

Oral History Interview
with
CLAYTON FRITCHEY

Assistant to the Secretary of Defense and Director of the Office of Public Information, Dept. of Defense, 1950-52; Assistant to the President of the United States, 1952; and Deputy Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, 1953-57.

Washington, D.C.
July 1, December 22, 1969 and May 6, 1970
by Jerry N. Hess, Harry S. Truman Library

The Harry S. Truman Library
Independence, Missouri
August, 1972

NOTICE

This is a transcript of a tape-recorded interview conducted for the Harry S. Truman Library. A draft of this transcript was edited by the interviewee but only minor emendations were made; therefore, the reader should remember that this is essentially a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word.

RESTRICTION

This transcript may be read, quoted from and cited by researchers and may be reproduced for purposes of research. Publication rights, however, are retained by the Harry S. Truman Library.

Oral History Interview
with
CLAYTON FRITCHEY

Washington, D.C.
July 1, 1969
By Jerry N . Hess, Harry S . Truman Library

[1]

HESS: Mr. Fritchey, to begin, will you give me a little of your personal background? Where you were born, where you were educated and what positions did you hold prior to your service in the Truman administration?

FRITCHEY: Well, I've been primarily a journalist most of my life and at the time that I first went into government, I was the editor of the New Orleans *Item* in New Orleans, Louisiana. My entrance into Government was through Mr. Truman appointing General Marshall Secretary of Defense at a bad moment during the Korean war. He asked me to take a leave of absence from

the New Orleans *Item* and to become his Assistant Secretary of Public Affairs, at that time it was called the Office of Public Information, and also his special

[2]

assistant. And so I did take a leave of absence, but the war, instead of lasting three more months, as General Marshall then thought was the likelihood, lasted for three years. Naturally, once one is in a war position, there is no dropping out, and so I resigned from the *Item*, and stayed on for several more years at the Pentagon with General Marshall.

HESS: General Marshall, of course, took over from Louis Johnson. Do you recall anything particular about the resignation of Louis Johnson?

FRITCHEY: Well, as you know, the war had been not going well and just at the time of the changeover MacArthur brought off his great coup in the invasion. And so General Marshall's entry into the Pentagon was a success from the very beginning. I suppose if Louis Johnson had stayed on another month, the victory would have probably insured his staying on at the Pentagon, but the President was under very great pressure to remove Johnson because it had been regarded as a political appointment. His predecessor, Mr. Forrestal, had been an extremely popular man, highly regarded by the press, and Louis Johnson had been regarded

[3]

simply as a man who raised some money for Harry Truman in 1948 when there wasn't any money. I, myself, have always regarded Johnson as a more capable man than he has been given credit for. Mr. Truman assigned him two relatively impossible tasks. By that I mean impossible from the point of view of political popularity. He assigned him the task of reducing the budget severely, and of being the first to integrate the services. There was great resistance to both. An institution whose budget is being reduced from eighteen billion to thirteen billion must incur a great deal of resistance from the military career men and also a great deal of resistance from each of the rival services who did not want to be integrated. So, Mr. Johnson had a thankless task, and in the middle of that he had to take on a war for which we were not very well prepared. In any event, I think it is an insight into Mr. Truman that the man he instinctively sought for Secretary of Defense when he needed to generate complete public confidence in the institution, was General Marshall who I think he admired above all other men.

HESS: Mr. Truman met with General MacArthur at Wake Island in

[4]

October of 1950. That was shortly after you went to the Department of Defense. Do you recall anything in particular about that episode? Anything that was said around the Pentagon about the meeting?

FRITCHEY: I suppose we'll have to wait for all the confidential files to be declassified before we know everything about the MacArthur episode, but even at that time there was some tension building. It was clear that MacArthur, I hardly need to say, was an extraordinary figure after his immense success with that invasion at Inchon. He was in an extremely strong position to have his way. There were differences of opinion, of course, as to whether the objectives of the war

should then be enlarged. The stated objectives up until that time were that we were in the war not for a definitive victory, nor definitive confrontation with the entire Communist world. There was a limited objective of restoring the status quo ante. The moment that we cut off the North Korean troops and had a very sizeable victory in our hands, there were those who wanted to go on and capture all of North Korea and go to the Yalu, and who knows from there on. I

[5]

always thought that Mr. Truman himself had grave doubts about this; but at an exhilarating moment, like sudden victory, it's very hard to explain to the public, why, when you've got the enemy on the run, you shouldn't consolidate your victory, and make it complete.

There are still differences of opinion as to precisely what Mr. Truman said to General MacArthur and vice versa. My own impression is that both the President and Secretary Acheson had misgivings about going for broke. Also, I think when the classified papers are available we'll see that, while MacArthur was not given an absolute green light, he was also not given an absolute red light. So he chose to make his drive to the Yalu and, as you know, disaster set in there.

HESS: Concerning the talks at Wake Island. On April 21st, 1951, Anthony Leviero in the *New York Times* quoted several documents that had been held under security classification up until that time. Do you know where he received his information? They were in connection with what actually was said at Wake Island and,

[6]

as I...

FRITCHEY: Do you remember the burden of what he said?

HESS: As I have been told, there was a young lady who was seated in the next room and who was taking stenographic notes. She really had not been told to do this. She was more or less waiting in the wings in the event that a stenographer was needed and while waiting she decided to take some notes and she took some verbatim notes of the conversations that were going on and those notes of hers were held under security classification until the following April.

FRITCHEY: By the Defense Department or by General MacArthur?

HESS: Well, it wouldn't have been by General MacArthur because I don't believe General MacArthur knew they existed. They were held by the White House and I suppose by the Defense Department.

FRITCHEY: Do you recall what the notes were supposed to have shown?

HESS: I think they intimated that General MacArthur

[7]

had stated that the Chinese Communists would not intervene. But, of course, I have not seen the exact notes. I have read the release in the press.

FRITCHEY: Well, Mr. Truman said that in his own book, and I don't know whether he based that on those notes or on his recollection. As you know, General MacArthur had disputed this to some extent. But Mr. Truman, himself said that -- quoted, I believe, General MacArthur as saying his intelligence convinced him the Chinese would not come in and that if they did that he would annihilate them. Whether Mr. Truman based that on the availability of the secretary's notes or not, I don't know. But that has always been Mr. Truman's view of the matter and I have never been impressed by General MacArthur's rebuttal of this because he never flatly denied it. I just think there are too many others that know what General MacArthur wanted to do, and did do it, and that there was a difference in intelligence estimates.

HESS: What else do you recall about the events surrounding the dismissal of General MacArthur in April of 1951?

[8]

FRITCHEY: Well, there were a number of conversations between President Truman and General Marshall. I recall there was some concern as to what the Joint Chiefs would say about this, when and if there was a post-mortem. And I have forgotten who suggested it, but I, myself, thought it was a very practical suggestion, that the views of the Joint Chiefs be very clearly obtained before the dismissal was made public, and some time was taken in doing that. In view of later events, I think it was a very sensible thing to do because men do forget what they have said. I know I often cannot remember precisely what I have said, and under pressure, old friendships and what not, there is a tendency not to be quite as blunt or quite as clear as you were. My recollection is that all the views of all the Joint Chiefs were obtained and obtained in writing before the dismissal was made, but I don't trust my memory entirely on it but that is my impression and I think that it can be easily checked as to whether my impressions are correct or not.

HESS: Do you recall whose suggestion that was? To have

[9]

this done?

FRITCHEY: I wish I did, because I thought it was a very politically sophisticated idea. Because the pressure did become very great later on.

HESS: What was your personal view of the dismissal of MacArthur? Did you think that it was the proper thing to do?

FRITCHEY: Absolutely. Oh, I think some of the details of it might possibly have been handled more adroitly, but that's always second-guessing. There would have been bound to be a climax and great public hue and cry no matter how it was done. It seemed to many of us that MacArthur's insubordination was even worse than it appeared. I, myself, was always struck by his cables to the Joint Chiefs because they would be insufferably long, and for a purpose. The general contour of them was that he would set forth, seemingly objectively, a program or a

strategy or even a tactic, and then would bring to bear endless arguments for doing it. There was often the implication that, if overruled, the Joint Chiefs (10,000 miles away), would

[10]

have to take the full responsibility if anything that went wrong. Now, there are, historically, always differences between the commander in the field and the home base. It's inevitable. In this case, however, all, nearly all of MacArthur's fellow officers regarded him as a lone wolf. Rightly or wrongly, they suspected that if they didn't go along with him in every particular, if anything went wrong, he would leak it. He would let it become known. And he would have the documentation to show that he had recommended such-and-such, but was overruled. This is an unfair way of dealing because every general in the field needs to have close relations with the center of operations in the Pentagon and with the Joint Chiefs. There needs to be a great deal of trust and confidence. MacArthur had no use for anybody in the Pentagon, in my opinion, up to and including General Marshall. General Marshall in return would never permit himself, even to his closest associates, to say a critical word about MacArthur. I, myself, felt that General Marshall did not feel close to General MacArthur, but the very fact of that made him lean over backwards to be fair.

[11]

So, day by day, it was difficult to cope with MacArthur. It was very difficult not to let him have his way because he made it so difficult not to. And his early, quick success gave him, of course, a great advantage, because many did not see eye to eye with him on the Inchon plan, which was a notable success, and turned the war around.

