

Colson Tells of Nixon Praise for Connally and Haig

By PETER KIHSS

Former President Richard M. Nixon's special counsel, Charles W. Colson, says that Mr. Nixon once told him that Secretary of the Treasury John B. Connally and Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr. were "the only two men around here qualified" to succeed him as President—in part because they supported the mining of North Vietnamese harbors.

Mr. Colson has written a 346-page book, "Born Again," describing his religious conversion after he left the White House in 1973. It is to be formally published March 1 by Chosen Books and distributed by Fleming H. Revell, of Old Tappan, N. J., but will be available in bookstores in middle or late February.

Mr. Colson says that President Nixon, in a December 1973 conversation attributed to the White House tape recordings that were the final

evidence in his eventual downfall to his chief of staff, H. R. Haldeman, and bitterly remarked:

"The tapes, they were all Haldeman's idea. Stupid, just stupid. I told Bob twice to have the system removed, but you know Bob. I forgot all about them. But there aren't any here now. I ordered every one removed. I saw to it myself. You can be sure of that."

Special Counsel

Mr. Colson was viewed by many as the White House "hatchet man" and he recalls how an anonymous Senate aide was the source of the description that haunted him: "Colson would walk over his own grandmother if he had to."

He served as special counsel from 1969 to 1973. He pleaded guilty to a charge of obstructing justice in connection with the trial of Dr. Daniel Ellsberg, who was accused of leaking the

Pentagon papers, and was fined \$5,000 and served nearly seven months in prison before his release about a year ago.

President Nixon's views on the men around him, according to Mr. Colson, were offered when he ordered the mining of Haiphong harbor and all-out bombing of North Vietnam to counter the spring, 1972, North Vietnamese offensive.

"When told the decision would infuriate the American people and perhaps cost him the election now only five months away," Mr. Colson writes, "I saw the President's jaw tighten."

"So what!" he snapped. "It's the right thing to do. If I didn't do it, the Presidency wouldn't be worth getting re-elected to."

"Later he confided: 'Only Al and John understand. They're the only ones in the whole government, besides you and Bob, who favored this decision.'"

General Haig was then deputy to Henry Kissinger in the National Security Council.

"Then wistfully he added, 'You know, Chuck, those are the only two men around here qualified to fill this job when I step down.'"

An editor's note says that Mr. Colson wrote President Nixon May 1, 1973, the day after Mr. Haldeman resigned as chief of staff, successfully recommending General Haig as replacement. Mr. Colson was also said to have "negotiated" the switch of Mr. Connally, former Democratic Governor of Texas, to the Republican party.

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