was fabricating documents."

In the aftermath of Watergate, Mr. Colson has repeatedly

acknowledged that during the summer of 1971, when the White House was looking for someone to find and plug the leaks by which the so-called Pentagon papers had come to light, he personally proposed Mr. Hunt for the job.

In a subsequent White House assignment, during the fall of 1971, Mr. Hunt is understood to have undertaken the task of reviewing diplomatic cables and other classified documents on the early stages of the Vietnam war, apparently in an effort to establish that the seeds of the conflict were planted in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations.

According to Mr. Lambert, Mr. Colson emphatically denied that he was supervising Mr. Hunt in this project. Mr. Colson also told Mr. Lambert that he had never seen the fake document that Mr. Hunt composed and mingled with the genuine records.

It is still unclear, Mr. Lambert says, who Mr. Hunt was working for at this period, and whether anyone but Mr. Hunt and Mr. Lambert ever saw it.