HESS: I understand that at the time of the dismissal, the news was supposed to be given to General MacArthur that he had been dismissed by Frank Pace. Is that correct?

FRITCHEY: That is correct. And I can't remember the details now, but there was some criticism of that particular part of the dismissal at the time. I've always felt that was a relatively unimportant detail, and in any case, no matter how it would have been done there would have been a great hue and cry.

HESS: General Marshall left in September of 1951 and Robert Lovett became Secretary of Defense. Just what kind of man was Mr. Lovett?

FRITCHEY: Well, first of all, General Marshall and Mr.

[12]

Lovett were very close. General Marshall was always a reserved man, but I always thought he had a great affection for Lovett, and they had worked together very intimately, so the transition was very smooth. Also Mr. Truman, in my opinion, came to have a great deal of confidence in Lovett, and so the changeover was almost without a hitch.

HESS: Did he make a very effective Secretary of Defense?

FRITCHEY: Excellent. There was a very easy understanding between Secretary Lovett and the President. I think they came to see eye to eye on the objectives of the war, how it should be fought, and the budget. I do not recall any serious difficulty between the White House and the Pentagon during Lovett's tenure there.

HESS: All right, fine. Are we ready to move on to the days of the White House staff?

FRITCHEY: Very well.

HESS: All right. How did you become a member of the White House staff?

FRITCHEY: Well, one never knows for sure what prompts

[13]

an invitation from a President or from the White House. I've always thought it was because I was to some extent a liaison between the Defense Department and the White House. The President's press secretary, Joe Short, and I were good friends. And it was natural for General Marshall to use me as liaison in that connection. So many of the difficulties of war center in the public relations area. Especially the Korean war which became, as the Vietnam war, a highly political war, involved highly in American politics. So, the President and Secretary Marshall and Secretary Lovett had to give an immense amount of time to this aspect of the war because it was losing popular standing all the time. Of course, the MacArthur incident divided the nation very deeply about it. It's in many respects like Vietnam today. And, I suppose, it will always be difficult to fight a war with a limited objective, especially for a nation that has been used to the idea of unconditional surrender and fight-to-the-finish. So it was constantly necessary to maintain a program of political education along with fighting the war. There was more attention to this than one would ordinarily imagine.

[14]

This meant that I was frequently back and forth to the White House, often dealing with Joe Short in particular with various public aspects of this.

HESS: Do you think it is wise to fight a war with limited objectives?

FRITCHEY: I think it depends on what the alternatives are. In the case of Korea the alternative was to go across the Yalu, bomb Manchuria, blockade the coast, and, if necessary, use nuclear weapons, as General Eisenhower later said that he intimated to the Chinese that he would do if necessary. Whether he did or not is another question. And whether the Chinese ever got the message is something that I've always been skeptical about.

I recall one statement of General Marshall's during the hearings on MacArthur that he often later referred to and which also impressed President Truman. In trying to make the Korean war understandable to Congress and to the people, Marshall was mindful that the American public understood the policy of containment in general, particularly since it was originally applied successfully in Europe. Therefore, he noted

[15]

that Korea was simply an extension of the policy of containment. As he said, the policy of containment was not to come to a total final confrontation with the Communists, nor was it an effort to restore the status quo before the Second World War, nor to roll back communism in all the countries that had come under Soviet rule in Europe. The policy of containment was to maintain the status that had developed in the immediate wake of World War II. It was thought that if we could avoid a nuclear war over a period of time, then accommodations would be reached, and the postwar difficulties would gradually be resolved in ways that none of us are wise enough to foresee. Marshall pointed out that the policy of containment required one kind of action in one place and one time, a different kind in another time and another place. For instance, in the crisis over Berlin, we could have resorted to force rather than the airlift. In Greece we relied on military advisors and economic and military aid. In Korea we had to do more than that, but it was still the policy of containment. In short, we were not seeking a decisive test, a once-and-for-all test, in Korea,

[16]

any more than we had been in Europe. And General Bradley followed this up with his famous statement, "Wrong war, wrong place, wrong time, wrong enemy." If you're going to come to grips with communism, you're going to go for the nerve center of communism and not get yourself bogged down in a mass land war in China, the worst possible circumstance for the United States. Marshall's statement helped clear the air. And General Bradley's famous line gave a further clarification to the American public as to what a limited war is. When you understand the alternatives of a limited war, it makes it, if not more palatable, at least more bearable. And we have somewhat the same situation in Vietnam. There are always those who want to bomb Hanoi and Haiphong to the ground. As General [Curtis] Lemay said, "Let's bomb them back to the stone age." Or let's go in and use nuclear weapons if necessary. Well, it was that way twenty years ago in Korea.

HESS: Can you tell me about your first meeting with Mr. Truman?

FRITCHEY: My first meeting within the Pentagon was a

[17]

dinner that General Marshall gave for him, at which he had all the secretaries and the assistant secretaries and the Joint Chiefs, all the heroes of the Defense Department, and he gave it in his own office in the Pentagon, which is about the size of a city block. Naturally everyone in the Pentagon was flattered about the President coming. That afternoon, I had been down on the Hill testifying on the Defense Department budget, and before going down General Marshall had called me to his office and given me some advice on how he thought it might be best to proceed, and what to do under certain kinds of questioning. As it turned out, the questioning followed much the line that he surmised it would, and his advice, which I followed very closely, turned out to be very successful. So, he was gratified.

HESS: What was that advice?

FRITCHEY: Well, it's too complicated to go into now, but it showed a great deal of canniness on his part on how to deal with politicians. That was my first insight into how much this rather reserved, awesome

[18]

man, had learned over the years in how to cope with politicians on the Hill. He had guessed precisely where they would attack, so to speak, and what would be the answers that would most satisfy them and deflect the attack. And he couldn't have been more right. So...

HESS: Very proficient in that.

FRITCHEY: I reported back late in the afternoon or early evening; it was just before the dinner started, I think, and he was most amused. And when the President came a few minutes later, he was so tickled by this that he wanted the President to hear a firsthand report about it. So, he had me repeat it to the President, and you know Harry Truman loves his politics and he loves the Senate and he was very amused by this, and also I could see, he was impressed by the political canniness of General Marshall. So, Mr. Truman said to me, "Well, are you finding this pretty tough going?"

I said, "Mr. President, after what I was doing before I came here, I find this a cinch."

He said, "Well, for heaven's sake, what were

[19]

you doing?"

I said, "I was running a pro-Truman newspaper in the Deep South." He roared. That began our friendship.

HESS: When did you first meet him in the White House?

FRITCHEY: Well, I saw him a number of times back and forth before I went over there to work regularly.

HESS: And, also, when you started to work at the Department of Defense, Charles Ross was still living. Was that right?

FRITCHEY: I never saw him. I think he was probably in ill health at that time. Joe Short was also intermittently in bad health during that period, and Roger Tubby and I both helped out on the press problems at the White House after I went over. The President had a great regard for Joe Short, who succeeded Ross, and Tubby was his assistant. Also the President was quite fond of Tubby, who had been in the State Department and had been a very valuable assistant to Short. So, when I came over, we had both someone who was familiar with the State Department,

[20]

as Tubby was, and someone who was familiar with the Pentagon, as I was. It helped.

HESS: Irving Perlmeter was also an assistant at that time. Is that correct, did you work with him?

FRITCHEY: Well, I worked separately from the press operation. I worked as an Administrative Assistant. The President had three. He had Dave Bell, and me, and another David.

HESS: Lloyd.

FRITCHEY: David Lloyd. There were the three of us who were Administrative Assistants, and our duties were never publicly described. When those jobs were created by Roosevelt, he said he wanted men "with passion for anonymity." Their usefulness to him was that neither the press nor anyone else knew precisely what they were doing, because their assignments varied from day to day, depending on what the President wanted them to do. So mine ranged all over the lot as Dave's did, both Davids.

I don't think any President before or since has quite operated with his staff as Mr. Truman did. I

[21]

don't know whether this would be ideal for all Presidents, but it suited Mr. Truman. He did not have a chief of staff in the sense that Sherman Adams was, under Eisenhower. He did not shut himself off. Of course, the White House staff in those days was much smaller than it is now. He would have a meeting every morning, early in the morning, and all of us at the level of press secretary, counsel, Steelman, The Assistant to the President, administrative assistants, special assistants, were welcome to come. We were not required to come, but most of us wanted to come when we were in town or not on something urgent. We made a point of it.

The second thing about these meetings was that they were very informal. So, there was a great deal of give and take, and the President encouraged all of us to speak up. We were certainly allowed, if not encouraged, to speak up in areas where we had no responsibility. For instance, if a personnel matter came up, or a patronage matter came up, he would discuss this in front of all of us, even though his patronage man, his personnel man, was there. And we all knew instinctively that if we wanted to say

[22]

something, it was all right to do it. And we did. So, it was a very, very lively occasion. And he gave quite a bit of time to this; it would often run an hour.

HESS: I have one question on a couple of gentlemen you mentioned: Dr. John Steelman had the title, The Assistant to the President, and, of course, at this time, Charles Murphy was special counsel. Just, in your opinion, how did it seem to you at that time? Did it seem as if the men were on an equal footing or did it seem that one had a rank somewhat above the other.

