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'I Ponder the Paradox'

By E. Howard Hunt Jr.

EGLIN AIR FORCE BASE, Fla.— Recently I received a letter from a Watergate co-defendant, now free. He wrote to recommend, now free. He represent me at my parole hearing, and was astonished when I replied that his suggestion was premature: I would not even be eligible for parole until January 1977, some fourteen months away. At that time I will have completed 30 months of Federal imprisonment, the minimum term imposed in my eight-year sentence, plus \$10,000 fine.

Since March 1973, when I was provisionally sentenced to a 40-year term, I have been incarcerated a total of 17 months in 13 different penal institutions ranging from city and county jails to three Federal prisons. Seven months ago I was reincarcerated in the Federal Work camp at Eglin Air Force Base.

During that period a number of Watergate figures were freed by our sentencing judge but my plea for a lessened sentence was rejected even though the court of appeals had vacated three counts to which I pleaded guilty. The remaining three counts, I believe, are the fewest charged against any major Watergate figure sentenced to prison.

Imprisonment is demoralizing enough without the psychological burden of an inequitable sentence. John W. Dean 3d, Jeb Stuart Magruder, and John N. Mitchell, are free. Unlike James W. McCord Jr. and G. Gordon Liddy (the latter is still imprisoned), I pleaded guilty; they were tried and convicted of at least eight counts each.

Unlike Mr. Liddy, I cooperated in testimony before Federal and state grand juries, the Ervin committee, and the House of Representatives. Unlike Mr. McCord, I appeared as a Government witness in two celebrated trials: the Ellsberg break-in and the Watergate cover-up, in both of which the prosecution was successful.

Not long ago I read about a survey

of sentencing in New York State and learned that the average sentence for burglary was 3.6 years. That average would include armed, violent criminals, many of whom had prior criminal records, and did not reflect actual time served—usually a third of the sentence.

Contrast that average with the eight-year term I am now serving (as a first offender) for second-degree burglary, in essence conspiracy to commit burglary. In Watergate there was no intent to steal anything of value, and a similar crime in most jurisdictions outside the District of Columbia would have been viewed as trespass, or at most breaking and entering, infractions of a substantially lesser scale bearing less severe penalties.

Mr. McCord was also convicted of bugging and wiretapping, while I pleaded guilty to conspiring to enable him to do it, a lesser crime than the acts themselves.

Charles W. Colson plea-bargained and was sentenced to a short term from which Judge Gerhard Gesell humanely released him when Mr. Colson's son was arrested for marijuana possession. After a divorce that gave child custody to his ex-wife, Mr. Colson remarried. Thus he had both a wife and an ex-wife to handle family problems.

My wife was killed in a plane crash nearly three years ago, leaving four motherless children all of whom have suffered deeply from the trauma of a double family tragedy. Our youngest child was only nine at the time. Since then, while I've been imprisoned, he has lived first with a housekeeper then with family friends—unsatisfactory arrangements left him troubled and disoriented, unable to comprehend why his father remains in prison when so many others have been released.

Unless I'm a political prisoner, I don't understand it either. And I ponder the paradox, hour by hour, day by day, week by week, month by month. To me time never seems to end.

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