

Oral History Interview
With
CHARLES W. COLSON
On
June 15, 1988



Nixon Presidential Materials Staff
National Archives and Records Administration

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Nixon Presidential Materials Project

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Charles W. Colson.

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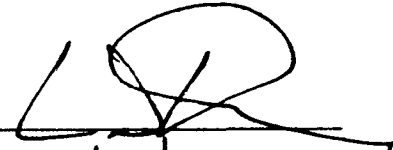
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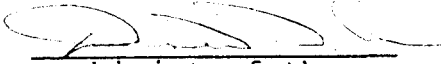
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Oral history interview with Charles W. Colson
conducted by Frederick J. Graboske
at Mr. Colson's office in Reston, Virginia
on June 15, 1988

FJG: In preparing for this interview I looked at hundreds of documents, thousands of documents. I couldn't really decide where to start until I read the exit interview that you did with Susan Yowell and Jack [John R.] Nesbitt fifteen years ago.

CWC: I re-read that recently.

FJG: You mentioned one area that you would like to be questioned about in the future was your work with President [Richard M.] Nixon between the election and the signing of the peace accords on Vietnam. So let's start there.

CWC: Let me ask you. Did we in the exit interview get into any of that?

FJG: No, you just said that was an area you'd like to cover. That [H. R.] Haldeman wasn't there...

CWC: That's right.

FJG: ...for much of that time.

CWC: I guess I said that because I felt a certain obligation to history to try to explain what happened in that period. Now, all these years later, I'm wondering how reliably I can do it. My recollection is that, after the election, the President went to Camp David pretty much to try to re-organize the second administration. I'm not sure whether those meetings at Camp David were on tape or not on tape.

FJG: I believe the Camp David system was disconnected by that time.

CWC: Was it by that time? Why would it have by then? Nobody knew

about the existence of the tapes.

FJG: Somebody decided it wasn't worth it.

CWC: Interestingly enough, if that is so, Nixon did not know it--or forgot--because the only time I was ever suspicious of a taping was in one of the meetings I went to with the President at Camp David--dinner at his lodge. What's the President's lodge called?

FJG: Aspen.

CWC: Aspen. After dinner I was talking alone with the President and at that particular point in time he was very angry with Henry Kissinger. He and I were talking in the living room at Aspen. Actually, we were talking in the little alcove. Just as you came through the door there was a little sitting area to the left. He and I were sitting there alone. Haldeman, [John D.] Ehrlichman, and [Ronald L.] Ziegler had been there for dinner. After dinner Nixon and I were talking in that little sitting room. I was getting ready to leave. Haldeman had gone earlier, for some other reason. Nixon walked me into the hallway leading into the bedrooms to tell me that Kissinger would be leaving the administration soon, as soon as the war with Vietnam was finally wrapped up, that Kissinger would be going back to Harvard. Nixon was furious at him for some interview he'd given to either a French or a Swedish journalist, I can't remember which now.

FJG: Oriana Fallaci.

CWC: Oriana Fallaci. Thank you, that's exactly right. The fact that he took me into the other room and sort of spoke in a hushed tone as if he didn't want anybody to hear--as far as I knew we were alone in Aspen except for Manolo Sanchez anyway--made me for the

first time suspicious there was a taping system. It was the only time that I ever really had any reason to think there was.

But there were several impressions I had during those meetings at Camp David. I wrote about them in my book Born Again. I felt an eerie sensation, like the Presidency had been sort of stolen away from the White House and it was in exile up in Camp David while it was being totally restructured. In one sense that's true. Most of the time during the election I was worried about getting the President re-elected. Haldeman was looking beyond the election to how he was going to fundamentally change the government in the second term. I discovered that I was kind of an alien intruder in what had been an inner circle that I had felt very much a part of.

Until the election of 1972 I was very close to Nixon and remained close to him afterwards. The group in the White House that masterminded the election was Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Colson, [John B.] Connally, [John N.] Mitchell. Add Kissinger to the inner circle on foreign policy. Then everything seemed to abruptly change. The morning after the election Nixon came in, and Haldeman led him into the Roosevelt Room. He gave the [William E.] Gladstone "exhausted volcano" analogy and asked for everybody's resignation, which stunned most people. It didn't really matter a whole lot to me because I'd pretty well decided to leave the administration anyway, although I'd toyed with the idea of staying if certain things could be arranged the way I wanted them.

FJG: What were those?

CWC: I would have been willing to stay as Secretary of Labor--that was something Nixon had talked to me about--but I realized that Watergate probably made that impossible. I had become too much of a political lightning rod to go through a Senate confirmation. I would have taken the chairmanship of the Republican National Committee for a year or two to help consolidate what I thought [was] the significant political realignment that had occurred in the '72 election, although I really didn't have a heart for that. And I would have stayed for one year, a short time, in the White House to try to do the same thing: consolidate the political gains that had been made in the '72 election. I had already told my law partners I was coming back, and I had really had made mental and emotional commitments to leave the White House.

I didn't care a whole lot. I really wasn't going to Camp David to try to protect my own turf in the second term, because I really didn't care whether I stayed or didn't stay. I'd been making six-figure incomes before going into the government, and I had a lot of money waiting for me on the outside. So it wasn't that I felt like I had to stay.

I was gripped by this sort of sensation that all of a sudden the Presidency has changed. The election's been held; it's all over; everybody's been asked to resign. And it's almost like we lost the election. That the Presidency is now in exile up at Camp David. Haldeman and Ehrlichman are in a major power grab, which I believed they were (and still think so). They were going to streamline the government to make it less Cabinet-administration and much more a line-function running through the

senior aides.

As a matter of fact, I came back and dictated a memorandum to my own files about my reactions to my meetings at Camp David with Haldeman, Ehrlichman, the President--two or three meetings, because I went up there (I'm sure your records show it), but I went up there for dinner twice with the President and then I took several people up, like Pete [Peter J.] Brennan, who became Secretary of Labor, [and] others. I was up there four or five times. I was so jarred (that is the right word, emotionally jarred) by what I saw that I came back and called Bryce Harlow and had a long talk with Bryce Harlow for two hours on the telephone, and then dictated a memorandum of my reactions and recollections. I don't know where that is, whether it ever got in the files, or not (I've given a lot of my files to Wheaton College because they were sort of inextricably linked with my personal life and the beginning of this ministry. So I'm not sure whether that's in there or not). Somewhere, someplace, is a long memo I dictated of my reactions.

The President was a willing party to all this, but I had the feeling that much of the impetus was coming from Haldeman and Ehrlichman. Part of it was well-motivated. Part of it was to try to get the government running a little more efficiently, because the Presidency, we had discovered, really can't manage the government. Subsequent Presidents have discovered the same thing. You can steer foreign policy. You can battle with the Congress for domestic policy. You can be the head of state, the visible public figure, but it's very hard to manage the

government. So Roy Ash came in and did the Ash [Council] study and there was the whole re-organization plan. Part of that was a healthy thing: to try to get some control of the second term and do things rather than just drift in the same old patterns. But part of it was, as I felt at the time, two guys wanting to become the super sort of deputy Presidents. It really struck me wrong. I really had some bad vibrations, I guess, on all my trips to Camp David.

The second thing about the post-election period that was significant was--and now I've got to really search my memory--was when it looked like the.... Haldeman took off, for a period of time. In December, when Nixon resumed the bombing [of North Vietnam], I was the only.... This you must have on tape. Early December meetings in the President's EOB [Executive Office Building] office, I would think you would have on tapes. I don't know how [intelligible] they are. The EOB tapes I listened to were catastrophes. I could not make myself out.