FRITCHEY: Well, in protocol, I believe Dr. Steelman's rank was first. But in practice, he himself, did not attempt, nor seem to want, to play the role of a Sherman Adams. He was secure, I think, in his relations with the President and apparently he did not want to operate across the

board. So, in effect, he did not assume much more responsibility than the rest of us, especially the ones who had been with the President a long time, like Charles Murphy.

[23]

There were several others, I would say three or four, who had been with him a long time and who did not clear things with anybody except the President. I, myself, was never instructed to clear anything with anybody else. I often did, however, consult with others on the staff before talking to the President directly about matters, especially Charlie Murphy, who had a great deal of judgment. The President had great reliance on him.

HESS: But this you would do just on your own. It wasn't because that you felt that you had to.

FRITCHEY: That's right. Now, this might not suit many Presidents. Kennedy operated pretty informally. Kennedy would operate informally by bumping into his staff here and there during the day and talking about matters, or picking up the phone rather than having a large meeting where everyone tossed in anything they wanted to.

HESS: Did Charles Murphy ever have a meeting in which he might have called in the administrative assistants and have a sort of staff meeting of his or not?

[24]

FRITCHEY: Yes.

HESS: How did he handle those?

FRITCHEY: Well, you know the quarters are pretty cramped there in the west end, but he had a pretty sizeable office and it was possible for a number of people to sit around there. But Charlie, like Mr. Steelman, is a very modest man and I presume that if he had wanted to magnify his position he could have. If he had wanted to make himself chief of staff or something like that he could have. He chose not to because we all had a great deal of respect for him and if he asked us to come by we accepted. I always did. We were always glad to have his counsel and have him to turn to. And you always felt when he called you, he was not ordering you to come but that you were being flattered by being consulted by him, but he has a very quiet, modest way of approaching matters.

HESS: Now, the date that you started at the Department of Defense was after the time that Clark Clifford resigned as special counsel.

FRITCHEY: Yes. I know Clark very well, but I never knew

[25]

him at the White House. I think he established in Mr. Truman's mind, the importance of that job as counsel.

HESS: Is that right? Now when Mr...

FRITCHEY: No question that Mr. Murphy had a great deal of responsibility.

HESS: When Mr. Truman first came President, he inherited Sam Rosenman who had been special counsel for Roosevelt, and after he resigned he appointed Clifford into that position.

FRITCHEY: Clifford, I think, had already been there as Naval Aide and was there and already begun to make an impression on Mr. Truman before Rosenman went back to New York in my recollection.

HESS: While we're discussing some of the men who were on the White House staff the same time that you were, I'd like to ask you a few questions about some of them, just general questions about what their duties were and how effective were they in their duties, what seemed to be their relationship with the President,

[26]

what seemed to be their relationship with each other, or anything that comes to mind about some of the men. Now, we have already mentioned Mr. Murphy, does anything else come to mind about Mr. Murphy?

FRITCHEY: Well, I think as the years went on that he had come to play an increasingly larger role as a counselor and advisor to the President. As you know, the personnel matters were then under Don Dawson. But there was a very amiable spirit around the White House and Don did not object to others making suggestions in that field, nor did he seem to me to be offended when a proposed nomination would be made to the President in our presence, and we raised questions about it. He always took it in good spirit. It was a very congenial group of men. As you know, Dr. Steelman operated to a very large extent over in the economic area, and at that time this posed some very big problems. When the steel strike came along that was about all he could handle. It was a twenty-four hour a day job. It posed great public problems, and great legal problems that went up to the Supreme Court.

Joe Short had the confidence of the President

[27]

to a very considerable extent and his advice to the President really operated across the board. The President had an interesting way of handling his press conferences. We would prepare, usually the night before a press conference, all the problems, issues and question that we thought might arise, and there'd usually be three or four people in on it; Joe Short, Perlmeter, Roger Tubby, and myself. And then the first thing in the morning we'd look over the night's news and the early ticker in the morning and see if there was anything further. Then we would go in and see the President. He didn't exclude others from this, so frequently other members of the staff, if they wanted to, could be present at the briefing with the President and sometimes a number did show up, and they enjoyed it.

After a time, we worked out a kind of unspoken modus vivendi with the President. The question would be raised. He, by look or gesture, would indicate whether he wanted any suggestions or

whether he wanted a proposed answer or whether he wanted discussion of it. So, without any hard and fast signals, we all caught on to how to proceed on this. Every now and

[28]

then, he would just say, "I'll take care of that," and that would be it. The fact is that I guess he didn't want to hear our thinking on that. Most of the time there was a discussion. Most of the time the answers, I'd say in at least half of the cases, spoke for themselves, or there were answers which revolved around specific information which we had obtained from one of the other departments. So it was available to him if the subject came up. Once in awhile there was a difference of opinion on how a question should be answered, and sometimes the President would welcome suggestions and sometimes he wouldn't, and sometimes he would let the argument go on and we'd move on to the next question without being absolutely certain what he was going to say. But nine questions out of ten we had resolved before the meeting began, and in those days the press conferences were held in the Indian Treaty Room in the Executive Office Building.

HESS: Did you attend the press conferences?

FRITCHEY: Oh, sure. The press would all be seated. There's a little room off the main room where we would gather, and then three or four of us would go in and sit down,

[29]

the President, Joe, Tubby, and myself. Or sometimes just one of us depending on who's away, who's in town and who's sick or what not. Anyway, there would be one or all three of us there. The questioning would begin and it would be very seldom that a question was raised that had not been anticipated. But time and again, the President would answer in a way wholly different from anything that we had suggested and he couldn't resist looking down at us and sort of half winking, and sometimes they would be blistering answers. Sometimes we thought we had worked out an answer which was tactful and which blurred the point and at least kept it in suspense until it could be answered more fully a week or two later. He hated to do that. He favored "yes" or "no," and frequently to his own disadvantage he was too blunt. There are times in politics when it's just simply bad politics to be totally candid.

HESS: Did you ever try to explain that to him?

FRITCHEY: Oh, he knew it, but it was just his nature. He wanted to speak up. He hated ambiguity. Above all, he hated to appear to be fearful. To me his pre-eminent

[30]

quality as a President -- more than almost any President that I can think of -- was his willingness at all times to sacrifice momentary popularity for the long-range interest of the country. I've come to prize this quality in Presidents more than any other quality because I think it is the rarest. We come to forgive Presidents for not doing this simply because it is almost more than you can ask for a President to risk his standing all the time. I'm sure that most Presidents have comforting extenuations. They justify it in their mind by saying, "Well, I must maintain my standing, otherwise I won't be effective." Mr. Truman knew that if he fired General MacArthur it would probably be fatal politically for him in the long run. His answer to that, in effect, was: "I'm

not interested in your advice about how much this will cost politically. I'm interested in your advice as to whether I am right constitutionally in doing this. And do I have any alternatives? If I am going to preserve the rights of the Commander in Chief and the rights of civilian control of the military, do I have any alternatives?" Of course, there is always an alternative. But he felt there wasn't without

[31]

weakening civilian control in this country, and if he did it the next man would do it more, and so on. So, even if he had faced impeachment for it, he would still have gone ahead and done it. When he seized the steel mills, he knew that would be turned into a highly unpopular decision in the middle of the campaign year, yet he did it. He knew when he called out the troops to break the railroad strike, that he was going to create disaffection in the group where he had to seek most of his support. Yet, he did it. In the end, of course, it cut him down. You can suffer just so much attrition. I regard this as his pre-eminent quality. I do not regard him as the most intellectual President we ever had, or most scholarly one. Not the most experienced one, not necessarily always the wisest one, but insofar as courage was concerned, and his respect for that office, and his willingness to pay any personal price, I consider him one of our most distinguished Presidents. I don't think any President has ever been stronger in that respect.

HESS: Concerning our discussion of the White House

[32]

staff members, what do you recall of Mr. Matthew Connelly?

FRITCHEY: Well, we all liked Matt. I liked him from the day I saw him. He was helpful to the rest of us because he had access to the President. He guarded the door. He knew who should see the President and who shouldn't. He was not jealous about his prerogatives. He often would get us in when he knew the President didn't want to be bothered any more that day. So, he was wonderfully helpful and sympathetic to our different problems. Of course, I think the prosecution of Connelly was despicable.

HESS: Why did that come about?

FRITCHEY: It came about simply because you had an administration, namely the Eisenhower administration, which came to power by running a campaign about the so-called mess in Washington. Trying to convince the American people that Harry Truman, of all people, was soft on communism, and the mess in Washington meant that everybody in the Truman administration was a crook. Well, I think that we all know now that Mr. Truman's

[33]

own sense of honor was impeccable. The effort of Herbert Brownell to picture Mr. Truman as a traitor because of the Harry Dexter White case, is, I think, one of the ugliest chapters in our history. I think the prosecution of Matt Connelly was equally ugly.

HESS: Do you think that these matters were carried on with the knowledge of President Eisenhower?

