

**Iron Man****Nick Thimmesch**

THERE WAS no better soldier in the Watergate tragedy than crusty John N. Mitchell, a man hated by those who don't know him, and admired by those who do. He does his time in the federal prison at Maxwell Air Force Base, without carping about his fellow transgressors in Watergate. He limps about in a body ravaged by two major operations, and he's lucky he survived.

Now comes Attorney General Griffin Bell to say that if he had been judging, he would have put Mitchell on probation for his offenses, and remarking that Mitchell has "suffered a great deal." In a dialogue with ABC-TV's Barbara Walters last week, Bell, who was a U.S. judge for 15 years, said: "We hold federal officials to high standards. John N. Mitchell was a first offender, as were most people in Watergate. Now, if they rob a bank, they most likely would have been given probation... (as) nondescript people..."

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DID BELL feel sorry for Mitchell?

"I do, yes," the attorney general said, perhaps indicating a different political climate these days. "I think he suffered a great deal. He's been disbarred. He is financially — financially, he's broke. His wife's gone. He's got a teen-age daughter that he ought to be able to spend some time with. I think he suffered a great deal for what he did."

After hearing John Ehrlichman complain bitterly about Nixon and the CIA, and H.R. (Bob) Haldeman do much the same, and Nixon himself piously intone his concern for these powerful members of his court, and, indeed,

hearing the whole gang try to put the blame on the other guy, Mitchell's silence and fortitude are appreciated.

After many months of suffering excruciating pain in his right hip, Mitchell was told last winter that he needed corrective surgery. Upon examination, it was discovered that he had an aneurism in his abdomen which required emergency surgery.

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BETWEEN this ordeal and the hip surgery which followed 10 weeks later, Mitchell, quite pale and thin, testified before a congressional committee on a CIA report that South Korea funneled \$400,000 to the Democratic party in 1968.

Mitchell also spends a fair amount of time providing legal counsel to fellow prisoners. He sleeps in a dormitory with 40 other inmate, and by all accounts, is well liked for his good humor.

His original sentence was reduced last year by Judge John Sirica to 1-to-4 years. This makes Mitchell eligible for parole the 22nd of this month, but it's likely he'll be held after that because the Southeast Parole Commission won't hear his case until July 5th.

It is not an excuse, nor even small consolation, to conclude that whatever Mitchell did, it was done by others in high office in previous administrations. Only the "others" were never prosecuted or jailed. It was the intensely political climate, combined with a sense of public outrage over Watergate, which helped make Mitchell the first attorney general to enter prison.