

Seldom-Seen Aides Protect Nixon's

Political Flank

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Until the abrupt resignation of one of their number several weeks ago, they were known to outsiders as Haldeman's Four Horsemen — a versatile, seasoned, and aggressive quartet of White House advisers technically attached to H. R. Haldeman, President Nixon's chief of staff.

The man who resigned was Clark R. Mollenhoff, a controversial reporter who returned to the newspaper business after six months of serving the President as an investigator of past, present and potential wrongdoing in the Federal bureaucracy.

The three who remain are Murray M. Chotiner and Harry S. Dent, two political advisers who occupy adjoining office space in the White House East Wing, and Charles W. Colson, the President's liaison with special interest groups around the Capital, who works out of a large, high-ceiling room in the Executive Office Building.

Much attention has been devoted to the Nixon staff in recent days, in part because it is undergoing substantial revision, but little light has been shed on Mr. Dent, Mr. Chotiner and Mr. Colson. This is no accident.

'Back-Room Boys'

"Most of the people here are fairly visible," notes one White House aide. "But Murray, Harry and Chuck are the original back-room boys, the operators and the brokers, the guys who fix things when they break down and do the dirty work when it's necessary."

All three hold the same title, special counsel to the President, the same as Mr. Mollenhoff until his resignation May 30. They share the same basic assignment, which is to protect Mr. Nixon's political flank, and the same relationship with Mr. Haldeman, who gives them wide latitude, but who keeps track of their activities and gives them special assignments on behalf of the President.

Of the three, the most obscure is Mr. Colson, although associates say his influence has been rising ever since his appointment Nov. 6.

Mr. Colson, a trim, 38-year-old Boston lawyer, came to a staff that was suffering badly from political inexperience, and he was promptly ordered to begin manipulating the levers of political power.

To take one recent illustration, it was Mr. Colson, associates say, who sensed the outcry that would result from Mr. Nixon's decision to move American troops into Cambodia April 30, and who acted even before the President spoke to mobilize a demonstration of support for Mr. Nixon's position.

"Remember all those phone calls and telegrams?" asked one of Mr. Colson's associates recently. "Chuck was responsible for a lot of them. He got some

of us together and we began making calls to Republicans around the country and groups we thought would be friendly. A lot of the guys who came in with Nixon think all you have to do to solve a problem and persuade public opinion is shove the President on the tube to make a speech; Colson knows you have to do a little work for these things."

Mr. Colson's special value derives in part from his long experience in the corridors and backrooms of Washington power. He served in the nineteen-fifties in the Department of the Navy following graduation from Brown University, and for five years as administrative assistant to former Senator Leverett Saltonstall, Republican of Massachusetts. When the Democrats came to power, he joined the law firm of Gadsby and Hannah in Boston, where he became a senior partner.

The firm has offices here and Mr. Colson maintained his ties with the Republican hierarchy, served as counsel for Mr. Nixon's "key issues" committee during the 1968 campaign, and kept in close touch with Bryce Harlow, perhaps the most seasoned political hand on the Nixon staff and now counsellor to the President. Mr. Harlow is said to have been instrumental in Mr. Colson's joining the staff late last year.

Postan Reform Triumph

One of Mr. Colson's major triumphs — made possible in part by a postal strike — was to salvage Mr. Nixon's postal reform package from almost certain death in the House last year. When it became clear that Postmaster General Winton M. Blount had offended not only Congress but the postal union chiefs by his blunt manner, Mr. Colson established contact with the unions and arranged a meeting between James H. Rademacher, presi-

dent of the National Association of Letter-Carriers, and the President.

Since then, Mr. Colson has ushered a steady stream of lobbyists and groups in and out of the President's Oval Office. He was instrumental in luring

the pro-Vietnam construction workers to Washington and helped get Mr. Nixon and leading financiers together during the stark month of crisis. He keeps a sharp eye on appointments to Presidential Commissions to make certain that interest groups favorable to the Administration receive their share of prestigious appointments.

"They don't keep me out over there," he says, gesturing toward the window which overlooks the White House. "They've never turned down a group I've recommended for an appointment with the President."

Meetings 'Turn On' Nixon

"It's extraordinary how this guy turns on," he says of Mr. Nixon. "No meeting has ever ended within the scheduled length of time. These things make an impression on Richard Nixon."

Mr. Colson recalled a meeting between the President and a group of Catholic educators who had trouble seeing him. Mr. Nixon became so interested in their recital of the difficulties of parochial schools, Mr. Colson said, "that he hauled out a piece of paper, named a commission to study the problem, and decided to double the amount of funding for library assistance."

Mr. Colson is in frequent touch with Mr. Chotiner and Mr. Dent, since his contacts with interest groups often provide information that his two colleagues find useful in their effort to elect Republican candidates next fall.

Mr. Chotiner, who managed Mr. Nixon's first political campaign in 1946, is White House

liaison with Republican candidates in 31 states. Mr. Dent has 19 states mostly Southern, and has responsibility for patronage and regular liaison with the Republican campaign groups on Capitol Hill and the Republican National Committee.

There is much evidence that Mr. Dent's once unchallenged control over the political apparatus has shrunk since Mr. Chotiner's arrival in the White House Jan. 13, although both men deny any rift.

"There are 500 elections of national significance this year," Mr. Dent says, "and one man can't do it alone."

'Technician' or 'Hatchetmen'

Outside the South, Mr. Chotiner is regarded as the key political figure in the White House. "Murray is the man to call," said one midwestern Re-

publican, and more and more the political news from the hinterlands includes reference to the man whom friends describe as "the perfect political technician" and enemies condemn as "the complete political hatchetman."

On balance, the three special counsels tend to reinforce the conservative tone of the White House, although Mr. Colson's point of view is much closer to the Eastern Republican Establishment. Mr. Dent, a former aide to Senator Strom Thurmond, Republican of South Carolina, is thoroughly sympathetic to Southern interests; and Mr. Chotiner has been urging Republicans to exploit the "student unrest" issue for political profit.

But their greatest value to the President lies not in the ideology but in their technical capacities.

"The Nixon staff is carefully structured along bureaucratic lines," noted one White House official the other day. "Until Murray and Harry and Colson got together too many things

were falling between the cracks. We needed some good tough political handymen to help the advertising crowd who came in with the President, and now we have them."



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Advisers technically attached to H. R. Haldeman, President Nixon's Chief of Staff, are, from left, Murray Chotiner and Harry S. Dent, political experts, and Charles W. Colson.