FRITCHEY: Well, if they weren't they should have been. If I were President of the United States and my Attorney General accused my predecessor of being a traitor, and my Attorney General had not consulted me on that in advance, I would have fired him. Of course, Mr. Eisenhower knew about that, but having told the country that Washington was teeming with Communists and security risks, they had to find some. Of course, they never did. To the best of my recollection, in eight years of investigation of two or three million Federal employees, they never found one Communist. If so, I don't know who it is.

HESS: Another gentleman who served as administrative assistant, we have mentioned this afternoon: David

[34]

Bell. Just how effective in his job was Mr. Bell?

FRITCHEY: I'm unable to answer that simply because I frequently didn't know what Dave was doing and he frequently didn't know what I was doing. But having seen him in operation under other circumstances, I have the highest esteem for him. I believe Dave had been in the Bureau of the Budget before he became an administrative assistant, and he's a wizard at it.

HESS: How about David Lloyd?

FRITCHEY: David, I think, was giving a great deal of time and thought when I was there, to the possible history of this administration. He was a literary man, a man of some taste. He tended to try to see this thing in perspective even while it was going on. And, again, many of his missions were directly from the President, and I simply don't know enough about them to discuss them intelligently.

HESS: There are several other members, but many of them held lesser positions, so let's just skip on over that, we have other questions.

[35]

FRITCHEY: I might say, that during the political bitterness of those days, there were many efforts made to picture General Vaughan as a malignant influence on the President, and to picture Mr. Truman as being particularly susceptible to his suggestions, and ideas, pressures and so on. I, myself, saw nothing to justify this. Often in meetings Harry, who had a considerable wit, would break in and frequently relieve the tension with a humorous remark, a humorous observation. But seldom do I recall him ever trying to influence meetings very seriously. He may have later individually with the President, but I don't think so. I don't think he attempted to use his position in that respect.

HESS: Previously you mentioned congressional liaison in relationship to your job in the Defense Department. Do you recall how congressional liaison was carried on by the White House during the Truman days?

FRITCHEY: Yes, Joe Feeney was the principal one then.

HESS: And Charles Maylon?

FRITCHEY: I don't remember him, I just remember Joe.

[36]

HESS: How did they operate? Do you recall?

FRITCHEY: Well, not too differently from the present administration. Of course, the staff was so much smaller then than it is now. It has probably tripled or quadrupled since then. So the Feeney operation was a very limited one, but he had the definite assignment of the day-to-day, hour-to-hour connection and links with the Hill. All the rest of us, in one way or another, had personal friends and contacts up there which sometimes were useful. But this was in addition to Feeney. Things were generally cleared through him.

HESS: Which personal contacts did you have that you thought were the closest? Who did you know the best on the Hill?

FRITCHEY: Well, I knew so many, it would be hard to say. I always had very good friends on the Foreign Relations committee. [Senator J. William] Fulbright always had been a close friend of mine. Russell Long, the Chairman of the Finance Committee, is a good friend, he was from New Orleans where I was once running a paper. I'm sure others on the staff also had their friends. So,

[37]

the operation was not confined one hundred percent to Feeney, but he had the principal responsibility.

HESS: How close was the President to Leslie Biffle at this time?

FRITCHEY: Very.

HESS: Would the President also make calls to various Representatives and Senators and discuss matters with them directly -- in the Johnson manner?

FRITCHEY: Well, he would do it but he did not spend his life on the phone. And when he talked, he talked quickly and to the point. Whereas Mr. Johnson might be on the phone a half hour or two years. But that was never Mr. Truman's way. Yes, he frequently interceded on his own, often without telling anybody else; he just did it. And we sometimes didn't discover it either; he'd forget to tell us, or didn't want us to know. But he had a lot of friends up there.

HESS: Just how were Mr. Truman's speeches written? Who worked on them?

FRITCHEY: It's very hard to define that exactly. Charlie

[38]

Murphy gave quite a bit of time to this. David did -- not Bell.

HESS: Lloyd.

FRITCHEY: Lloyd. Dave Lloyd. Others would be helpful from time to time, like Sam Rosenman, even in those days. From time to time, on special occasions, you might even receive help from someone like John Hersey. The President did not like adornment; he did not like rococo speeches. It was not too difficult to produce what came to be known as the Truman style, which was plainness, even dryness. So, almost anybody who was competent could produce this effect. They are not distinguished by a great deal of style. Some of these men were quite capable of style if they had had a different principal. But, it would not have seemed suitable for Mr. Truman to have given the kind of speeches that distinguished Stevenson, for instance, or even Kennedy. Therefore, the concentration was on the substance. Generally they had a strong point. Generally, they were not too long and generally an effort was made to fortify the point as persuasively and with as much documentation as possible. On the

[39]

state of the Union speech, for instance, Dean Acheson would personally be very helpful, not because he was Secretary of State so much but for the fact that he had a very fine style and the President had a great deal of confidence in him. For instance, on one state of the Union message, we would gather for a number of days in the Cabinet Room in the afternoon whenever Mr. Acheson could spare the time and when he could come over. The speech was done more or less methodically in sections. Defense wants so much, State wants so much of the speech, Interior wants this part, you have got to touch an awful lot of bases on the state of the Union speech. Acheson was extremely versatile at editing and suggesting to us bridges between sections, so that a speech of that magnitude might take several weeks in the preparation.

HESS: Do you recall what year this was that you were helping with the state of the Union message? Was that the final state of the Union message?

FRITCHEY: My recollection is that I participated to some extent in the preparation of the state of the Union in 1951 and 1952. More work went into this

[40]

particular speech than probably any other one the President gave during the year. I think that's probably true of other Presidents as well. But naturally, every agency and every Cabinet department of the Government fights hard, fights all during December for a place in that speech, and rightly so because once the President makes a commitment in the state of the Union, he's a long way toward doing it. And if Agriculture, or Interior or Justice fails to get a commitment of some kind, even a small reference in that speech, they know very well that when the fighting for the money comes later on that they may lose out. So, the competition to be represented in the state of the Union speech is about as fierce as there is in Government. It's unlike almost any other speech in that respect.

HESS: When you would work on the speeches in the Cabinet Rooms, what members of the White House staff would be present?

FRITCHEY: It would vary from day to day. One day we might consider the claims of say the Defense Department for a place in the speech, or the claims

[41]

of one of the independent agencies and what not. So they might or might not be represented depending upon those who were doing the actual construction of the speech. Sometimes Mr. Acheson would just pick up his own pen and write a whole stretch himself, and, believe me, it was first class.

HESS: At the time that you were there, were you concerned only with the Department of Defense matters or were you helping to write the speech in total?

FRITCHEY: Well, as I have said before, since the role of the administrative assistant by statute was never spelled out, you could be used for anything from day to day. You were simply operating at the President's pleasure from day to day. You might have two or three assignments at one time or you might have none and you might have one. Also, there was an extraordinary flexibility in the staff at that time. I don't know whether this would be good for every President or not but it seemed to work out for Harry Truman, in the sense that one member of the staff felt free to call upon others to help him in a situation. He'd say, "Are you tied up? Has the

[42]

President got you doing anything? Could you help me on this? Could you go see so and so? Would you talk to so and so?" Or "I'm stuck on this section of speech would you help me on this speech?" And there was this kind of interchange in the staff which I found worked out quite well. And almost everyone liked it because it gave a kind of a variety so that you were not pinned down to one specific rigid task. It was enjoyable to move in different areas. Now, I think this is more true of the administrative assistants than the others. For instance, I did a great deal of political work for the President.

HESS: Tell me about that.

FRITCHEY: This, of course, was never spelled out, and many member of the staff didn't even know what I was doing. I was for some time principal liaison between the White House, the President, and the Democratic National Committee. This has never been written about. Very few people know it today. Not even many of the reporters caught on. The usual routine was for the chairman of the committee to call on the President

[43]

from time to time. India Edwards, who was the vice-chairman for women, also made a point of seeing the President. The President liked her and she was quite effective. I think she saw him probably more frequently than the national chairman did. But I would be in touch much more frequently on a day to day basis sometimes both by telephone and by actual appearance at the committee. In the nature of things, the departments and the agencies and the Democratic National Committee, as well, look for a good pipeline to the White House, even though one isn't specifically assigned to them. In this case it was more or less specifically assigned.

HESS: Was this assigned by the President?

FRITCHEY: Yes.

HESS: Now, when you first went to the White House, Frank McKinney was chairman of the Democratic National Committee, is that correct?

FRITCHEY: That's correct.

HESS: And then he was very shortly thereafter, replaced by

[44]

Stephen Mitchell.

FRITCHEY: Correct. Frank took over the committee as I recall early in 1952 , and he had a big job on his hands. There was no question that the administration was in trouble on the public relations side. The propaganda of the Republicans, and the threat of Eisenhower, were creating very serious problems. McKinney was, and rightly so in my opinion, very sensitive to the public relations aspect of the party and the Democratic National Committee and the needs in that area. That made a considerable bond between us. He and I got along well. And so I became kind of an informal advisor to him in that area. They had a director of publicity, Sam Brightman.

HESS: Did you know him well?

FRITCHEY: Yes, sure. And later, after I left the White House, I went to the Democratic National Committee as vice-chairman and director of a new division called the Office of Public Affairs, and I kept Sam as the publicity director when I came. He'd been there a long time, he knew his way around. But he

[45]

wasn't quite McKinney's style. He was better than McKinney thought he was.

