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Colson Said to Urge Break-in, Arson

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Charles W. Colson, former special counsel to President Nixon, suggested to a White House intelligence operative that an office in the Brookings Institution here be burglarized and then firebombed, according to allegations made to investigators in the Watergate case.

Colson, one of the most powerful figures in the first Nixon administration, denied the allegations.

Colson allegedly made the burglary and firebombing suggestion in 1971 to John J. Caulfield, a former New York city policeman then working as an undercover

espionage agent for the White House, according to four different sources involved in the Watergate investigation.

The target of the action, the sources said, was to be an office in the Brookings Institution then occupied by Morton Halperin, an associate of Dr. Daniel Ellsberg and the object of a White House-initiated wiretap from the spring of 1969 to June, 1971.

Caulfield and former White House counsel John W. Dean III have told federal investigators that Colson suggested Halperin's office be burglarized and that the illegal entry then be disguised by firebombing the premises, the sources reported.

According to the sources, Caulfield told investigators he immediately rejected Colson's alleged proposal as "totally insane," and informed Dean that he did not wish to be associated further with Colson.

An associate of Colson acknowledged yesterday that Colson was involved in discussions with other White House officials, probably in 1971, about how to remove certain material from the Brookings Institution, an independent center for the study of public policy questions. The Colson associate described the material

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sought by the White House as "classified documents" and did not elaborate.

However, Colson denied earlier this week that he had suggested either bur-

glary or firebombing as a means of obtaining the information. "I absolutely made no such statement or suggestion," the former presidential special counsel said. "It is ludicrous. The story you have told me is a flight of fantasy, the outer limits—this has gone too far."

Colson's associate made this additional comment:

"It is always possible that Chuck said such a thing. It is characteristic of him to overstate. That anyone could have taken it seriously—really thought he meant to start a fire—is just not sensible. We are in an era when you guys (in the press) have to separate the rhetorical from the real—to print a story like this is profoundly unfair."

According to federal sources, neither Dean nor Caulfield considered Colson's alleged suggestion as being a joke or anything less than a serious proposal.

"Caulfield told Colson, 'This has gone too far,'" one source said, "and left the room."

According to another source, Colson allegedly described the proposed firebombing as a means of hiding the theft of papers from Halperin's office. By burning the whole office, the source said, the specific objective of the breaking and entering would never be discovered, the source said.

Federal sources said yesterday that the Watergate prosecutors have decided not to attempt prosecution for the alleged proposal to firebomb the office, partly because such action was never carried forward, and partly because of the difficulty in proving such a case. The Watergate grand jury and the FBI are still attempting to learn if Halperin's office was burglarized, the sources reported.

Caulfield, the sources said, has told investigators that he never participated in any illegal entry missions for the White House.

Caulfield, who testified before the Senate Watergate committee last month that he extended an offer of executive clemency to Watergate conspirator James W. McCord Jr., worked in the White House as chief of an undercover operations team that reported to John D. Ehrlichman, President Nixon's former principal deputy for domestic affairs, accord-

ing to federal sources.

They said federal investigators have been told that Ehrlichman also was involved in discussions of a proposed burglary at the Brookings Institution.

Caulfield has told federal investigators that he was involved in about 20 undercover espionage missions undertaken for Ehrlichman, including two illegal wiretaps installed in 1969, the sources reported.

The targets of the wiretaps were syndicated columnist Joseph Kraft and an unnamed government official, the sources said.

According to the sources, the covert operations group headed by Caulfield was supplanted in 1971 by "the plumbers"—the White House unit that President Nixon has said he established to investigate the Pentagon Papers leak. "The plumbers" operated under the direct supervision of Egil Krogh Jr., an Ehrlichman deputy, and David Young, an aide transferred to Ehrlichman's office from the staff of Dr. Henry Kissinger.

"For some reason it was decided that the Caulfield group couldn't handle the really heavy stuff," one person involved in the Watergate investigation said yesterday. "So the most sensitive assignments, especially if they were illegal, went to the plumbers," whose members included Watergate conspirators G. Gordon Liddy and E. Howard Hunt Jr.

"The plumbers" team was assembled in July, 1971, and Ehrlichman has said in a civil deposition that he was first introduced to Liddy "as the new man in place of Mr. Caulfield."

Caulfield reportedly has told federal investigators that the team headed by him and his White House associate, former New York city patrolman Anthony T. Ulasewicz, set up two wiretaps in 1969 on White House orders.

He also told the Senate's Watergate investigating committee that "in the spring of 1971, I began to notice that, for some reason, the amount of investigation work handled by Ulasewicz through me had diminished."

According to sources involved in the Watergate in-

vestigation, the Caulfield team's missions for Ehrlichman included the following:

- Background investigations on politicians and other national figures considered unfriendly toward the Nixon administration, including Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, then Rep. Mario Biaggi of New York City, and a major contender for the 1972 Democratic presidential nomination.

- Infiltrating the ranks of antiwar demonstrators in Washington.

- Interviewing participants and eyewitnesses to the 1969 My Lai massacre to determine if initial newspaper accounts of the atrocity were correct.

- The two wiretap operations.

Colson, one of the top White House advisers with direct access to the President until his resignation in March, recommended that Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt Jr. be hired in 1971 to investigate the leak of the Pentagon Papers to the press.

In 1971, Hunt and his Watergate coconspirator, Liddy, directed the burglary of the office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist as part of their White House assignment.

In grand jury testimony made public in May, Hunt said he discussed the fabrication of State Department cables with Colson that implicated the late President Kennedy in the 1963 assassination of the South Vietnamese president.

Hunt testified that he showed the phony cables to Colson and that "he seemed to like them . . ."

Colson, according to numerous sources in the White House and Justice Department, was responsible for initiating an extensive catalogue of "dirty tricks" and deceptions in the president's re-election campaign.

Some reports have implicated Colson in the Watergate operation, but those reports have been disputed. Colson has repeatedly and emphatically denied any involvement in the illegal Watergate surveillance.