FJG: They're very difficult to understand. The worst thing is that someone gave the President a clock, if you remember this thing. It was on his desk and it ticked, and that's what you hear at first...

CWC: Right.

FJG: ...is this ticking clock. The voices are under it.

CWC: Yeah, and my voice tends to be low and monotone and so it didn't come through very well.

FJG: I've learned to understand you...

CWC: Have you?

FJG: ...on the tapes. You and Nixon. I got pretty good at it after awhile. I've spent ten years at it.

CWC: I remember one tape, January 8, 1973, because it was thought to be a very significant tape for Watergate. It wasn't. I could not make myself out. I mean I listened, and the [Special] Prosecutor's office had all of those amplifying techniques.

FJG: It's not amplification. It's experience.

CWC: Hmm. Well, you probably could hear me--maybe you could understand me better than I could understand myself. [Laughter] Anyway, the sequence of events, I'm not sure I can pin the dates down now precisely, but early [in] December Kissinger was in Paris attempting to negotiate the final accords. [Alexander M.] Haig was not in the White House, and I don't know why Haig wasn't there. A member of the NSC staff by the name of [Richard T.] Kennedy, who's now an ambassador, was handling the cable traffic. I guess that was when Nixon and I spent many long hours together when I was sort of his sounding board. Not that I had had any expertise in foreign policy or had been necessarily advising him on that, but I was there, so I was the guy he was talking to. Kissinger was desperately trying to get him to make a public [television] broadcast and Nixon was refusing, but at the same time attempting to put pressure on South Vietnam and step up pressure on North Vietnam. He was trying to get South Vietnam to be more amenable. I used to, during that time, give speeches to Barry Goldwater and other "hawks" that would be attacking South Vietnam's intransigence. At the same time, he [Nixon] was ordering Kissinger to stand firm with the North Vietnamese. Then

we resumed the Christmas bombing, which was a very lonely, difficult period. I was sort of in the middle between Henry Kissinger and Nixon, both of whom in their memoirs have ignored this period out of a mutual non-aggression pact between themselves, because neither Kissinger nor Nixon, I would think, want to point fingers at each other and open up cans of worms. But I was in the middle of it. Kissinger was sending back these very hawkish cables, which I assume are in the....

FJG: In the NSC files.

CWC: They've got to be. Then, when Nixon agreed to resume the bombing, Kissinger went on a major campaign to disavow the resumption of the bombing. Nixon ordered me to have Kissinger's phone calls monitored and also all contacts with the press monitored. So I got John Scali, who was on my staff (who's now the ABC newsman) to be checking the logs and checking news people, and we traced most of the anti-Nixon leaks from the White House to Henry.

On New Year's weekend of 1973 Nixon was at Camp David, Kissinger was out in California--and I was in Washington, and sort of the intermediary when Nixon was fulminating about.... Well, you've heard those conversations. You've heard the phone conversations, from Camp David to me at home and then the White House, in which he was raving and ranting about Henry double-talking, which Henry was. It was during that time that I got Steve [Stephen B.] Bull and the Secret Service checking all of Kissinger's calls and discovering that Kissinger was calling "Scotty" [James B.] Reston and others, planting self-serving

stories at the same time he was recommending Nixon be tough on Vietnam. It's sort of petty stuff but nonetheless it's part of the historical record. Also explains the internal intrigue in the White House, which was not peculiar to the Nixon years; it goes on today. Today people write about it more freely than we did then.

I always thought that was probably in many ways historically significant because Nixon was enormously distracted by the Vietnam War for the entire period of December and January when he should have been doing two things. He should have been really solidifying what he was going to do in the second term, and he couldn't, because the Vietnam issue kept coming unravelled. He also could pay no attention to what was then the enlarging Watergate scandal.

There was one time during that period which, when I told the President--and I've testified to this, but no one ever found the tape, so I don't know. Maybe you have. There was one time during that period in January when the Vietnam thing was finally.... I didn't feel free to talk to Nixon about Watergate until the the Vietnam thing was over. I was in contact with my own soon-to-be law partner, David Shapiro, who was advising me to tell the President the dangers of obstruction of justice. But I couldn't do it, because he was too consumed with Vietnam. I've often wondered, if it hadn't been for that reversal of the peace talk negotiations and the Christmas bombing, if he might not have dealt with Watergate earlier. But there was one time when I told him in January that I had come to the conclusion now that

Watergate stretched into the White House and could involve people in the White House, which was the first time I had believed that. I really thought, naively, that John Dean was not a conspirator but was trying to just protect us politically. I really thought that Haldeman and Ehrlichman knew nothing about it. Then, when I discovered that there was money being paid to the defendants--the first time I found that out was in early January--I then got nervous and went to Haldeman and told Haldeman that I was concerned about it. That it could be interpreted as obstruction of justice (that was when Haldeman made what was--I've written about--his famous remark, "What's the matter with raising money for defendants? They did it for Angela Davis. Why can't we?"). When I got nowhere with Haldeman I went to Nixon and said, "I'm concerned. This could stretch into the White House." (We were in the EOB, I remember that.) And he looked at me and said, in a very low voice, now as I think about it, "You mean Bob and John?" And I said, "Yes." Have you ever found that on a tape? Have you? Prosecutors never could.

FJG: Yes, I think I've heard that tape.

[Interruption]

CWC: I always intended if I had ever gone to trial to use that as an exculpatory statement because I was the first guy to go to Nixon and warn him of the pitfalls in the White House, I think. Unless somebody else had. But they never could find that tape. Maybe it was one of those that it was just, you couldn't hear.

FJG: That's possible.

CWC: But you've now been able to hear it. So be it. Doesn't make any

difference. And that was sometime in January that I recall saying that to him around the time of the Inaugural. I don't know whether you've located that.

I think when I did the exit interview that's what I was thinking about. Maybe you've got some specifics in that period you can help....

FJG: One of the things you mentioned was your views of the second term versus Fred [Frederic V.] Malek's. I believe it's probably to do with the organization of the administration. You said history would bear you out. I just wondered what the difference was in your views and Malek's. Malek, of course, was Nixon's....

CWC: Malek, I think, was very caught up in the Roy Ash business. I had grown up in politics. I believed that the art of governing involved the art of building political consensus: affecting how people think; coalitions; symbols; moving public attitudes; using the "bully pulpit" of the Presidency to influence how people think. Malek was pure efficiency: running government the way you would run a business. He was bringing in people like the Secretary of Transportation, as I remember somebody by the name of [Claude S.] Brinegar, whom nobody had heard of. I wanted to bring in some people who were politically astute, not for partisan advantage but because, in order to work with cities and communities and your transportation policies, you needed to have somebody who knew how the political system worked. He was bringing in guys that may have had MBAs [Master of Business Administration] at Harvard and were whiz kids in business and knew information sciences and could make things run well, but

government doesn't work like business. I was concerned with governing, Malek with managing. But there's a difference. Government requires a lot of cajoling and coaxing and compromise and consensus, and business doesn't. Business is much more autocratic than government can afford to be, at least government at the policy-making levels. So my battles with Malek, and they were many, were over the kinds of people that he was going to staff that second term with.

