

John Mitchell Gets a Furlough



JOHN MITCHELL
'Serious hip problem'

Washington

Attorney General Griffin Bell yesterday approved a medical furlough for Watergate figure John Mitchell to determine whether he needs surgery for hip trouble.

The furlough is expected to begin just after Christmas, the Justice Department said.

Mitchell, who served as attorney general under Richard Nixon and was convicted of crimes stemming from the Watergate coverup, is confined to a federal prison camp at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama.

He asked for an early parole, saying his hip problem is increasingly serious and surgery should

Back Page Col. 1

From Page 1

not be performed within the prison system.

Bell approved a furlough for Mitchell so private orthopedic surgeons can determine if an operation is necessary to correct a degenerative condition of the right hip, the department said.

Although federal prisoners ordinarily are transferred to the medical center for federal prisoners at Springfield, Mo., when they have problems, prisons director Norman Carlson said such a move might not be safe for Mitchell.

"Springfield has 1050 inmates including medical, surgical and psychiatric patients," the department said in a statement.

The orthopedic consultants are expected to report their recommendations to the prisons bureau by January 12, and it will then make final decisions about treatment for Mitchell, the department said.

On October 4, Watergate Judge John Sirica reduced Mitchell's sentences to a minimum of one year, making him eligible for parole next June. He was convicted of the Watergate coverup along with former Richard Nixon aides H. R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, and each originally was sentenced to 30 months to eight years.

Mitchell's attorney, William Hundley, wrote Bell in October that the condition, which became troublesome during the Watergate trials, "has gotten progressively worse over the past few years . . ."

Mitchell is "in constant pain and is taking too much valium just to try and ease the pain," Hundley wrote.

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