HESS: What was your impression of Stephen Mitchell?

FRITCHEY: I think I could tell you that more successfully if we went about the Stevenson candidacy more chronologically.

HESS: Fine, that is what we are up to now anyway.

[46]

Second Oral History Interview with Clayton Fritchey, Washington, D.C., December 22, 1969.
By Jerry N. Hess, Harry S . Truman Library.

HESS: Mr. Fritchey, when did you first become aware that President Truman did not intend to run for re-election in 1952?

FRITCHEY: Well, I was never really sure until he publicly announced it. Like some of the other members of the White House family, we had had some indications and hints from time to time, and it may very well be that Mr. Truman confided to others but he did not confide to me. And so we had only a little inkling on the day, on the night that he drew down.

HESS: At the Armory? What was the inkling that you received?

FRITCHEY: Well, around the first of the year, it seemed to me, and to others, that he was possibly preparing the way for a successor. By that I mean he drew attention nationally to Adlai Stevenson. This turned out not to be an accident. As we see now, he had been thinking very seriously for some time of not running again. But I think, like most chief executives,

[47]

they find it necessary to conserve their power and not always to reveal precisely what they have in mind publicly. And also circumstances can change, so that it is better, on balance, to run again.

HESS: What do you think first brought Adlai Stevenson to the President's attention in this context, as a successor?

FRITCHEY: Well, leaders of the party around the country always had a great regard for Truman. Some of the most respected political leaders, bosses, if you like, such as Dave Lawrence of Pennsylvania, and the leaders in New York County, and the politicians in the Middle West, kept in touch, sometimes indirectly, once in awhile directly, and the word began drifting back to the White House of the impression that Stevenson was making. Especially after a trip to New York, I believe late in 1951, in which he took a large meeting pretty much by storm. So, I think this idea began to develop in his mind, and I think it's fair to say now, that Stevenson would not have been nominated had it not been for Mr. Truman. As you know, Stevenson was not interested, and it took a great deal of

[48]

persuasion. Finally, it took Mr. Truman to do it personally in the showdown in Chicago.

Whether the New Hampshire primary brought things to a head is something we'll never know for sure. I think it was a factor. As you know that occurred around the middle of March and it was a surprise around the White House and a disappointment. I must say, Mr. Truman himself never showed any particular reaction to it. So, I have concluded that he had already pretty well made up his mind. After the New Hampshire primary I think he felt he had better move because it was clear that Kefauver was going to be very successful in the primaries. As it turned out, he won, I think, fifteen in a row, probably the all time record. An interesting sidelight on American politics is that a candidate can win that many primaries and still not have a serious chance of getting the nomination, if the President of the United States doesn't want him to have it.

HESS: Did Mr. Truman seem to be supporting any other prominent party members other than Adlai Stevenson, about this time, about the first of the year?

[49]

FRITCHEY: From the time that Mr. Truman made his public announcement that he was not going to run again, it seemed to me that his first choice, if not his only choice, from then until the convention, almost to the convention, was Stevenson.

HESS: Did you ever hear of any support for Vice President Barkley?

FRITCHEY: This came about two weeks or so before the convention. There had been communications, not a great deal, but some, back and forth to Chicago and Springfield, Illinois; some directly with Stevenson and some with his associates. And I think the President, President Truman, finally became convinced that Stevenson absolutely would not run. This put him in a difficult position because the principal regional and state leaders had more or less deferred to the President in developing a successor. Very few of them, as you know, were keen on Kefauver. Mr. Truman had, in effect, undertaken, in their minds, to produce the alternative to Kefauver in Chicago. And thus when it became seemingly certain that nothing could prevail on Stevenson, it was necessary for the President to

[50]

act, and he came to the conclusion that Alben Barkley was the answer to this. Just how he arrived at this, none of us knew for certain, but it had its own logic. Probably the only serious drawback to Barkley at that time, was his age, because he was a widely esteemed man, extremely experienced, highly regarded by the public and a very popular man, and a very popular man in the party, and a great campaigner and a great speaker. I think it was on a Sunday, about two weeks before the convention was to open in Chicago, that Mr. Truman had a quiet meeting one Sunday morning in his study at the White House about 11 o'clock. And I can't recall exactly who was there, but Charlie Murphy was, I remember that. I believe the national chairman was Barkley's sort of man Friday, he's now dead, oh, I can't remember his name to save my soul, his name was so well-known, it'll come to me in a minute.

HESS: Leslie Biffle?

FRITCHEY: Les Biffle, sure. Mr. Truman began with a general review of the political situation, and then he disclosed what he had on his mind. Shortly thereafter Mr. Barkley came in, and it was apparent

[51]

that he had no foreknowledge of this. And when the President's feelings and desires were made known to him I thought he reacted with great dignity, in a most courteous way, but still firmly, I thought. He pointed out to the President his own infirmities as a candidate, with particular attention to his age. I thought it was quite a remarkable performance. There wasn't any false modesty about it nor any coyness, it was a very sensible recital of what he thought his drawbacks were.

HESS: What other drawbacks did he see in himself other than his age?

FRITCHEY: That's the principal one of course, and the ability to carry on a vigorous campaign. And the age factor is a very serious one, there's no doubt about that: The party looks forward to eight years for a candidate, you see. That would have taken Barkley into his eightieth year.

HESS: Did he give Mr. Truman an answer at this time?

FRITCHEY: It was decided at that time, that all things being equal, this is the way it would be. And so

[52]

about a week before the convention opened, the word was gradually spread to various political leaders of the party coming into Chicago for the convention, what the strategy was going to be. This surprised a good many and some really couldn't believe it because of the age factor. But gradually it became known that this was the wishes of the White House. I don't know what finally would have happened had it not been for the revolt on the part of labor, and that was enough to -- that occurred on a Sunday I believe, before the convention opened. It was a meeting of labor groups who were very friendly toward Barkley, personally, but they felt they had a great stake in this election and they thought they had a possible winner in Stevenson. And when Mr. Barkley learned about this, it reconfirmed in his own mind that he had liabilities that were too great. And on that same day there was a caucus of the Illinois convention, late in the afternoon in Chicago, Sunday, at which Mr. Stevenson made a final effort to extricate himself from any draft, and news of that leaked out. At this time, I believe, Kefauver had an ironclad commitment of over three hundred delegates

[53]

which he had won the hard way. And one never knows for sure how things would have worked out. Well, my own view, if President Truman had not decided to sort of take over the convention and run it, and actually, forcibly draft Stevenson, I think the chances are strong that Kefauver might have gone on to get the nomination. But as you know, the President, by his personal intercession, prevailed on Stevenson.

HESS: Did you ever hear Fred Vinson mentioned as a possible candidate?

FRITCHEY: Yes, all kinds of possibilities were mentioned, but so far as I know there wasn't a single delegation lined up for Vinson. There had been no preparation for him. I think that it is true that an incumbent President can -- his power is immeasurable and it might have been that he could have put over anybody. I don't mean to suggest that Vinson was just anybody, because he was a man of great reputation, very popular, and so on, but there had been utterly no preparation for him either in the party leadership or in the public mind.

[54]

HESS: Now, we've mentioned the principal regional and state members, the so-called political bosses, what political bosses do you think had the most influence with Mr. Truman during this period of time, the latter part of his administration?

FRITCHEY: I would say the single greatest was Dave Lawrence of Pennsylvania, who was almost an ideal type of political leader in the sense that he himself was the mayor of a major city. He had his own constituency and he had the gift for practical politics as well as a very good record as a mayor in his own right. So he had a nice balance, a nice appreciation of the need for first-class political performance and also the practical requirements of politics.

HESS: Good. And I understand that you were associated with Governor Stevenson's staff during the 1952 campaign and I'd like to ask you to tell me about that episode. Perhaps you can begin with your opinion as to why you were chosen for that position. Why were you chosen to assist in the Stevenson campaign?

FRITCHEY: About a week after the close of the convention

[55]

and Mr. Stevenson's nomination, he flew down to the White House to see the President, to discuss the coming campaign, get his views, canvass strategy, all the natural things. During the course of this he pointed out to the President that he was wholly unprepared to conduct a national campaign because he had been Governor of a Middle West state for the last four years and had been absorbed in relatively provincial affairs and that his staff, while it was very good, was experienced largely in statewide matters, regional matters, and not in national and foreign policy, and so he felt the first order of business was staff. Now, Mr. Truman said in effect, what could he, Mr. Truman, do to help him. The momentary request of the Governor was to ask for the loan of two members of Mr. Truman's staff, namely Dave Bell and myself. So, as I think I may have told you, we were not even given time to go home and get a toothbrush. After Governor Stevenson and President Truman had lunch, the Governor went immediately to his plane, and Bell and I with him, and flew to Springfield.

[56]

HESS: Before we get into the matters at Springfield I would like to ask one other question about the meeting between Governor Stevenson and Mr. Truman, and to ask that question I would like to read a statement from Cabell Phillips' book *The Truman Presidency* which appears on page 425 and get your reaction to it and ask if this is the same meeting. Mr. Phillips states:

In August Stevenson paid a visit to the President in the White House in the hope of working out a modus vivendi by which the President would remain in the background until the last couple of weeks of the campaign, while Stevenson created a public image and program of his own. The conference was held in the Cabinet room with the President and key members of his staff lined up on one side of the vast coffin-shaped table and, on the other side, Stevenson and picked members of "the Springfield crowd" -- like representatives of sovereign powers at a treaty conference. It was stiff, painfully uncomfortable, and largely inconclusive.