I was looking for people who understood how to motivate people politically; how to change attitudes and values. Malek was looking at the most efficient manager. He was in the Roy Ash mentality. I felt historically that [Dwight D.] Eisenhower made that mistake with business people. He thought you could just transpose business principles into government. And that Nixon was in peril of making it in the second administration. History probably won't render a judgement because the whole thing fell apart. So there's no telling. But we've certainly seen [Ronald W.] Reagan's problems in that respect. So....

FJG: As I recall when you were preparing to leave the administration there was some talk of you going into what they called a "Kitchen Cabinet", a sort of unofficial advisory capacity. Can you talk a little bit about that? What was intended there?

CWC: That was Nixon's idea, it wasn't mine. Nixon asked me at Camp David on--let's see if I'm as good as Haldeman [at remembering details]--on a Monday night the 13th of November, the Monday night after the election. We had dinner together with Haldeman, Ehrlichman, myself, and the President. Before dinner the

President made a very strange request of me. I couldn't figure it out. Still can't understand it. He asked me if I would stay in the second administration. Oh, I know what it was. Sure. I was called on Monday morning after the election. Nixon had gone to Key Biscayne, and now he was back at Camp David. Bob Haldeman called me himself and said, "The President wants to talk to his top people, starting in the order of importance of the individual to him in the second term. You should be flattered because he wants to see you first." It was kind of an unusual thing for Haldeman to say, which is why it stuck with me, because he would normally just call up and say, "Be here at seven o'clock." It was almost like I was being romanced a little bit. It caused me to be a little suspicious. I got there, arrived at Aspen, and the President asked me to sit and have a drink before dinner, not in the main part of the living room, which is off to the right looking out over the pool, but on the left part, there's a little sitting area.

Haldeman and Ehrlichman and I sat there, and Nixon asked me what I was planning to do. I told him, "I've written you a memo," because Haldeman asked that I do so (and that's I'm sure in the files) "in which I outlined the three things I would be willing to do if I stayed in the government, but felt on balance I should leave." I told him that I had already been talking to my law partners and planned to go back and practice law. He said, "Well, I'd really like you to stay." He said, "The place where you could help me the most is to take over Bill [William E.] Timmons's job and to be Counsellor to the President. Do what

Bryce Harlow did for me. Be Counsellor to the President and handle the legislative affairs." I was thinking to myself, "That's the last thing that I would ever do." I couldn't figure out why in the world he would ask me to do that. I said to him, "I don't think that's my thing. I don't really have any heart for dealing with these Congressmen and Senators. I don't really enjoy that. I think I'm better off to go back and practice law." He didn't ask if "there's anything else that you wanted to do."

I had the feeling at the time that there was no way that Haldeman and Ehrlichman were going to let me stay on, for several reasons, a lot of reasons. First of all, I didn't fit into their neat scheme of things. So, I took the President's offer as one that he made in order to be able to say he'd made me an offer, knowing I wouldn't take it. Then of course I later read in his memoirs that the hardest decision he had to make after the election was to let Chuck Colson go because he knew Chuck loved politics. I was planning to go. When I read his memoirs, it confirmed that the offer he made me was pro forma. It was to make me an offer, but one he knew I wouldn't accept.

Then he said, "Come to think of it, you're probably right. You can do more good..." (I figured this is all on tape, but you say it's been disconnected.) He said, "Come to think of it, you're probably right. You probably can do more good on the outside. What I'd like you to do is be General Counsel to the Republican National Committee. As their lawyer you'll be plugged into the party apparatus, and you'll be part of a 'Kitchen Cabinet'. We'll just meet regularly like we're meeting tonight

for dinner, and you can advise me, and then you can practice law and make all the money you want at the same time." So we spent most of the night talking about that, and then, after dinner--it was a relaxed dinner--after dinner he said he had second thoughts about that. He said "I don't know that it's.... The timing on that probably isn't good. Maybe you should stay for a year or so to help." It was like he had second thoughts. "Maybe you should stay for a year or so and work with me on consolidating the political gains of the '72 election." Which is one of the three options I'd given him for staying. I said, "If you want me to do that, I will, because that's one of the things that I would have the heart for." So he said to me, "Yep, I think that's what we should do. Let's delay your leaving six months or a year, maybe. It certainly would take us six months; it might take us a year. Let's delay your leaving. And stay in the White House as my assistant to organize the political affairs, and I'll give you all the authority you want."

After that night Haldeman and I went off and had a talk. I told Haldeman what conditions I'd want to work for that year in the White House. Haldeman said, "None of us" (which was only he and John, I guess) "are thinking of ourselves. We're thinking of just giving our lives to the country for the next four years and serving the President, and here you are making demands on us. You want this and you want that. And then you're going off and make a lot of money." And I said, "Well, talk to the President. This is what he wants." That was the way it was left that night.

About two or three days later, Haldeman called me and said,

"That'll never work out." He said, "The President's re-thought it. And we think you really should go and start the law practice. And the President would like to give you an overseas trip in February, and you can take care of a mission for him. Be good for you and your wife, and after you come back from that, get your law practice started." I said, "Fine." That's the way I really thought it was left.

All I can do is be subjective about it. I always thought, afterwards, and maybe this is self-serving, but I always figured Nixon would have kept me--wanted to keep me on. I had told him in July of '72 when we had dinner one night in Key Biscayne that I was going to leave after the election and practice law. And he had said he didn't blame me a bit. It would be a second term after all and... I said, "The fun is gone after the election, for me," (because I loved the politics) and I had left a very significant income when I went to the White House in 1969. So I told him I was going back, so it wasn't really a big surprise.

I always interpreted the events--and that may be borne out by other things or not--that he wanted me to stay; that Haldeman and Ehrlichman were dead against it. That the dinner--my being the first one invited up there on a Monday night--was to flatter me, and then he would offer me something I couldn't take, knew I wouldn't take. Then I would turn it down. Then the President, after dinner, had second thoughts, apart from Haldeman and Ehrlichman, [and] asked me to stay a year. I agreed [and] went and talked to Haldeman. Haldeman was very unhappy about it. The next day Haldeman and Ehrlichman worked on him, and I was gone

again. I went back up there and talked to the President two or three times, and on each occasion he would talk about the law firm and friends he was going to send me and law business, so I realized it was settled then, and that was that.

FJG: I can understand why Ehrlichman would be opposed to your staying. Maybe we can get into that a little bit later on.

CWC: You can understand that?

FJG: Yeah.

CWC: Why? I fought him on most issues.

FJG: Yeah. I think you've got the point right there: you fought him. Why would Haldeman be opposed to your staying?

CWC: Because I was the only other guy on the whole White House staff that could walk into the President's office without Haldeman's OK.

FJG: And you would go in and spend some time talking with the President.

CWC: He used to be very apprehensive about that. Now let me be fair to Bob. There were times when Bob Haldeman actually encouraged that. I think he was ambivalent about it. I think there were times he encouraged it, because it got the President off his back when he wanted to do other things. There would be days when the President just wanted to sit and and shoot the breeze, and I was a good guy to do that with, and that took Bob off the hook. I'd spend sometimes whole Saturday mornings in there. Haldeman could go home and do other things. So in a way he was glad, but also he created a monster out of it, because Nixon would give me assignments directly, and I would get them done outside of

Haldeman's tightly-controlled staff system. It used to infuriate Haldeman.

There were times when he would really raise Cain with me over that. But Nixon would call in Kissinger without Haldeman. Ehrlichman, but John Ehrlichman was pretty careful about keeping Bob Haldeman informed. I wasn't. I was the loose cannon. He could give me things to do, and Haldeman'd never know it. I think he was threatened. That's just an opinion.

