

Post 5/12/73

Scandalous Souvenir

The stunning secret memorandum that brought the ITT affair to the door of the Oval Office was given to Senate investigators by Charles W. Colson's former confidential assistant who now performs similar duties for Secretary of Labor Peter Brennan.

Sen. Sam Ervin's Watergate investigating committee has kept secret the name of the unidentified secretary who turned over the explosive 1972 memo on ITT by then presidential aide Colson. In fact, it was Joan Hall, Colson's skilled private secretary until he left the White House this year—a shocker that will send a shiver through the administration.

"Joan Hall knows more about Chuck Colson than he knows himself," one White House aide told us. She kept his financial records and had full access to the torrent of memos that flowed from his office. Thus, the unanswered mystery: Is the ITT memo just the beginning?

Near the end of 1972, Mrs. Hall complained to friends about long hours and vocal abuse that went with being Colson's secretary. But there was no sign of a break between them. Indeed, Colson secured a \$17,794 job for Mrs. Hall as administrative assistant to his friend Brennan—partly, some at the White House felt, to make sure she did not talk too much to investigators and grand juries.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Hall was interviewed by Ervin committee investigators the evening of Aug. 1. Contrary to usual practice, no Republican staffers were present. At that time, Mrs. Hall turned over the March 30, 1972, Colson memo warning that other secret internal memos would "directly involve" President Nixon in the favorable anti-trust ruling for the International Telephone and Telegraph Corp. She also turned over other unspecified documents.

Her motives are a mystery. Contending that "I don't have to talk to you about this," Mrs. Hall told us nothing. The Senate investigators are also mute. Colson told us Mrs. Hall had taken the ITT memo home as a "souvenir" of her days in the White House but felt compelled to hand it over when a Senate subpoena asked for any pertinent documents in her possession.

However, former associates of Mrs. Hall describe her as a battle-seasoned veteran of the bureaucratic wars who would not dream of taking home an explosive document for sentimental reasons. Their questions: Why did she turn over the ITT memo? Are there any more explosive "souvenirs" at home?