Did you attend this meeting?

FRITCHEY: I would not exactly recognize the meeting from that description.

HESS: How would you characterize the meeting and who attended?

[57]

FRITCHEY: I literally can't recall. Most of the time they were together separately from the staff. I don't recall any Springfield staff that Stevenson brought with him but I don't trust my memory on that. I believe, on second thought, Bill Blair his secretary, was with him. His Springfield number one braintruster was Carl McGowan, now Judge McGowan, and a very able man, but my recollection was that he was not along on that trip.

HESS: How would you characterize the meeting?

FRITCHEY: The meeting, I thought, the little I saw of it, of course I didn't sit in nor did anyone else when they were having a bite to eat and talking privately, but it seemed to me to be a cordial gathering. They are both somewhat reserved men; Stevenson particularly. He is not a man you would think of as spontaneously Mr. Truman's style. He was not chosen by Mr. Truman on any cronyism or an old friendship or because they had ever worked very close together. It was just a general instinct Mr. Truman had for what he wanted as a high-class successor. We must always remember Mr. Truman never forgot his reverence for this

[58]

office, and he wanted to be followed by the best man that could be found. And these two men were not by nature very compatible. They didn't have very many -- share many congenialities. They came from different backgrounds; their approach was different; Stevenson was suave; Mr. Truman was plain-spoken, but their essential outlook on the politics of the party and the politics of the country and the policies of the country, was fundamentally harmonious, and that's what mattered to Mr. Truman. I don't think at that time that Mr. Stevenson's regard for Mr. Truman was as high as it later became. This is a matter very difficult to document. But I think that he, Stevenson, was to some extent influenced by the environment in which he spent those four years in the Middle West. He was not close to Washington or to national affairs during that time. The anti-Truman press was virulent in Illinois. Many of Stevenson's close friends were Republicans and he received a lot of Republican support when he ran for Governor, you know, and he got a lot of money from Lake Forest, what Agnew would call the effete snobs. And there was a certain condescension in that area toward Mr. Truman. Also, like many others,

[59]

I think that Stevenson, at that time, was over-impressed by Eisenhower. Stevenson had been in the war, he'd been an assistant to Frank Knox in the Navy, he'd already gotten a taste for international affairs and he regarded Ike as much more of an internationalist than he turned out to be. But Eisenhower was a towering figure during those years that Stevenson was involved in international affairs in the war and shortly after the war and during the United Nations days and the Dumbarton Oak days and meetings of the Advisory Council in London and the first meetings in San Francisco of the United Nations. Eisenhower was, in the eyes of many liberals, sort of a white hope, and most of them regarded him as potentially a Democrat. As you know, there was even an effort made in 1948 to nominate him on the Democratic ticket. So, the little I saw of the Truman-Stevenson meeting in the White House was, as I say, cordial, polite, agreeable. I think

Mr. Truman went out of his way to assure Stevenson that he would support him in any way he possibly could, whether it was staff or campaigning, or helping to raise money. To the best of my knowledge, there was no effort to spell out the

[60]

respective roles at that time.

HESS: Did you, or did you not, feel at that time or later that Governor Stevenson would have preferred that President Truman limit his activities in the campaign?

FRITCHEY: Well, from the beginning this was an unspoken factor. There is no question, as the polls showed, that this was the low point in Mr. Truman's popularity. He had been the victim of a most concerted propaganda, and he was also -- I don't suppose he had ten prominent newspapers in the United States supporting him. Then there was this magnification of the "mess in Washington," and once you get a cliché like that going, and it gathers some plausibility, it is very difficult to dispose of. In any case, there was general agreement that the situation not only called for a new face but a whole new spirit. After all, the Democrats had been in power, just think, five straight elections and probably the most telling slogan, in that campaign, was "Time for a Change." There was great exhilaration, momentarily, in the Democratic Party after the Stevenson acceptance speech. There's no doubt it was

[61]

an extraordinarily fine speech and set a fine keynote for the campaign. And it had a certain elevation, which people at that time did not associate with Mr. Truman. His administration, unfairly, in my opinion, had been pictured as grimy, involved with petty frivolities, and so on. All which seems wholly unimportant today. But it was necessary to create a new image if there was any chance of winning. Mr. Truman knew that just as well as Governor Stevenson. The general message, through the lines, between the lines, Truman to Stevenson, was, "You're the new leader, and you must do it whatever way you think is best, and know that I'm here and can be called on for anything you want, whatever amount or degree seems best." It seemed to me a diplomatic and subtle way of saying that he, Truman, knew the realities of that particular political situation and what was called for in that campaign.

Now it is true that even the most modest of Presidents have their pride, and their vanity. I think the way the campaign was ultimately run, Mr. Truman felt a little hurt at not being called on more. I think he always tried to tell himself that perhaps in

[62]

the same circumstance he would do the same thing. There is no question that everyone felt that the emphasis had to be on a new voice, a new spirit, a new pitch. Unfortunately, a newspaper on the west coast, I believe in the State of Washington, came out with what purported to be an exclusive story which appeared within the first couple of weeks after the convention. Apparently Stevenson had earlier been in that city. I can't remember whether it was Seattle now or Portland, one or the other. It was before the convention, and he had offhandedly used the phrase "mess in Washington" in connection with something. I don't think he meant that in any serious way, but it was recalled by the paper, and it got picked up by the wire services. This, of course, was a matter

of great concern in Springfield because, taken out of context, it was very hurtful. I had to go to New York for Stevenson on another matter, and it was decided that I should go by Washington and see my old boss. After all I was still on leave of absence from the White House, so I did that. Before I could bring up the subject, the President did. So, I just told him very frankly the circumstances. Mr. Truman, himself, often spoke off-the-cuff, and said

[63]

things beyond what he really meant, which always is dangerous to do in politics. When he knew all the circumstances, he kind of chuckled and, knowing his own proclivity for shooting from the hip, he laughed about it, and I thought was quite amiable. So, from that point on, I did make trips back to Washington from time to time; not many, just to fill the President in on what was being planned, discussed, what speeches were coming up. He was always generous, never complained, never asked what role the nominee had in mind for him.

HESS: Would you characterize yourself as being the principal point of contact between the two campaigns?

FRITCHEY: No, I don't think so. I think I was one of them.

HESS: How was liaison between the two campaign programs carried on? Besides through yourself?

FRITCHEY: There were a number of people on the White House staff that kept in touch. Also the national chairman India Edwards who was very close to the White House at that time, saw Mr. Truman pretty regularly. Mitchell,

[64]

once he was appointed, made a point of keeping in touch, and, infrequently, Stevenson directly to Truman. I cannot recall any instances of this surfacing in a clear-cut way except for this one instance I've told you about. My recollection is that Mr. Truman did not campaign very strongly until the end of the campaign.

HESS: He did make several trips I think in the latter part of September and then in October.

FRITCHEY: That is my impression. I'd have to go back and check that now. I don't believe that the Stevenson headquarters, the brain trust so to speak, had very much to do with the content of those speeches nor do I think they were cleared in any detailed way with Springfield.

HESS: Were the itineraries of where the President...

FRITCHEY: Itineraries, there was consultation on, oh yes, complete agreement on that.

HESS: All right, the meeting at the White House that we mentioned awhile ago, was it at that time when you

[65]

found out that your presence was requested in Springfield, is that right?

FRITCHEY: Stevenson, or the President said jokingly -- well, Stevenson said in effect, "Look, Mr. President, you got me into this, now you're going to get me out," so to speak, "I don't have any staff or allotment."

So the President said, "What can I do for you?"

He said, "Well, I would like to steal some of your staff to begin with."

He said, "O.K. who do you want?"

On that occasion he mentioned Bell and me and it was instantly arranged.

HESS: Fine. We mentioned a few of your duties in Springfield but let's enumerate that further. Just what were your duties for Stevenson in Springfield and who did you work with?

FRITCHEY: Wilson Wyatt was the campaign manager and I was his executive assistant. This particular setup enabled me to cover quite a lot of ground in addition to working closely with Wyatt. I tried to devote quite a bit of my time to public relations in general.

[66]

Stevenson's press secretary was an able young man, but he, like many other members of the Springfield staff, had been confined largely to Illinois affairs and he did not know any of the Washington press corps or any of the national columnists, which obviously I did; and so I tried to be helpful in that area, although I did not serve as press secretary. We then also had a most unusual operation, which so far as I know, has never been written about and this was the speech brain trust. Every candidate has to have a number of speechwriters because if he did nothing else he wouldn't have time to write all of his speeches. I recall while flying back from the White House to Springfield, that this was what Stevenson wanted to talk about more than anything else. It was the first time I learned how much store he put on speeches, he had always been used to doing his own and he still thought he could in this campaign. I think he told me that he had spoken to John Sparkman, who was then his vice-presidential running mate, about this, and he quoted Sparkman telling him he couldn't make less than a dozen major speeches. I remember I spontaneously laughed, and he looked at me rather oddly. So I told

[67]

him that I had gone back and checked two or three campaigns just to see how many speeches had been made by various candidates.

