

Early Talk of Resignation

Colson's Story on Nixon

Washington

Former White House aide Charles Colson said yesterday that Richard Nixon considered resigning the presidency eight months before he did so, but worried that Gerald Ford could not control Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

"You know, Henry really is unstable at times," Colson quoted Mr. Nixon as telling him in a December, 1973, conversation.

Asked about the Colson statement, Kissinger replied, "I will not dignify that with a comment."

In an interview on the NBC "Today" show, Colson said that in a Dec. 18, 1973, conversation, Mr. Nixon talked seriously about resigning the presidency.

"Maybe what this country needs is a nice clean Jerry Ford," Colson quoted Mr. Nixon as saying. "The trouble with Jerry Ford is it would take him two years just to get up speed."

Mr. Nixon was quoted as adding, "Jerry's greatest difficulty is he couldn't control Henry Kissinger."

As an example of what he thought Mr. Nixon meant, Colson said that a year earlier Kissinger had advocated an immediate resumption of bombing of North Vietnam when negotiations with Le Duc Tho appeared stalemated.

Colson said he saw a cable Kissinger sent from Paris on Dec. 5, 1972, which read, "Start the bombing immediately, these madmen have doublecrossed us."

State Department spokesman Robert Anderson said the department files were reviewed and did not support Colson's version of the cable.

Colson said Mr. Nixon ordered Kissinger to continue negotiating. He held off resumption of the bombing for three weeks.

Colson said that in another conversation in December,

1973, Mr. Nixon said he was confident the Supreme Court would uphold his contention he could not be forced to turn over White House tapes to investigators.

"He said if he lost in the Supreme Court on the tapes he would resign," said Colson. The court ruled 8 to 0 against Mr. Nixon in July, 1974, and he resigned a few weeks later.

Colson said Mr. Nixon told him he felt his four appointees to the court — Warren E. Burger, Harry A. Blackmun, William H. Rehnquist and Lewis F. Powell Jr. — would vote in his favor and let him keep the tapes.

"He told me he was sure that he would have four votes when the tape case came to the Supreme Court," Colson said.

In a similar interview, former White House counsel John W. Dean III had quoted Colson as saying Mr. Nixon had told him he had assurances from Burger that the court would support him.

Colson and Dean served prison terms on charges stemming from Watergate investigations and recently were released.

Colson also said:

- Mr. Nixon played a personal role in the negotiations that led to Spiro Agnew's resignation as vice president in the fall of 1973.

- The FBI sent to the White House files containing potentially embarrassing personal information about Senator George McGovern of South Dakota, Mr. Nixon's Democratic opponent in the 1972 presidential election, and about the late President Kennedy.

Colson said the McGovern information never was used. He said the file on Kennedy had "no national security value whatsoever" and concerned an investigation in the 1940s when Kennedy was a Lieutenant in the Navy.

- He read the CIA files on Watergate and concluded, "It is inconceivable to me that the CIA did not know in advance about the Watergate break-in."

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