FJG: Did he ever talk to you about this?

CWC: Yeah. Once. About the independent access?

FJG: Yes.

CWC: Oh, many times. Yeah.

FJG: What did he say to you?

CWC: He would tell me, if the President called me it was my responsibility to let him know immediately what it was about and clear it with him before I did it, and don't do anything, even if the President ordered me to do it, unless I cleared it with Bob. I said, "Bob, I'm sorry. He got elected, not you. If he tells me to do something, I'm going to do it." So we had some uncomfortable sessions over that.

He also told me, about a month before the campaign was over, he said, "There's something you need to know about Richard Nixon. He uses people. You can think you're his friend one day, and the next day he'll discard you, and you won't even know it. Don't be shocked when he does that to you." I said, "He wouldn't do that to me." I think Bob was setting it up for after the election.

FJG: Do you think Nixon liked to play his senior staff members off

against each other?

CWC: Do I think what?

FJG: Nixon liked to play the senior staff...?

CWC: Oh yeah. Oh, he loved to. It was part of his technique.

FJG: Would he ever tell you to do something and specifically tell you, "Don't tell Bob about this"?

CWC: Oh, yeah. Several times. Many times he would say, "Do something and don't tell Henry about it." He would often say, "There's no point in involving Ehrlichman in this; we know where he stands on it. You just take care of this." That was a frequent technique. You probably heard that on the tapes.

FJG: Right. What would the point of all that be?

CWC: There were several points, I think. One was he would create a certain amount of competition between people which could tend to bring the best out in people (and the worst). He knew that the staff system could stifle. Sometimes he wanted to get away from his own people who were trying to pen him in.

FJG: A number of former staff members--Ray [Raymond K.] Price, Jeb Magruder, and others--have written about what they call "the dark side" of Nixon, and they associate you with the dark side. What's your opinion of that?

CWC: Well, I think everybody has a dark side. I think all human beings do. I think Nixon did. I think we probably, Nixon and I, there were a lot of things about us that were similar in the way we viewed politics. I probably thought--I think it was Teddy [Theodore H.] White who wrote in The Making of the President [1972] or Breach of Faith, one of the two books he wrote after

the '72 campaign, that Nixon and I were the two best politicians in the White House and thought alike. So, when he [Nixon] was thinking about a lot of the gut politics, the political infighting, he would talk to me. He wouldn't talk to Haldeman. That wasn't Haldeman's thing. Haldeman hadn't the background. I grew up in the school of Washington political battles and rough political campaigns in Massachusetts. Haldeman hadn't. Haldeman was a media man. Ehrlichman was an advance man. There wasn't anybody sort of skilled in the school of what I call hand-to-hand political combat in the White House, except me. When Nixon would have these things he'd want to talk about, I'd be the guy he'd lean on. Probably because of a similarity of views on things.

If Nixon's Presidency had not fallen, people would have said, "Nixon was a great political genius. He knew how to manipulate the political system and get his goals accomplished." Then it wouldn't have been the dark side. Then it would have been his political genius. It became the dark side only because of Watergate, which, if you've listened to all the tapes, you probably can render your own opinions. I knew nothing about it in advance and while I wouldn't have opposed it on moral grounds I would have on grounds of pure stupidity. I wouldn't be above doing dirty political tricks but wasn't about to get caught. I'd be offended at the stupidity more than the lack of morality. If Nixon's Presidency hadn't collapsed, what everybody wrote about as the dark side would have been his Machiavellian genius at manipulating situations to his advantage. So, it became the dark side because Watergate brought the whole Presidency down.

[Interruption]

FJG: Why were Haldeman and Ehrlichman suspicious of you?

CWC: [Let me] answer that question another way. Until the [Sam J.] Ervin hearings I never knew or had any idea of the meetings that took place. I never knew of any efforts to try to use the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] as a foil for the tracking of the money. I never knew of the meetings that took place where they plotted the coverup--many of them were later revealed on the tapes. I never knew the September meeting where John Dean came in and talked to the President. I was really--I now realize--I mean, I realized afterwards, when I saw the charts of all those meetings, that I'd been kept in the dark. I also heard from two different people that Ehrlichman had said, "As soon as the election is over, Colson will be gone and so will the Watergate mess with him."

One day we came back from somewhere on Air Force One. We'd all flown somewhere. My wife was with me. So we probably had been in Key Biscayne, and my son met me at the airport. Yeah, that's right. My son met me at the airport, at Andrews. He had come out in my White House car to meet the plane, and he'd never seen Air Force One. The President had left by helicopter, and I was about to drive from there home. Correct that--Patty [Patricia], my wife, wasn't with me. We'd probably been in California. We'd been somewhere on a campaign trip, or something. One of the trips I was there. So I took my son aboard Air Force One to show him the plane, which had just landed at Andrews twenty minutes earlier. We got to the conference room

in the plane, which is right off the President's office, and I swung open the door. I figured, the plane's empty and I'll show my older son the President's office. Haldeman and Ehrlichman were sitting there in the middle of a conversation. When they saw me it was just like a shock. They just stopped the conversation. I said, "Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you guys had gone. I just came to show my son the office." I kept on going and showed him the office. The whole time I did, they were sitting there stony silent, so it was very awkward, because I knew whatever they were talking about, they didn't want me to hear.

There was another time when they were having a meeting in Bob Haldeman's office. John Mitchell was there. It was right after the Watergate break-in. I had to see Bob on something else altogether. I walked to the door of the office, and Mitchell came to the door. I said, "I've got to talk to Bob." He said, "Not now, you don't want to be in this meeting." I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "Watergate." I said, "I hope my friend Howard Hunt wasn't involved." This was about a week after the Watergate. He said, "He was into it up to here [pointing at his ears]. You're better off staying out." So I walked out.

There were four or five times like that when I went into things that I--your sense tells you something's going on, that you're not wanted here. I later saw the chronology of meetings and realized I wasn't in any of them, and that's strange, because I was the guy that was getting most of the public flack. So I

think they wanted me out after the election because they thought that then the heat would be off of them. Whereas in fact they had been involved in many more coverup meetings. I wasn't involved in any coverup meetings; and the prosecutor never charged me with being involved in them.

The one thing that linked me to the coverup was recording [E.] Howard Hunt's phone conversation December '72 and passing it on to John Dean, which I did to protect myself. Didn't work, but.... I didn't think I was furthering the coverup; I thought I was protecting my own interests by recording it. I was never charged with attending one of the coverup meetings, and I didn't know they took place. So, that to me is one reason that I can surmise that both Bob and John were glad, when the election came, that they could get rid of me.

[End side one]

[Begin side two]

FJG: You say you have no previous knowledge of the break-in of the Democratic National Committee headquarters. In February of '72 you had a meeting with Hunt and [G. Gordon] Liddy. Did they discuss anything at all about their intelligence operation? Liddy's proposed intelligence operation?