And he said, "Well, for instance how many did Wendell Willkie make?"

And I said, "He made two hundred and fourteen."

I thought Stevenson was going to faint. He said, "Why, you can't write a half a dozen good speeches a year. Nobody on earth can write two hundred and fourteen, even bad ones."

And I said, "That's true, so therefore, you've got to have a speech team."

He said, "I've never had a speech team."

I said, "Well, you're going to have to have in this campaign."

He said, "I knew it was a mistake."

So, gradually it forcibly dawned on him, as time went on, that he really was not going to be able to write every word of his speeches. His candidacy attracted some of the most brilliant men, not only in this country, but elsewhere, many of whom came to Springfield. Some stayed twenty-four hours, some stayed twenty-four days, as long as they felt they had something to contribute. We felt they had something

[68]

to contribute, and we welcomed their presence. So we had this sort of "brainpool" to contribute ideas, or a paragraph, or a sentence, or a slogan, or an entire speech. It ended up that Stevenson never, ever, took anybody's in total but he would have available to him this mass of material from which to choose, to select. Of course, he ended up rewriting almost every speech, so in the end he might as well have written it himself except that he couldn't have; you've got to have something to go by.

HESS: Who were a few of the people that were contributing ideas for the speeches?

FRITCHEY: Dave Bell was a notable one. Arthur Schlesinger was, Ken Galbraith was, Bill [William M.] Reddig, David Cohen, Herbert Agar. Well, so many came and went that it's hard to recall. Many of them, leading members of the Senate came, some of the more literate ones like Bill Fulbright, Hubert Humphrey, full of ideas, full of intimate knowledge of the national scene, and foreign scene, and they would stay and not only visit with him but visit with us and we would sort of pick their brains and then keep them there until we got everything we could.

[69]

HESS: Would there be anything that might be characterized as a typical speechwriting session that you could tell me about?

FRITCHEY: No, we had no real format. I suppose a more methodical candidate might have wanted a more methodical way of doing things.. It was haphazard but it worked -- the end result was, as you know, probably the greatest collection of campaign speeches in many, many years.

HESS: To what extent did Governor Stevenson participate in the writing of the speeches?

FRITCHEY: Well, we worked out a system of sorts where there would be discussion with two or three members of the entourage about a given speech, on a given trip, whether it lasted six days, or ten days. Obviously there are appropriate places to give a farm speech, appropriate places to give foreign policy speeches. The brain trust, so to speak, got the general drift of his

thinking, and what he wanted to say, and this would end up usually in a first draft. Then he would work on that, and there would be a second draft, and then he would end up endlessly rewriting, until toward

[70]

the end it was ninety percent Stevenson. This became a real trial to us because he would keep on rewriting up until about five minutes before the speech was given. This made great difficulties for me and my dealings with the press, because obviously they wanted a speech frozen as many hours or days in advance as they could get it. They would see him sitting up on a dais in Indianapolis, or Los Angeles, writing away, and realize he was making substantive changes, and that they would have to rewrite their leads, which sometimes they did in the middle of the night. This was very exasperating for the press. Time and time again we would discuss it with him but we never made much progress.

HESS: What particular men would...

FRITCHEY: He just hated the idea of anybody else writing a word for him.

HESS: What particular men would you place as members of the brain trust, the speechwriting brain trust?

FRITCHEY: Well, the ones I have mentioned, of course. Carl McGowan was a very important member of it, Bill

[71]

Blair, both very intelligent, able men, both of whom knew Stevenson better than the rest of us who came into Springfield from the outside. They knew what his prejudices were, and what sort of style he favored. George Ball was a very important member of it. Wilson Wyatt, as you know, was highly intelligent, a very distinguished lawyer, so we had a cross section of men who were extremely well versed in twenty different fields. Dave Bell had been in the Budget, you know, an extremely able man. And then, as I told you, we had the top members of the Senate coming and going, and we were on the telephone to people around the country all the time.

HESS: As you will recall, there was some criticism that Governor Stevenson's speeches were too intellectual and on too high a plane for the average voter. What do you say about that? Would you agree with that?

FRITCHEY: Well, there was much discussion of this. My final judgment is that they weren't, that they created an atmosphere that was of lasting value to the party. It ultimately led, in my opinion, to the election of Jack Kennedy. A fortunate thing for Stevenson was

[72]

that no one believed that anybody could beat Eisenhower, and, therefore, his defeats were never seriously held against him. His campaign was on a high plane, with no concessions to demagoguery in a desperate effort to defeat Eisenhower.

HESS: Do you think that Adlai Stevenson thought that he could defeat General Eisenhower?

FRITCHEY: Let me answer your question this way: I've come to the conclusion that all nominees, whether for sheriff, dog catcher, mayor, Governor, Senator, or President, ultimately come to this conclusion, otherwise they can't run. And they are surrounded by people who also get caught up in it, and who in any case feel it is all-important to maintain the morale of the candidate. And so there is this tendency to magnify every good indication and to diminish the reverse. I think toward the end of the '52 campaign that Stevenson did think he had a serious chance. I must say, I did too, especially when you consider the last Gallup poll showed them only one percentage point apart.

[73]

HESS: Is there something that Governor Stevenson...

FRITCHEY: Also, you must remember that no Democrat had been defeated for five elections.

HESS: In your opinion, is there something that Governor Stevenson could have done that he did not do that might have swung the election the other way?

FRITCHEY: No, and I've never heard anyone else suggest it.

HESS: Why did Governor Stevenson decide to leave his principal headquarters in Springfield and not to move it to either New York or to Washington?

FRITCHEY: Well, that to some extent, to a very large extent, was strategy, or tactics if you please. Obviously there are many mechanical drawbacks to running the campaign in a small town, and they were very, very painful ones, I assure you. The communications problem, the housing problem, the difficulty of people getting to see you. Yet it was part and parcel of the image that all of us felt that Stevenson had launched with his great acceptance speech: The Lincoln, the

[74]

Springfield ambience. Chicago is Cook County, and is the worst ambience. New York would not have been logical under the circumstances. He wanted to stay in his own state, he wanted the Illinois background, he had been in Springfield, he had, as everyone knew, a passionate admiration for Lincoln. So that was a deliberate political choice.

HESS: Could you tell me something about the physical setup that you had in Springfield?

FRITCHEY: Well, pitiful. Wyatt and I finally found a relatively small house a few blocks away from the Governor's mansion. It probably finally got about twenty or thirty cubicles in it but was never adequate, and we had to add on and add on. As the campaign went on, we finally took over the Elk's Lodge and moved quite a few people in there. The hotels, of course, were inadequate. We finally managed to get one floor of a hotel. But just trying to find housing and shelter over night for all kinds of party leaders pouring in, Governors, Senators and others coming in, state chairmen -- I would never want to go through again. It served the atmospheric

[75]

purpose but it was a tremendous handicap from a mechanical standpoint.

HESS: Did you go on any of the campaign trips?

FRITCHEY: Oh, of course.

HESS: Would you tell me about those and how were they run?

Are we running out of time, it is 4 o'clock?

FRITCHEY: Fine.

HESS: All right, let's quit here and schedule another one.

FRITCHEY: All right.

[76]

Third Oral History Interview with Clayton Fritchey, Washington, D.C., May 6, 1970. By Jerry N. Hess, Harry S. Truman Library.

HESS: Mr. Fritchey, to begin today, I'd like to read an excerpt from the book, *The Politics of Honor: A Biography of Adlai E. Stevenson*, by Kenneth S. Davis, and get your reaction to it. This is on page 278 and 279:

There were other grave disadvantages to headquartering in Springfield. Travel in and out of the town was much more difficult than travel in and out of Washington would have been, and Springfield was deficient in mass-communications facilities. The latter complication was enhanced by the apparent fact that Bill Flanagan, whom Stevenson retained as his personal press secretary, seemed not to enjoy the candidate's full confidence. When newsmen asked Flanagan questions to which, they felt, he should have immediate answers, Flanagan was likely to reply that he didn't know, he'd try to find out. For this, and various foul-ups in news facilitation, the unfortunate Flanagan was soon very much in the doghouse with reporters. The situation was considerably improved when the White House loaned to Stevenson one of the President's principal assistants, Clayton Fritchey, who had had a brilliant newspaper career (he'd been editor of the *New Orleans Item*, managing editor of the *Baltimore Post*, and won a Pulitzer prize for reporting while on the *Cleveland Press*) before coming to Washington in 1950 as assistant to General Marshall, then Secretary of Defense.

Now, my question is, if you agree that the situation was considerably improved, as Davis says, what did you do to improve the situation when you got there?

[77]

FRITCHEY: Well, in justice to Bill Flanagan, it was not that he was not up to the -- let me put it this way, it was not that he was incompetent, it was the fact that he had served Stevenson as press secretary while Stevenson was Governor of Illinois, and therefore, overwhelmingly concerned with relatively local affairs.

