

Rough Ex-Nixon Aide

Charles Wendell Colson

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In President Nixon's old inner circle, Charles Wendell Colson stood out for his capacity to inspire passionate distaste—and enjoy it.

Democrats loathed him for playing rough politics and even more for being successful at it, as he was in his campaign to win over hard hats, teamsters, Roman Catholics and ethnics for the President during the 1972 re-election campaign.

Many Republicans, and some of his old colleagues on the White House staff, abhorred him even more. Herbert G. Klein, formerly the White House director of communications, called Mr. Colson a "cobra."

Senator Lowell P. Weicker, Republican of Connecticut, complained a year ago that Mr. Colson was spreading rumors about him.

"You make me sick," the Senator shouted when Mr. Colson tried to explain, ordering him out of his office.

In an oft-quoted memorandum that Mr. Colson wrote several years ago, he stated "I would walk over my grandmother if necessary" to re-elect Richard Nixon.

'Viciously Loyal'

The line confirms his father's admiring description of his son as "Viciously loyal"; but it is only one of many proclamations of the tough-guy notion of politics as a form of warfare held by Mr. Colson, who today pleaded guilty to trying to disseminate derogatory information about Dr. Daniel Ellsberg and his attorney.

A poster from the Marine Corps, in which he served as a company commander, adorned his White House office. Mrs. Patty Colson says her husband's favorite tune is the Marine Corps Hymn.

To compound the military theme, the master list of more than 200 Nixon "enemies" was drafted in Mr. Colson's office, and the political staff that he gathered at 9:15 A.M. daily during the 1972 campaign was formally named the "attack group."

Last year, Mr. Colson said he had undergone a religious conversion in which he found "a great inner serenity, really a new life" through Jesus. The report was greeted with skepticism among some who had known him well.

Friendship With Hunt

Because of his long friendship with E. Howard Hunt Jr., the former spy who pleaded guilty to involvement in the Watergate break-in, Mr. Colson was once widely suspected as the Watergate master-spy.

A secret affidavit from Mr. Hunt said that Mr. Colson knew nothing about Watergate until after it happened. Yet in a tape transcript released by the White House, President Nixon is quoted as saying that Mr. Colson "is up to his navel" in the Watergate affair.

Mrs. Beard took the first steps to disavow a memorandum, apparently signed by her, outlining the exchange of a contribution to the 1972 Republican national convention, and settlement of an antitrust suit against I.T.T.

Mr. Colson also was Mr. Hunt's supervisor when he falsified diplomatic cables to make it seem that President Kennedy had ordered the assassination of President Ngo Dinh Diem of South Vietnam in October, 1963. Here, as in other cases, Mr. Colson offered a tantalizingly partial denial: It is possible, he explained, that something he said led Mr. Hunt to fake the documents, but he never "ordered" the forgery.

An Only Child

Mr. Colson was born in Boston on Oct. 16, 1931, the only child in a conservative family. His father, Wendell, worked his way through law school at night and became a lawyer in the Boston office of the Securities and Exchange Commission.

One of Mr. Colson's grandmothers traced her ancestry to George Washington's mother. Yet the formative spirit in the Colson household during the Depression years was more nearly that of aspiring ethnics rather than Yankee Brahmins—a point that colored Mr. Colson's political outlook.

At the Browne and Nichols School in Cambridge, he was a star debater and good enough student to receive a scholarship offer from Harvard. But nearby Harvard seemed both stuffy and radical, and he anticipated correctly that he would be a bigger wheel at Brown where he was active in student government, debating, the Marine officers training program, and young Republicanism. He was graduated with honors in 1953.

After peacetime service in the Marine Corps, Mr. Colson joined the staff of Senator Leverett Saltonstall, Republican of Massachusetts, in 1956. At 27 he became the youngest administrative assistant on Capitol Hill, simultaneously attending George Washington Law School at night.

Mr. Colson put his personal stamp on the Saltonstall re-election campaign of 1960. Senator Saltonstall's easy victory confirmed Mr. Colson's instinct for "constituency" politics—that is, appeals to special interest, working class and ethnic groups—that he would apply again in the Nixon White House.

Mr. Colson was a principal author of the Nixon re-election appeals to restless Democrats, including a campaign pledge of Federal aid to parochial schools and repeated attacks on abortion, amnesty and busing.

During the 1960's, Mr. Colson operated a law firm here and in Boston. His first wife, Nancy, from whom he was divorced in 1963, still lives there with their son and two daughters.

The law firm flourished and by 1969 Mr. Colson had his own chauffeur and a six-figure income. Yet money is not believed to be his principal drive. When the White House offered him a job of wide scope and influence, Mr. Colson jumped at it and quickly invested all his fervid loyalty and aggressive energy in the cause of Richard Nixon.

After recommending Mr. Hunt for the White House staff, Mr. Colson authorized him to investigate Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts.

Later he sent Mr. Hunt, in a red wig disguise, to the Denver hospital bedside of Mrs. Dita D. Beard, lobbyist for the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation. After the Hunt visit,