CWC: Yeah. They were complaining that they had an intelligence operation.... That meeting took place, took all of five minutes. Much was made of it in the Watergate hearings, but what happened was, late in the day Hunt, whom I knew, had brought Liddy by my office, whom I did not know, and don't think I had met, because he wanted me to meet Liddy. He brought Liddy in and said, "My

friend Gordon has been put in charge of security at the Committee to Re-elect the President [CRP]. Those jerks over there aren't listening to him. We can't get anything approved." They knew that I didn't have much use for Jeb Magruder, either his abilities or his strength of character. He wasn't somebody that I thought that much of. Howard Hunt sat on the couch away from the desk while Liddy sat up at the desk and told me his responsibilities, in a brief capsule--[it] had nothing to do with the break-in at the Watergate. It didn't have anything to do with planting people. What he told me was it was intelligence gathering and security at the Republican National Convention, basically. He said, "I've come up with a proposal, a plan. I've presented it. I can't get Magruder to approve it. So there's no use my being over there at the Committee. I should be doing something more productive, if he won't approve it. Would you help me get it approved?" I said, "This is not in my area of responsibility. If it's a good idea, you guys ought to--somebody ought to give you the backing." We probably talked a maximum of five minutes. I think I wrote a memo about it later, after the break-in, because I realized that meeting was going to be significant. Whatever I wrote in that memo was at the time the best I could recall. But at some point I did tell Magruder that his guys had come by to complain, and he ought to get off the pot and do something about it. Which he later testified to. I'm not sure I remember that or I remember him testifying to it. I can't tell you that I independently recall talking to Magruder. It wasn't that big a deal to me. And it was not in my area of

responsibility.

But I felt there should be intelligence gathering, yeah. I was all for that. There's been intelligence gathering in every campaign I'd ever been in. Planting guys in the other headquarters. That was always done. Electronic surveillance, probably if they had asked me about that, I would have said, "No." I know I would have said "no" at the Democratic National Committee for sure, because they wouldn't have gotten any information that was valuable. If they were going to plant bugs at the headquarters of [Edmund S.] Muskie, who was then thought to be our opponent, I probably would have asked some questions about whether they could get away with it, and what the law was, and what would be the consequences if they got caught. I think I would have come down and probably said, "No." Just that there were other ways to get the information that you would need, other than going to.... It would be just too dangerous. I would put an employee to work for them. I had done that in previous campaigns. I kind of thought that's what they were talking about. I don't ever remember them saying anything about electronic devices.

The first time I ever heard anything about that was--I've testified in the Watergate trial--was five days before the actual Watergate break-in. I was in John Mitchell's office at the Committee to Re-elect the President. We wanted to know whether Dwayne Andreas was going to support Hubert Humphrey. Dwayne Andreas was in New York at a meeting in the hotel with Humphrey. If he wasn't going to support Humphrey, he was going to support

us. For some reason it was very significant. Mitchell was sitting puffing on his pipe, and he said, "Tell me his room number and I'll tell you what the conversation is." I thought, "Geez, that's pretty amazing." So that's the first time I ever remember anybody saying anything about electronic surveillance.

FJG: At the Hofstra Conference ["Richard Nixon: A Perspective on his Presidency"] Magruder said that the reason he ordered the break-in was to find out what [Lawrence F.] O'Brien knew about the [Howard] Hughes connection.

CWC: You've undoubtedly read my book, Born Again. And you've read John Dean's book. In prison we called Magruder in and said, "Would you mind telling us why you did this, since we're all in prison?" And he just fumbled all over the place and never gave an answer. I was sitting next to Anthony Lucas at the Hofstra Conference when Magruder gave that answer. Lucas looked at me with this incredible expression: finally, somebody's given an answer. We went outside and talked afterwards, and both of us had the same conclusion: that Magruder answered that because it had been set up for him, and somebody led him to that answer. It was a convenient answer to a question he's never been able to answer before.

FJG: What do you think the correct answer is?

CWC: Whew! I think there's a combination of answers. I think that Magruder doesn't know why he approved it. Liddy and Hunt and these guys came to him, super-romantics, right out of the pages of spy novels, [and] Magruder was into something way over his head. He was a very nice guy, competent administratively--a very

good administrative assistant to somebody. When it came to making decisions, he was just scared of his own shadow. He would not be a good decision-maker, in my opinion. I think he made the decision because he thought he would win favor with his superiors by obtaining inside information. For what purpose? I don't think he ever thought about it. I think his motivation frankly was, "These guys have got a scheme. We can find out what's going on inside the Democratic National Committee. I'll look like a hero with Bob Haldeman. Maybe the President will even get to see it, and I'll get credit." So, I don't think he ever thought of a reason.

I think Hunt was being programmed entirely by Bob [Robert F.] Bennett of the Mullen company, who was really more interested in the internal warfare at the Hughes Tool Company. That's why they went out and tried to get into Greenberg's [Herman "Hank" Greenspun] safe in Las Vegas. They weren't really interested in political information for the Republican National Committee or for CRP. They were interested in whether they could get dirt on the competing faction within Hughes. I think the whole bugging operation was aimed at Larry O'Brien and [R.] Spencer Oliver, both of whom had very close Hughes connections--O'Brien on a retainer, Spencer Oliver's father working for Hughes. I think that it was a commercial venture. But that they got the backing and support and cover of the Committee for the Re-election of the President because they had somebody who was very simple and naive, who thought he could look good by getting intelligence information. Actually, I think the information was being

gathered for commercial purposes, and to make Magruder look good.
That's my theory.

FJG: I think you've answered one of my questions that a lot of people wanted me to ask you, which is, why did you save that tape of your conversation with Howard Hunt? I think you've said you gave it to John Dean.

CWC: OK, I'll tell you why in a very simple answer. When Howard Hunt called me, I had no idea there was a coverup going on. I knew nothing about the attempt to throw the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] off on the track of the CIA. I had no idea they had destroyed the contents of Howard Hunt's safe. I had no idea that they were paying the defendants. I had no idea anybody had been told to perjure themselves. I had no idea that the Department of Justice investigation wasn't thorough and complete. I had no idea that John Dean's sole object in life wasn't to simply protect the President, find out as much as he could, and keep us out of it. I had no idea Haldeman and Ehrlichman had had any coverup meetings. I knew none of this.

All I knew is that the newspapers were blaming me as the guy who knew about the Watergate break-in in advance. If you read that tape very carefully, you will see that in it I maneuvered Hunt into the position of saying that I didn't know anything about it in advance. I saved that tape as my ticket that I wasn't involved in the Watergate. That's the problem with the conspiracy and that's the problem why I say Nixon, once it took on a life of its own, couldn't stop it.

To me, the Watergate was the break-in. To Mitchell,

Haldeman, Ehrlichman, others, it was the coverup. I didn't know there was any coverup. If I'd known there was a coverup, I never would have taped it or I wouldn't have taken the call. I took the call as a way of proving that I wasn't the guy that planned the break-in. Plain and simple. I hung myself with it, because Jim [James] Neal, the prosecutor, told me if it hadn't have been for that tape, he couldn't have indicted me.

FJG: So you made the tape, you saved the tape, thinking it was exculpatory,...

CWC: Absolutely.

FJG: ...and you gave it to John Dean.

CWC: Gave it to John Dean. And said to him at the time, "Hah! This will finally show those guys. Everybody thinks I ordered the Watergate break-in. Read this. Listen to this." He later testified--now, he, I think he wrote that that's exactly what I said to him when I gave it to him. He then listened to it; realized it was dynamite, because it was a blackmail threat; ran it off to Haldeman and Ehrlichman, and it was another step in the coverup, but I backed into it.

FJG: Didn't you notice that there was a blackmail threat in there?

CWC: Yeah, but it didn't make any difference to me.

FJG: Why then did you say...? You said something to the effect of "Say no more. The less I know, the better."

