

Colson Free After 7 Months in Prison

Washington

Former special White House counsel Charles W. Colson went free yesterday, his sentence shortened like that of other major White House figures convicted in the Watergate affair.

"It's wonderful to be out," he told reporters as he picked up his belongings at Ft. Holabird, Md. where he had been in custody.

Colson had served nearly seven months of a 1-to-3 year sentence. He was in his lawyer's office in Washington after spending the day speaking to Watergate prosecutors, when word came his sentence had been reduced to "time served."

He drove back to Ft. Holabird, at the edge of Baltimore, 40 miles away, to pick up the belongings and say good-bye to friends. The visit lasted 25 minutes.

To waiting reporters, he said his plans were "to take a little more time to think and be with my family."

In reducing Colson's sentence, U.S. District Judge Gerhard A. Gesell said:

"This action is taken by reason of defendant's serious family difficulties which have greatly aggravated the severity of the sentence imposed."

Gesell did not go beyond that statement.

But earlier in the day Colson's lawyers had written the judge, pleading for early release because of the family problems. The lawyer members of Colson's former law firm, asked that the letter not be made part of the public record.

Colson's 16-year-old son, Christian, was arrested in his dormitory at the University of South Carolina on January 24 and charged with possession of marijuana, with intent to distribute. He was released on \$5000 bond. No trial date has been set.

And in an application for reduction of sentence last

Back Page Col. 6

From Page 1

October 7, Colson's lawyers cited the death of his father which left "his 73-year-old mother wholly dependent emotionally on the defendant, her only child."

Colson's memorandum also said that President Ford's action in pardoning Mr. Nixon "raises serious questions with respect to even-handed justice for former subordinates of Mr. Nixon who have been prosecuted for offenses in which he was a participant."

The petition said the question was particularly troublesome in Colson's case because he was "convicted for disseminating derogatory information about Daniel Ellsberg's attorney at Mr. Nixon's direct request."

Colson's release leaves only one well-known Watergate figure, burglary mastermind G. Gordon Liddy, still in prison, along with three others. Still others have not been sentenced and others are free on appeal.

"There was a lot of hugging and crying going on," said one of Colson's lawyers, in describing the scene when the telephone call came from Judge Gesell.

Mrs. Colson, who had been in another room, rushed to his side.

As special White House counsel, Colson had been one of the aides closest to Mr. Nixon when he was President.

He figured prominently in testimony presented at both White House plumbers' trial last July and in the Watergate coverup case.

He had been the last of the big-name defendants behind bars since U.S. District Judge John J. Sirica freed John W. Dean III, Jeb Magruder and Herbert Kalmbach with similar orders reducing sentences to time served.

Colson, 42, had been indicted in both the Watergate



AP Wirephoto

Charles Colson and his wife talked to newsmen outside their McLean, Va., home

coverup and Ellsberg break-in cases.

But on June 3 last year, he pleaded guilty to a charge of obstructing justice in connection with the trial of Ellsberg, the scholar who leaked the Pentagon Papers. The charges in the other cases were dropped.

Colson told the court he took part in an effort to smear and defame Ellsberg in advance of Ellsberg's trial. He was sentenced by Gesell to one to three years in prison and fined \$5000.

The prison term began July 8, 1974.

Four other defendants in the coverup trial were convicted by a jury on New Year's Day and still await sentencing. They are former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, former White House chief of staff H. R. Haldeman, former Nixon domestic counselor John D. Ehrlichman and former re-election committee official Robert C. Mardian.

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