



FORMER PRESIDENTIAL AIDE CHARLES COLSON

## WATERGATE

### The Tough Guy

Of all the assorted characters in the sordid Watergate cast, Charles Colson was widely viewed in Washington as the wiliest, the slickest operator and thus the least likely to be charged with a crime. So quick to deny any personal wrongdoing, so voluble in defending the innocence of the President, Colson often seemed to be protesting too much. Federal prosecutors apparently thought so too. TIME has learned that the former White House special counsel not only may be among the first former officials to be indicted by Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox's grand jury but that he is under investigation as the possible source of the White House pressure that kept the Watergate wiretapping plan alive until it was finally approved.

**Fully Aware.** When the indictment comes, possibly this week, it most likely will charge Colson with involvement in the burglary of the office of Dr. Lewis Fielding, the psychiatrist who had treated Daniel Ellsberg. But the federal prosecutors are determined to seek confirmation of their suspicions that Colson (who had arranged for the White House hiring of Plumber E. Howard Hunt and was close to Hunt's partner G. Gordon Liddy) was a power behind the Liddy-Hunt wiretapping.

Colson has admitted to investigators that he met with Hunt and Liddy in early 1972 to discuss a political-intelligence-gathering plan after the then Attorney General John Mitchell had twice rejected it. He has also admitted telephoning Jeb Stuart Magruder, then deputy director of Nixon's re-election committee, to urge that the plan be approved. But he claims that he did not know that the scheme involved illegal



wiretapping of Democratic National Headquarters. The prosecutors are pursuing the possibility that Colson was fully aware of the nature of the project.

The evidence implicating Colson in the Fielding office burglary is more complete. Investigators have acquired the transcript of a telephone call between Hunt and Colson on July 1, 1971 (which Colson had secretly recorded), in which they discussed the need to "nail" Ellsberg. Hunt was hired by the White House as a consultant one week later. Hunt then wrote a memo to Colson detailing ways to injure Ellsberg's public reputation. It suggested gaining access to the psychiatrist's Ellsberg file. Colson reportedly relayed the memo to Egil Krogh and David Young, the White House plumbers assigned to plug news leaks, and urged its implementation. Finally, Colson has admitted raising the private funds (he says \$2,000; other sources say \$5,000) to finance the Hunt-Liddy trip to Fielding's office, although Colson insists that he did not know the money was to be used for that purpose.

Colson will be in familiar company when the Cox indictments are returned, since Krogh and the plumbers' supervisor, John Ehrlichman, are expected to be charged in connection with the Fielding raid. Young has been granted partial immunity. Krogh, Ehrlichman and Young were indicted on burglary charges by a local grand jury in Los Angeles. But Cox is expected to level a more serious charge, probably conspiracy to violate the civil rights of Ellsberg, and the California authorities will presumably allow the federal prosecution to take precedence.

**More Disliked.** Colson's troubles are not likely to sadden his former White House colleagues. He was probably more disliked, as well as feared, than any other White House aide. Even that awesome guardian of the Oval Office, H.R. Haldeman, was one of Colson's harshest critics. He once complained to a subordinate that "Colson is always doing things behind my back." Explains another former aide: "Haldeman had no control over Colson. He detested him, but he couldn't do anything. John Mitchell hated Colson too. With those two against you, you have to have something powerful going for you to survive that long in the White House."

What Colson had going for him was the ear and the admiration of the President. Colson had avidly cultivated that contact. Shortly after arriving at the White House, he had met Nixon a dozen times but complained, "The President doesn't even know who I am." Once a corporation lawyer and lobbyist, as well as an assistant to former Massachusetts Senator Leverett Saltonstall, Colson had been hired by Presidential Counsellor Bryce Harlow as a political tactician. He proceeded to exploit his friendships with many labor leaders. Colson gained Nixon's appreciation with his advice on how the President could gain labor support for his re-election—advice that seems to have been successful.

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Colson's exact duties were always a mystery to most of the staff, but they were almost solely political. "He worked for the President's re-election full time for four years," says one staff member. Colson secretly turned papers face down and closed his desk drawers when colleagues entered his office, which some of them sarcastically termed "the Office of False Impressions."

Nixon liked the fertility of Colson's mind. Dick Howard, Colson's former assistant, used to boast: "The President calls Chuck five or six times a day. Colson is the President's window on the world." A subtle campaign by Halde- man, supported by Mitchell ("I wonder if the President really knows what Colson is like," Mitchell once mused at a small meeting), eventually closed that window by reducing Colson's influence.

ber instead); hiring young men to pose as homosexuals supporting McGovern at the Democratic National Convention; engineering telephone and mail campaigns supporting Nixon's Viet Nam policies, even when unsolicited opinion was generally favorable. Explained one Colson acquaintance: "Chuck could never take a chance with the truth. He doesn't trust the truth."

Other, more serious acts of which Colson has been accused include ordering Hunt to fabricate a State Department cable that would make it appear that the Kennedy Administration was involved in the assassination of South Viet Nam's President Diem in 1963; urging that Washington's Brookings Institution be fire-bombed as a diversionary tactic to cover a raid to seize some politically damaging documents; leaking information to LIFE for a story in 1970 that helped defeat Maryland's Demo-

STEVE NORTHUP



COLSON & WIFE PATTY, ON POOL DECK OF THEIR SUBURBAN WASHINGTON HOME

The combination of Haldeman's opposition and lucrative private law practice offers led Colson to resign last March.

If Colson actually performed half the various acts of which he has been accused, he was easily the least principled of all Nixon's associates. The long list of deceptive practices attributed to him—virtually all of which he denies—includes drafting scurrilous newspaper ads assailing "radic-libs" during the 1970 congressional campaigns; urging the use of \$8,000 in Nixon campaign funds to buy copies of a pro-Nixon book and thus balloon it into a second printing; compiling a list of Nixon's political "enemies"; requesting an IRS audit of the tax returns of a Teamster official who opposed the President; dispatching someone to pose as a Gay Liberationist and donate money to Nixon's New Hampshire primary opponent, Paul McCloskey, then turn the donation receipt over to the Manchester *Union Leader* (an emissary was indeed sent but decided to pose as a Young Socialist Alliance mem-

ber instead); hiring young men to pose as homosexuals supporting McGovern at the Democratic National Convention; engineering telephone and mail campaigns supporting Nixon's Viet Nam policies, even when unsolicited opinion was generally favorable. Explained one Colson acquaintance: "Chuck could never take a chance with the truth. He doesn't trust the truth."

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