CWC: Yeah, because I didn't want to get involved. I said--and my theory was I could help Howard Hunt if he didn't get me involved in any of those goings on. Then, if he ended up going to jail, I could go to the President and get him out. Which I fully

intended to do. Yeah, "Don't tell me any more. I don't want to get involved in this thing. I've stayed out of it." And I had. Until that tape.

FJG: OK. I want to switch gears here and go back to the 1970 campaign. A researcher was in not long ago, and he's trying to run down the story that the administration (presumably you) gave \$400,000 to Albert Brewer, running in the primary against George Wallace in 1970, in an attempt to end Wallace's political career. Do you know anything about that?

CWC: No. Who was Albert Brewer?

FJG: Albert Brewer was the Lieutenant Governor.

CWC: No. I don't know anything about that. If that happened, it would not have been my department, anyway. That would have been Harry Dent.

FJG: I think the assumption was that, if there was something dirty going on, Harry Dent wouldn't have done it, so it had to be you.

CWC: Oh. That's a logical assumption. I mean, that's an assumption that people, I realize, draw, [a] logical conclusion that people come to. Understandable conclusion. But I don't remember anything.... I didn't handle any cash, ever. Sometimes money came into my office in the way of campaign contributions. I would have the Committee for the Re-election send over and pick it up. I had control of some campaign contributions in 1970, in several states, but Alabama wasn't one of them. I didn't have anything to do with the Wallace campaign in '70.

FJG: OK. This same researcher also recounted a story to me that the IRS [Internal Revenue Service] was investigating George Wallace

and his brother Gerald and one of his financial backers, a fellow named Seymore Trammel. Eventually the IRS investigation was turned off, with only Trammel being prosecuted, and that only after he had cooperated with the prosecutors. Immediately after that investigation was turned off, Wallace announced he would not run as a third party candidate. There is the assumption that there's a quid pro quo somewhere between Wallace and the administration.

CWC: Wallace announced he would not run as a third party candidate?

FJG: Yes.

CWC: But he did run.

FJG: Well, whether he did or not, the idea was that there was a quid pro quo for that statement.

CWC: I don't know anything about it. It doesn't even ring, it really doesn't even ring any bells.

FJG: OK, well, that's a fair answer.

CWC: I remember something that John Mitchell talked about with Wallace. That Wallace.... Oh, I know what it was. Oh yeah, I do know this. Right after the 1970 election we had a meeting down in Key Biscayne. We were talking about Wallace, and John Mitchell said, "He's in a peck of trouble." I remember thinking to myself, "Boy, that's good news because that'll get him out of the way for 1972." Another time I remember Mitchell talking about Wallace being in a lot of trouble and going to have serious problems himself with the law. I didn't remember it being taxes --maybe it was taxes. I do remember Mitchell talking about the fact that George Wallace was going to have his hands full and

might not be a problem to us in '72. I recall that. That was Mitchell who said it, though.

FJG: OK. To stay with Wallace for a minute, in May 1972 he was shot. You had a meeting with the President that evening. In the course of that meeting the President told you to have someone go in Arthur Bremer's apartment and plant some information relating him to the [George S.] McGovern campaign.

CWC: To plant it?

FJG: To plant it.

CWC: Hmm. I don't remember that. I remember him saying "We ought to get the story out to the press that this guy...." I remember the President being obsessed that night with fear that this guy would prove to be a Nixon supporter. He was really uptight about that. He said, "What if this guy turns out to be some right-wing nut? This is going to kill us. It would be great if this guy were a left-wing fanatic." I called Howard Hunt from the President's phone. I think I called from the EOB office. Maybe I went into my own office. If I called from the President's office you would know it.

FJG: I think you went into your own office, because I don't recall that phone call.

CWC: Went into my own office and called Howard Hunt and asked him if he could get out to Milwaukee, or wherever Bremer was from, and find out what was in the apartment and see if there was any evidence that would link this guy to any right-wing or left-wing causes. Came back and told the President I had.... Did I come back and tell the President I had somebody who could go out

there?

FJG: I don't recall the specific details on that.

CWC: But then, we immediately heard that the FBI had sealed the place off, so I never called Hunt back. Later the FBI investigated that with me, and I told them just what I've just told you. I don't remember the President telling me to plant things. You would know, if he said it on the tape.

FJG: At the time of the Wallace shooting, was the President interested in gun control? Did that spark an interest in gun control on his part?

CWC: No, I don't think so. Not that I know of.

FJG: Do you know what his views were on gun control, his personal views?

CWC: I don't remember, but I would assume we would have been pro-National Rifle Association [NRA], just by political disposition.
[Laughter]

FJG: Well, the reason I ask the question is, as I understand, there was a tremendous conflict between your office and Ehrlichman's office, in the person of Geoff [Geoffrey C.] Shepard, on the issue of gun control.

CWC: Well, that would be logical because my office dealt with all the special interest groups. I had about ten or twelve people on my staff dealing with all the special interest groups. I don't think I ever dealt with the NRA. You would know--there would have been memos if it were....

FJG: Yes, there are memos about it.

CWC: Oh, there are? Are they signed by me?

FJG: No, no, they're from...

CWC: Henry Cashen.

FJG: ...Cashen.

CWC: I don't remember being personally involved in the gun control. I was very much involved in the abortion, busing, aid to parochial schools. I remember those. I don't ever remember being involved in the NRA controversy. I mean the gun control.

FJG: OK, on busing which was one of the major domestic problems for the administration, if not the most volatile: you're on record as endorsing someone's views that you were going to "ride busing for all it's worth" in the '72 campaign. This clearly brought you into conflict with John Ehrlichman.

CWC: Head-on. Deathly conflict.

FJG: Why don't you tell me a little bit about that?

CWC: You probably read my memos where I believed that Nixon could forge a new political coalition--which he did, and which was temporarily lost in the '76 campaign and resumed in '80 and '84--of the white ethnic voter feeling alienated; the middle-class worker who now has a boat in the back yard and a house in the suburbs; who's worked hard to get out of the ghetto; who's Polish or Irish, or Italian; who constitutes the swing vote majority in Electoral [College vote] rich states, like Michigan, Ohio, Illinois, Pennsylvania, New York, Maryland. I felt that Nixon could reach those people by appealing to them on the issues about which they were most sensitive. None was more sensitive than the issue of busing, because most of them were making payments on homes in the suburbs in order to get their kids out of the city

schools, and now you're going to bring the kids from the city schools out into the suburbs.

I also felt it was sort of an elitist notion. Dick [Richard M.] Scammon, who had been head of the Bureau of the Census, I think one of the finest political minds in Washington.... Is Scammon still around--Scammon & [Benjamin J.] Wattenberg, the...?

FJG: I don't know what ever happened to Scammon.

CWC: I don't either. I haven't heard from him in recent years. I thought he was a genius. I used to bring him in to meet with the President a lot, for political advice. He was a supporter, and his political advice was great. He always said busing was the single most sensitive issue from all of his polling data. So I was in favor of, and did have, a special political advertising fund for putting up ads in ethnic areas around Detroit and elsewhere. I had a guy on my staff, Mike [Michael P.] Balzano, who did this, and they were very simple ads: it was "Stop busing, vote Nixon." I thought that was an issue you should play for all it was worth.

Scammon's point--I felt busing was an elitist issue--Scammon used to argue that it was patronizing to blacks to say that somehow, by bringing them into contact with whites, they were going to be made superior. Some of that superior white culture would rub off on them and be good for them. Maybe that was justification. I have to admit, I saw the issue as 98% political. And Ehrlichman was worrying about the substance of the issue, and we conflicted.

