

Charles Colson pleaded guilty today to a charge that he created and implemented a scheme to defame Daniel Ellsberg and those engaged in Ellsberg's defense in the Pentagon Papers trial. Jeff Loeb has a report from Washington.

Loeb: This morning, at the beginning of proceedings at which many observers felt the charges against the defendants in the Ellsberg break-in would be dismissed, Charles Colson, one of those defendants, quietly approached Judge Gerhard Gesell and pled guilty to one count of obstruction of justice. This plea, to a charge which was not in the original indictment, marks the end of criminal proceedings against one of the highest-ranking officials to have served in the Nixon administration.

In exchange for Colson's cooperation and testimony, possibly against Nixon himself, all charges in both this case and the Watergate cover-up case have been dropped by the special prosecutor's office. Colson's guilty plea was totally unexpected, and as a shocked audience in the courtroom looked on, the following interchange between [him] and Gesell took place [Loeb reads]:

"Do you accept the statement by the prosecutor that the government has the evidence to be able to prove you guilty of devising and implementing a scheme to destroy the public image and credibility of Daniel Ellsberg and those engaged in his legal defense, with the intent to influence, obstruct and impede the conduct and outcome?" "Yes, your honor, I do."

"Do you understand your right to trial by jury on these charges?" "Yes, I do."

"Do you waive your right to indictment under the Constitution and realize that the only thing left for the court to do is to sentence you?" "Yes, I do."

"Do you also realize that this charge carries with it a maximum sentence of five years in jail and a \$5,000 fine?" "Yes, I do."

"Have you been in any way coerced in making this decision?" "No, your honor, I haven't."

"Have any promises been made to you of which this court is unaware?" "No, there have not."

"At this time, then, before I take the matter under consideration for sentencing, do you have anything to say, Mr. Colson?"

Replying in the affirmative, Colson at this point, with bowed head, began reading from a prepared statement from which the following is excerpted.

[Tape of Colson reading is played at this point, but due to poor recording is so muffled and unintelligible it cannot be transcribed.]