

Laser to Destroy Tapes Was Eyed

By Jack Anderson

Former presidential aide Charles Colson once considered firing a high-voltage Buck Rogers-style cannon at the White House to erase the taped conversations of Richard Nixon.

Such a mission impossible would have wiped out the evidence on the White House tapes which led to Mr. Nixon's resignation. Colson, however, contends he never seriously pondered putting the scheme into action.

Despite this denial, Colson did meet twice with an industrial research consultant, Gordon Novel, and discussed the possibility of using an experimental "degaussing cannon" to fire a gigantic magnetic pulse at the White House tape storage room. A rough design of the ray gun, named after a magnetic measurement, was even drawn up.

"Novel talked about driving by the White House and demagnetizing all the tapes," Colson told us from prison through friends. "It was something that he said would fire three blocks."

Novel, who is also an electronics expert, told us he was visiting Colson in March on an unrelated legal matter when the talk turned to the tapes.

Colson, he said, told him tapes at the White House and the CIA "could cause the President grief." Novel mentioned the "degaussing cannon" and Colson urged him to look into it. Colson insists he gave the con-

sultant "no encouragement."

Novel, however, obviously thought he had a mandate from Colson. He journeyed to El Paso, Tex., and spoke with Jack Prentice, innovative research and design chief for Jetco, Inc. Jetco already was marketing a metal detector using "degaussing" principles.

Prentice told Novel, and confirmed to us, that he had built a prototype cannon and could construct an operational one for \$25,000 to \$30,000. Prentice believed that because the tapes belonged to the President, there would be no crime in erasing them if Colson, acting for the President, okayed it.

The Jetco specialist drew up a simple plan for the "degaussing cannon," using capacitors, a switch, a parabolic reflector and a special heat resistant coil. The electronic artillery piece could be housed in a van, or mounted in a light plane or helicopter.

On March 21, Novel wrote Colson that he would "forward by hand courier the known facts on the El Paso erasure matter," the code name for the "degausser."

Shortly thereafter, the industrial consultant flew to Washington again and talked to one of this area's best known electronics men, Allan Bell, president of Dektor Counterintelligence and Security. Bell threw cold water on the mission, calling it "iffy" and "impractical."

At its best, advised Bell, the bizarre device would obliterate a few layers of tape, leaving the rest intact. At worst, it would de-

stroy huge quantities of other taped material and scramble all computer "memories" in its path.

One part of the scheme was to bombard the CIA—and the irresistible jolt of magnetism might blot out priceless files of Russian and Chinese agents and other espionage and security matters.

In his report to Colson, Novel said hiding in the heavy woods near the CIA, or "degaussing" the tapes from the tank-van while they were in transport, offered a better chance of success than magnetically bombarding the CIA or the White House from a plane.

But as Novel recalls it, he and Colson mutually decided not to pursue the plan because of its danger to national security tapes and computers near the target tapes.

Colson scoffs at the idea that the magnetic beam ever came that close to development. "I laughed at it," he said. "It was a little bit of comic relief." But Mr. Nixon might have had fears Colson would be a sucker for just such farout ideas. In the transcripts, Nixon said Colson "loves the action . . . Colson would do anything."

Footnote: Colson and Novel also discussed a caper to patch H. R. Haldeman's voice onto a tape along with an actor who would imitate President Nixon and make false confessions. The fake tape would be sent with a phony authenticating note from an allegedly disgruntled Secret Service man to the Senate

Watergate committee which, Colson surmised, would leak it. Then he and Novel would reveal the tape was fraudulent and the hoax would tend to discredit the whole case against Mr. Nixon. Colson said it was true he discussed this idea. "Wouldn't that be a great gag?" his statement said.

Baker's Bombshell—Bobby Baker, the former Senate aide who went to prison in a celebrated scandal of the early 1960s, has completed more than half of a book that will embarrass some present senators.

Now a successful businessman, Baker insists he isn't writing a cruel book about those who condemned him. Indeed, the book will contain many warm anecdotes about prominent political figures.

But the book will charge that Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.), now the Senate's "Mr. Clean," twisted arms for political funds when he was the Republican Senate campaign chairman.

Baker will chide the present apostle of political reform, Sen. Sam Ervin (D-N.C.) for voting consistently against reform in times past.

Baker also will point out that Sen. Carl Curtis (R-Neb.), who saw no great wrong in President Nixon's conduct, lashed out against the Democrats involved in the comparatively small-potatoes Baker case.

The former Senate boy wonder hopes to publish his book after the din of Watergate dies down.

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