FJG: You had a lot of conflicts with Ehrlichman, didn't you?

CWC: Yep.

FJG: I notice looking through some of your memos here....

CWC: Usually [Patrick J.] Buchanan and I were ganged up against Ehrlichman.

FJG: Here's one on April 4, 1972, you to Haldeman: "We have paralyzed ourselves in the domestic area. We spend enormous amounts of energy arguing over what we should do. In the absence of a consensus no one makes the hard decision. We seem to have an institutional problem which results in impasse more often than action."

CWC: I was critical of the staff system at that point. That's exactly what was happening. You've got to remember, at that point in the polls Nixon was actually trailing Muskie. Still April. Or maybe neck and neck. But there was no sense that we were going to have an overwhelming electoral victory in 1972. Every time an issue would come up that had political overtones, and I would be invited to participate in the debate, we would end up just making no decision. In utter frustration I sent that memo to Haldeman. If it was marked to Haldeman, it probably.... You should know that many of those memos were for the President. I would mark them for Haldeman so that the President wouldn't necessarily--it would not necessarily get tracked back to him. Similarly a lot of memos from Haldeman to me were from the President.

FJG: Why was there no action on some of these things?

CWC: The staff system, I felt, was paralyzing the President. A lot of it was Nixon would be indecisive on domestic issues, often. Nixon would oftentimes not make a decision. He wouldn't resolve

it when....

[Interruption]

I felt there was an institutional paralysis that was going to hamper us in the campaign. I didn't feel Nixon had the freedom to speak on political issues the way he needed to for the election. Not knowing at that point that McGovern was going to be [nominated] and it probably wouldn't make any difference, anyway.

FJG: OK. In 1972, did you ever have any conversations with Gene [Eugene J.] McCarthy about running as a fourth party candidate?

CWC: Gene McCarthy?

FJG: Um hmm.

CWC: I never had any conversations with Gene McCarthy anytime.

FJG: I think you did.

CWC: You think I did? Conversations with Gene McCarthy? No.

FJG: You told that to the President.

CWC: Wow! I told that to the President?

FJG: You did.

CWC: That I had talked to Gene McCarthy? Or that somebody had?

FJG: I believe it was you who had lunch with him.

CWC: No, I would doubt that. And I would doubt I told him [the President] that. I don't think I ever told him.... I wouldn't have told him I had lunch with Gene McCarthy unless I had. Somebody might have had lunch with him, and I might have reported that to the President.

FJG: OK, well, perhaps my memory's faulty on that.

CWC: I mean, that's possible. I could have heard that as.... What

time of the year was that, do you know?

FJG: This would have been, I believe, before the Wallace shooting.

CWC: I'm a complete blank. I know one thing about my relationship with the President. I would not have said I had lunch with Gene McCarthy unless I had. I don't think I ever had lunch with Gene McCarthy. I know him, I've met him, I've talked to him. But I wouldn't have been seen at lunch with him in '72 for anything. That just doesn't ring true.

FJG: OK. I noticed in the files there are a lot of transcripts of your telephone calls. Did you record all your phone calls?

CWC: No. I recorded conversations spasmodically. If there was somebody that--if there was a reason that I felt I needed a record, or sometimes for convenience. If it was going to be an important call, occasionally I would want to stick a transcript in the file. If I were dealing with the networks for the President, I made recordings. Because I figured what I was saying was sensitive and what they were saying was going to be sensitive. I never did it inside the White House. I never got Haldeman or Ehrlichman or Kissinger. It was only people outside, and it was only where I thought there would be something that either needed to be saved for protection or for convenience of not having to write a memo. Then I would do it.

FJG: You had a lot of conversations with the networks.

CWC: With whom?

FJG: With the networks.

CWC: Oh, lots.

FJG: At Nixon's behest.

CWC: Almost every one at Nixon's behest. You probably realize that I reported every one to him.

FJG: In detail.

CWC: Yeah. In detail. [Laughter]

FJG: Perhaps you could tell me a little bit about what Nixon hoped to gain from all of this.

CWC: This is obviously very self-serving, but we believed the network coverage was biased against Nixon. We believed a book written by...

FJG: Edith Efron.

CWC: ...Edith Efron. The Mindtwisters or Mindebenders or something.

FJG: The Newstwisters.

CWC: Newstwisters. We believed our own news summaries that were coming out of Buchanan and [Lyndon K.] "Mort" Allin that indicated to us that we weren't getting a fair shake on the news. I don't think anybody in government ever feels they're getting a fair shake from the news. So you start out realizing that, now, we used to watch the news broadcasts and go up the walls at what we thought was unfair coverage of Nixon. So, one of my jobs was to put whatever kind of subtle, or not so subtle, pressures I could on the networks to keep them honest. See, this is where people delude themselves: I didn't feel we were doing that to unfairly bend the networks to favor Nixon. I felt we were doing it to offset their anti-Nixon bias. So that we weren't doing anything unfair; we were just countering their unfairness. But, you look back on it, and you realize [that] sitting in the White House to be putting pressure on the networks--I would now look

down my nose on such things. But I did it. [Laughter]

FJG: And Nixon told you to do all these things.

CWC: Oh, yeah, I mean that was.... You probably listened to the tape, we had the network executives in one night, all three of them, and afterwards Nixon and I sat there and chortled over how he had twisted their tails and backed them into corners and how they were cowards and how he would lower his voice when he really wanted to make a point to them. I can remember him.... We would sit there and laugh after we had them in on how we had put the screws to them. I mean, that was one of my major assignments. I spent a lot of time at it. Pretty good at it. We got them to back off of some stories frequently. Got Bill [William S.] Paley to back down on some of his reporting.

FJG: Put pressure on Dan Rather?

CWC: Pardon me?

FJG: Did he put pressure on Dan Rather?

CWC: I think he did, because some of the reporting changed. Neither one would admit it today. There was a famous tape with Paley that I made. I don't know whether that ever showed up in the files or not.

FJG: It's in the files.

CWC: Is it?

FJG: It's not open to the public, but it's in the files.

CWC: It's a long tape. The original I gave to Sandy [Alexander] Lankler, who was Paley's attorney, but I said "I can't promise there isn't a transcript of it in the files." The tape is not in the files, because I....

FJG: The transcript's in the files.

CWC: The transcript's in the files. Yeah. In which Paley really backed off.

FJG: I believe a transcript of your conversation with Lankler is in the files also.

CWC: OK.

FJG: Again, not open to the public yet.

CWC: Why not?

FJG: Nixon has objected to it.

CWC: Oh, is that right? Nixon's objected?

FJG: Nixon has objected to the release of 150,000 pages of materials from the Special Files.

CWC: Well, I know he has, but why would he object to that?

FJG: We don't understand why.

CWC: That only makes Paley look bad.

FJG: We're now in the process of beginning to review those documents. Trying to have outside archival assistance, so a panel has been formed of outside archivists and historians to give us guidelines in the review of these materials. We believe that substantially we are correct in attempting to open them, and that Nixon is incorrect.

CWC: I would think on something like that there wouldn't be much doubt. I don't think I ever had any contact with the networks that Nixon wasn't aware of. I had Frank Stanton in my office during the "Selling of the Pentagon Case", when.... Do you have the transcript of that?

FJG: I don't think we have that one.

