

# COLSON RELEASED AFTER 7 MONTHS

FEB 1 1975

## Former Nixon Counsel Has Sentence Shortened for 'Family Difficulties'

NYTimes

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Jan. 31 —

Charles W. Colson, a former special counsel to President Nixon, was released from prison today on the ground of "serious family difficulties."

The order for the 43-year-old Mr. Colson's release was issued by Federal District Judge Gerhard A. Gesell late this afternoon. He noted that a motion to reduce Mr. Colson's sentence "has been under consideration for some time."

Mr. Colson was serving his sentence at the Maxwell Air Force Base Federal Prison in Montgomery, Ala.

He was sentenced to one to three years by Judge Gesell on June 21 after pleading guilty to obstruction of justice for his role in disseminating damaging information about Dr. Daniel Ellsberg. He has served seven months and, under usual circumstances, would have become eligible for parole next July.

Dr. Ellsberg has said that it was he who made public the secret Government study of the United States role in Vietnam known as the Pentagon papers.

Judge Gesell, in ordering that Mr. Colson's sentence "shall be and hereby is reduced to time already served," said only that the motion was being granted "by reason of the defendant's serious family difficulties, which have greatly aggravated the severity of the sentence imposed."

### No Details Given

No details of the "family difficulties" were given. It is known, however, that his wife, Patricia, has not been in good health, and that his 18-year-old son, Christian, was arrested in South Carolina, where he attends college, for the possession of marijuana. Mr. Colson's father died a few months ago.

The order required that Mr. Colson be released immediately. His lawyer, David I. Shapiro, said that he and Mr. Colson learned of the order "around five o'clock this afternoon." Mr. Colson had nothing to say immediately about his release, Mr. Shapiro said.

Another close friend, who saw him after the order was issued, said Mr. Colson "looks fabulous, thinner, back to Marine trim and very, very happy."

Mr. Colson, in pleading guilty, said that "the President" on numerous occasions urged me to disseminate damaging information about Daniel Ellsberg." He said that he "never really questioned" whether what he had done "was right or proper."

Mr. Colson, who has converted to evangelical Christianity, is known to have given information to both the Watergate special prosecutor and to Federal grand juries. He also testified before the House Judiciary Committee during its impeachment inquiry last summer.

Mr. Colson, who lives in McLean, Va., served as President Nixon's liaison with special interest groups such as labor and ethnic minorities. He was also a key White House political strategist.

Mr. Colson, a lawyer in Virginia since 1958, was disbarred early last month by the state's Supreme Court, which upheld the disbarment decision of the state bar association, on the ground that Mr. Colson had demonstrated "a reckless disregard" of the "integrity of the legal profession and the judicial system."

He twice applied to the Ford Administration for some form of executive clemency, asking in September for a Presidential pardon or a commutation of his sentence, and requesting a pardon again in December.