

Value of Colson as a Watergate Witness Is Uncertain

By ANTHONY RIPLEY

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 4 —

Charles W. Colson today is a surprise witness for the prosecution in the Watergate affair, but his exact value in that role is a matter of dispute.

Associates of the tough-talking former special counsel to President Nixon say privately, "The notion that he is going to pull the President down from his perch is not there."

At the White House, Gerald L. Warern, the deputy press secretary, told reporters at today's briefing, "We welcome the possibility that Mr. Colson may testify and welcome his decision to step forward and testify completely and comprehensively.

"The suggestion that the White House is apprehensive is utterly false."

Even the President's Watergate lawyer, James D. St. Clair, joined in. As he went into the room where the House Judiciary Committee is considering impeachment, he recommended that Mr. Colson be called as a witness there, saying his testimony would be "highly supportive" of Mr. Nixon.

On the other hand, one former White House associate said Mr. Colson "knows where all the bodies are buried." A second former associate agreed, saying that the former counsel's access to the President and rapport with him were unique among White House staff members.

Yesterday, Mr. Colson pleaded guilty to a single count of attempting to obstruct justice

and influence the trial of Dr. Daniel Ellsberg, the central figure in the Pentagon papers trial.

All other charges against him in the Watergate scandal were dropped in exchange for his plea and his pledge to cooperate as a witness for the Watergate prosecutor, Leon Jaworski.

David L. Shapiro, Mr. Colson's law partner, said in a telephone interview that Mr. Colson would appear before the Judiciary Committee if he was requested.

"If they ask us, we'll be pleased to cooperate in any way we can," he said, declining other comments on the matter.

'Greater Rapport'

However, associates of Mr. Colson said he might meet informally with the committee staff within 10 days and make similar informal contacts with Mr. Jaworski's staff this week.

The committee and the special prosecutor's office are both believed to be in possession of a formal statement that Mr. Colson had drawn up to present to the Senate Watergate committee.

However, he was never called to testify before the committee. He invoked the constitutional right against self-incrimination when called before the committee staff for interviews.

"He probably had more entree to Nixon over an extended period of time than anyone outside of Ehlichman, Haldeman, Flanigan and Kissinger," said one former associate. He referred to John D. Ehlichman and H. R. Haldeman, former

Presidential aides; Peter M. Flanigan, assistant to the President, and Secretary of State Kissinger.

"In some ways he had greater rapport than any of them," he said. "He had experience on the [Capitol] Hill and around Washington. At the same time, I'm not sure the President trusted him completely."

He was, the same source said, "a red-tape cutter on political action."

From the public records, statements and transcripts of tape recordings made available by the President, Mr. Colson emerges as almost a classic operations man at the White House, driving projects to completion, many of them in the area of shady politics.

During Mr. Nixon's first term, Mr. Colson was assigned to deal with lobbyists and politically potent special interest groups, a sort of go-between with the lobbyists and decision makers.

He brought representatives of the New York building trades unions in to see the President, drafted legal briefs and went over lists of Presidential appointments and guest lists.

Campaign Work

He helped generate telephone calls supporting the President during the Cambodian invasion, took part in campaigns against liberal Senators — Republican Charles E. Goodell of New York, and Democrat Joseph D. Tydings of Maryland — and was linked to a series of criticized campaign advertisements against eight incumbent Senators in the 1970 elections. But, closer to the Watergate

affair, it was he who hired E. Howard Hunt Jr. as a \$100-a-day consultant on the White House staff.

Mr. Hunt was a personal friend from their days at Brown University and was sent off on a number of missions approved by Mr. Colson.

It was also Mr. Colson who said he called Jeb Stuart Magruder, then deputy director of the Committee for the Re-election of the President, and urged him to move on a project Mr. Hunt and G. Gordon Liddy were involved in. He said he did not know that the project was the Watergate burglary.

Mr. Colson sent to John W. Dean 3d, the President's former counsel, the list of "enemies" selected for possible future revenge.

Worked With Co-ops

He worked with the dairy farmers' cooperatives in their early dealings with the White House at the time a \$2-million campaign contribution was pledged.

The presidential transcripts link him to possible offers of clemency to the original Watergate burglary.

Mr. Colson is also said to have warned Mr. Nixon late in 1972 and early 1973 that high members of the President's staff were involved in covering up the Watergate affair.

He worked on a parole for Calvin Kovins, who was convicted along with James R. Hoffa, former teamster president conferring with Charles G. Rebozo and former Florida Senator George A. Smathers on the project. Both Mr. Rebozo and Mr. Smathers are old friends of Mr. Nixon.