CWC: I taped it under my desk. I had the Army Signal people come up and put a recording device under my desk and actually taped Frank Stanton's conversation with me when he came into my office.

FJG: I don't know what ever happened to that tape. We don't have it.

CWC: He begged and pleaded for mercy. I know I wrote a memo about it.

FJG: I believe I've seen the memo.

CWC: The only thing I said [was] "We'll try to get the votes to keep you from going to jail for contempt of Congress. And all we want from you is not pro-Nixon coverage, just occasional fairness." I never saw a guy squirm so much in my whole life, because he kept saying, "Well, what do you want?" I said, "Just occasional fairness." "Oh, no, we try to be fair all the time." I said "Come on, Frank. All I'm asking for is occasional fairness." Lankler was in the room with him. Brought him in. I never saw a guy cowering the way he was cowering. When I told him we would get Jerry [Gerald R.] Ford and Bill [William] Springer and a few guys to try to switch the votes so he wouldn't be held in contempt for "The Selling of the Pentagon", he said, "I'll do anything you want to help you. What do you want?" I said, "Just occasional fairness," which drove him up the walls. Yeah, that was part of ongoing warfare.

FJG: One of your areas of responsibility was the hardhats.

CWC: Correct.

FJG: I talked to Don [Donald F.] Rodgers about the hardhats' march in New York and he's given me chapter and verse on his end of it. Can you tell me about your end of it, you and the President watching that?

CWC: My end of it was I saw it on television. I thought it was great. It was a sign of support for the President. The hardhat symbolized the ethnic American, blue-collar working voter that I was trying to get into a new conservative coalition. Just the kind of voter I was trying to appeal to, with the busing and the three "a's": amnesty, abortion, and acid, I guess was the three "a's" we had.

I immediately went in and talked to the President, which you've probably heard on tape.

FJG: No, this is before the taping system was installed.

CWC: Oh, is that right?

FJG: Yes. This is in 1970.

CWC: Oh, that's right. I told him what had gone on in New York. I said, "This is fabulous. These guys are out in the street, marching with American flags." He really got excited. He said, "I'd like to meet those guys." I said, "I know their leader, Peter Brennan," because I had met him. No. I guess I hadn't met him. I said, "The leader is a guy by the name of Peter Brennan, who's the head of the building trades council in New York." Nixon said, "Get him on the phone for me." So we had the operator track him down, and Nixon called him. Talked to him. Thanked him. Congratulated him. Hung up. Then I said, "You know, Mr. President, we ought to bring those people in. It would make a great picture."

Ehrlichman had conniptions, had fits over it, because he thought it would be a sign of repression. There were a lot of student protests going on at the time. He thought it would be a

signal that Nixon was lining up with the people who were beating up demonstrators. So we had a major fight in the White House. Ehrlichman opposed me, and [George P.] Shultz opposed me. I don't know where Haldeman stood. Nixon agreed, and I called up Peter Brennan and invited him down.

He brought his entire building trades council, and they wore their hardhats. Just before they were to go [into] the office wearing their hardhats someone came in and said it was against protocol for them to wear their hats in the Oval Office, so they made them lay their hats out on a table in the Roosevelt Room, and we've got a great picture, which I've kept on my wall at home (I love it), of all the hardhats on the table. Then we went in the Cabinet room--and they presented Nixon with a hardhat in the Oval Office--and he took them in the Cabinet room, and they had a great meeting. That was the beginning of cementing that coalition with labor, with which I spent a lot of my time, as you doubtless know.

FJG: There was a prosecution of Paul Hall of the Seafarers Union, for whom you interceded with Mitchell. Did you have any success? I know that ultimately the prosecution failed.

CWC: Did I intercede directly with Mitchell?

FJG: Yes.

CWC: I didn't go through John Dean?

FJG: I believe you went directly to Mitchell on this one.

CWC: In the '72 campaign?

FJG: No, this is probably in '70-'71.

CWC: No, I didn't go to Mitchell directly.

FJG: Well, perhaps you were indicating that you would get word to him about it. Maybe you were not going to deal with him directly.

CWC: It would have been through John Dean, I think. The only times I dealt with Mitchell directly.... Mitchell and I did not talk. You won't find much in there between Mitchell and me. I might have talked to [Richard G.] Kleindienst, but my more routine practice was to go to John Dean and ask him to check it out with Justice, because that was what I was told by Haldeman and Nixon was to be the procedure they wanted me to follow. So I did.

Yes, I thought Paul Hall was being harassed. I interceded.... He was the Seafarers Union, wasn't he?

FJG: That's right.

CWC: Yeah. I also had several calls from Jerry Ford about it, trying to get people off Paul Hall's back. If there was any prosecution, I tried to get the Justice Department to stop where it was at. I can't remember now the circumstances of why I felt it was so unjust, but I felt they were really unfair to Paul Hall. I don't remember why.

FJG: As I recall, the whole thing failed. If it made it into court, the court threw it out.

CWC: Oh, no, they threw it.... It did make it into court. And the court threw it out. It was not a good prosecution.

FJG: Why was Jerry Ford interested? There aren't too many seafarers around Grand Rapids.

CWC: He'd been one of the few labor union leaders to contribute to Republican candidates.

FJG: Why did you and Mitchell not speak?

CWC: Well, it's a long story. It went back to the '68 campaign. In the '68 campaign I was running a group called the key issues group, where a group of Congressmen and Senators--I was the chief staff guy. They would come up with policy papers for the campaign, and deal with all the special interest groups in Washington. I worked with Bryce Harlow, who brought me into that. We were constantly trying to get Nixon to take positions on things.

About early October a freeze order came out from Mitchell, who was campaign manager. The freeze order was, "Do nothing, say nothing. We're just going to ride our lead out." I felt that was going to cost us the election, so I wrote memos and talked to Nixon. I created a real ruckus within the campaign, because I felt that was a disastrous strategy. Mitchell won, and Nixon did nothing in the month of October in the way of policy statements or initiatives. Every week we lost about two percentage points in the poll, until, [on] the night before the election, we were actually behind. Nixon rescued it with his television performance. I think Mitchell's judgement call in the '68 campaign almost cost Nixon the election. He [Mitchell] knew I thought that and had very uncharitable things to say to me.

Then, when I came in to White House, I never had any contact with Mitchell, except I did an interview for the Boston Globe, and they asked me what I thought about Mitchell, and I said, "No comment." That created a real stir. Mitchell told a lot of people he was going to get me out of the White House. Whenever Nixon would take us out on the Sequoia or something, he'd always

say, "Now, let's see. Bob, you and I, and Chuck, and John, and, oh no, not John. Not with Chuck." He kept us apart.

The first time Mitchell and I had any contact with each other was during the ITT [International Telephone and Telegraph Company] case, where he called on me for help. And where I tried to help him. He was then out of the Justice Department. In the Justice Department, I doubt that I ever really had a conversation with John Mitchell. If I needed anything in the Justice Department, I went through John Dean or called Dick Kleindienst. I doubt you'll find much traffic between me and Mitchell on any issue. He just didn't like me and I didn't like him. Nothing personal. I just thought his political judgement was very unsound. On that score history will probably show neither one of us [was] right, but he was more unsound on what happened on the Watergate. [Laughter]

FJG: OK, well, I see it's nearly three o'clock. I know you have a meeting, so let me stop.

[End of interview]

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 conducted by Frederick J. Graboske
 at Mr. Colson's office in Reston, Virginia
 on June 15, 1988

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