It is not a fair test of Flanagan's ability or intelligence or general competence that he was not in the best position to serve as press secretary to a presidential campaign. Stevenson himself had been concentrating on purely state and local matters for four years. Even as experienced as Stevenson was in international affairs, and to some extent national affairs, he had been away from the scene. That was one reason he was reluctant to run. He realized that he would have to do a cram course during the campaign, which he did. Fortunately he could fall back on many years of very professional experience. Flanagan could not. He was an Illinois lad, and I think the reporters liked him, but it's true, he was not in a position to deal with many of the intricacies of affairs that

[78]

had been occurring on the Washington scene and the international scene.

So, while I was serving as Wilson Wyatt's executive assistant (he was the campaign manager), I inevitably got involved in the press area, and I think I was able to be of some help, simply because we had a hundred or two hundred correspondents in or around Springfield and on the campaign train, the campaign plane, all of whom I knew because of my Washington experience, and from my having served on many different newspapers around the country. So it was inevitable that they would gradually drift to me, especially in matters within my competence.

And, of course, the reason Governor Stevenson asked Dave Bell and me to come out there was the fact that we had been close to the national and international scene, and it was only natural that Stevenson should rely on us perhaps more than some of the men who were with him while he was Governor.

HESS: One question about Mr. Stevenson choosing you and Mr. Bell. Did he personally know you before this time, or did someone on his staff know you?

[73]

FRITCHEY: Yes, he knew me.

HESS: When did you first meet him?

FRITCHEY: I think I first met him through Barry Bingham, the publisher of the Louisville *Courier-Journal*. We spent a weekend together one time at Mr. Bingham's house. We also had many good mutual friends, and many of the people who came to Springfield, like Arthur Schlesinger, Ken [Kenneth] Galbraith, David Bell, and others, were close friends of mine, so we were a very congenial group. We had all known each other, and worked together. We had all served in the New Deal-Fair Deal administrations.

HESS: Do you happen to know if Governor Stevenson knew Dave Bell before this time?

FRITCHEY: I can't answer that. I really don't know whether he ever met Bell before or not, but he knew of him, and he was a very able man, and instantly supplied what Stevenson wanted, which was a great deal of know-how, and sophisticated knowledge of the issues we were going to deal with.

HESS: Fine, we'll get further into your duties in Springfield

[80]

in just a minute, but at the conclusion of our last interview, we had just mentioned the campaign trips, and you said that you had traveled on some of them. Just how were the campaign trips conducted?

FRITCHEY: Well, I think not too differently than is customary. We had a logistical team planning the itinerary. We had a group in Washington and a group in Springfield coordinating this. It was under the general direction of Wilson Wyatt, because, naturally every political boss and every state chairman and county chairman in the country wanted the candidate to come to his particular area, and so this required the judgment of Wyatt and a number of his associates, as to which were the most strategic spots to go to and when to go to them and how. So, we would fan out from Springfield for, say, a week at a time, or four or five days at a time, sometimes longer.

So every trip had to be plotted from morning to night. This required a tremendous logistical operation, because we also had to provide facilities, room and board so to speak, hotel arrangements, telephone and other communications for a very large press corps that was

[81]

with us. There were always two planes: the candidate's plane and the press plane. With us, of course, many times, were visiting political leaders who came to Springfield to see the candidate and who also wanted to be on the plane when we were visiting their particular states and cities. They usually rode the candidate's plane. This required a very big staff just to plot this out, and to keep it moving all the time. It's one of the biggest and most important things in a campaign, coordinating the logistics, especially these days, where you're moving so fast with planes.

HESS: How would you compare the difficulty of arranging a campaign with planes as opposed to a campaign with trains?

FRITCHEY: Planes are more difficult, because you're trying -- I remember on one occasion we started, I believe, in New Mexico, spent the afternoon in Oregon, and went to a major rally, I believe, that evening in Kansas City. In the days of trains, that would have taken two weeks. We did it in less than twenty-four hours. I must say, it's a wonder we weren't all dead.

[82]

It was a remarkable thing about Stevenson, he had this excessive weight, as you know, and he didn't look like an especially strong man, but he never even got a cold during this incredible campaign, when we were getting three and four hours sleep. He didn't lose his voice once, and very seldom lost his temper.

HESS: How many trips or campaign swings did you make, do you recall?

FRITCHEY: I can't recall now.

HESS: Did you go on most of them?

FRITCHEY: I went on about half of them, because it was necessary for people to keep the shop in Springfield.

HESS: The times when you did not go, just what were your duties in Springfield?

FRITCHEY: As I think I said before, I was Wilson Wyatt's executive assistant, and he was the chief campaign manager, and when he wasn't there, I had to pinch hit for him.

This is very like a G. H. Q in war. It isn't

[83]

possible, if you took a call every two minutes, a long distance call every two minutes, to take all the calls that are coming in during the course of the day, because almost every political leader in the country, every candidate in the country, wanted to talk to Stevenson or to the campaign manager, almost constantly. We would have calls backed up forty and fifty to the most important people in the United States. This creates probably more ill will than any single thing in a campaign, because people who could ordinarily get through at any other time, have to take their turn in this kind of an operation.

Take a man of the stature of a president of a very large university, or the president of a very large steel company. Normally, Stevenson would take the call right away himself, for he knew many of them. If a Governor called, or a prominent Senator, they'd normally get through right away. In a campaign it's impossible. Everyone who calls is a celebrity, so to speak, and there just aren't enough hours in the day to take them all.

Much of my work was taking the calls that Stevenson and Wilson Wyatt couldn't take. Of course, they all

[84]

prefer to start, first with Stevenson, and secondly Wyatt, and when worst comes to worst, settle for me. Bit by bit, when they found out that I had access to the candidate, and their message went through, they became more comfortable with this arrangement.

HESS: Did Jacob M. Arvey lend any assistance to Stevenson during that campaign? Jake Arvey of Illinois.

FRITCHEY: Well, you know Jake always prefers to be called Jack. He played a very considerable part in Stevenson's life. Stevenson probably would never have been a candidate for Governor if it had not been for Arvey. And at that time he was certainly an extremely influential

man, and in my opinion a very useful one. He had, aside from his political experience and sophistication, and his ability to deliver in a key state, he just had general good sense. Unlike many professional political leaders, he was an extremely intelligent man and had a good grasp of the issues. So, it was congenial for Stevenson to work with him. He never imposed on his old friendship with Stevenson. I considered him a very valuable man to have in our camp during that time.

[85]

HESS: Did he lend a good deal of assistance, did he lend a good deal of help?

FRITCHEY: Yes he did. I think he was very fond of Mr. Truman, too, and I think Mr. Truman trusted him. At least, that's the impression I had.

HESS: What was the relationship between Wilson Wyatt and the man who held the position of chairman of the Democratic National Committee, Stephen Mitchell?

FRITCHEY: This posed some somewhat awkward moments. Stevenson's reluctance, as I've said repeatedly, to taking the nomination, was that he had been away from the national scene, and he had not been working with anyone who was a natural candidate for national chairman. There was a unanimous feeling that the then chairman should be replaced, not because of any inadequacy on his part. He had only been national chairman, I believe, six months or so.

HESS: Frank McKinney.

FRITCHEY: Frank McKinney. But there was the desire to create an entirely new image.

[86]

I think you know as well as I do that Mr. Truman had been subjected to a very critical campaign, by what we then called the "one-party press." It is not so much a Republican press today, but it was overwhelmingly so then, plus the fact that the Democrats had been in power for five straight terms, and there was a tremendous desire for change. In the process of it, the press, as well as the Republican Party, became extremely partisan. Mr. Truman,, being President, was the natural butt of this. They had been able to magnify what I regard as very small delinquencies in the administration into the so-called "mess in Washington" (mostly a figment in the imagination of the press).

And so there was a general feeling that, without respect to Mr. Truman's performance, the only chance for success was to create a whole new image. Of course, that required a new national chairman, regardless of how well McKinney had been doing.

Stevenson did not want to appoint an established political pro. The upshot of it is that he fell back on his friend, Steve Mitchell, who had had no national experience, and he too had to start from scratch.

[87]

Fortunately, Wilson Wyatt had a clear mandate to run the campaign, and Steve Mitchell wisely ran a complementary operation. He ran the national committee and its relations with the party around the country. He did not try to substitute himself as campaign manager. So it worked out better than some of us thought it would.

Fortunately, Mitchell is a man of personal integrity and good temper, and a situation that could have been full of jealousies and acrimony managed pretty well just because of the personal character of the two men, Wyatt and Steve Mitchell.

Wyatt is a man of great charm, and the greatest tact, and very careful of other people's feeling and their dignity. So he went to great lengths to keep in touch on a day to day basis with Steve, and so did I. Of course, there are times when you slip and we did things that they didn't know about, and vice versa, but that's inevitable. But there was a general feeling that no one was really trying to hide anything from anyone else. On the whole it was not an ideal situation, but it worked out reasonably well.

[88]

HESS: Did he do a fairly good job as chairman of the Democratic National Committee?

FRITCHEY: Steve's performance, I think, especially after the defeat, was quite a notable one.

We had a substantial debt which he cleaned up. He started the *Democratic Digest* at a time when we had neither the House nor the Senate, and at a time when our leadership on the Hill was composed of two Texans who did not altogether share the political outlook of the northern liberals of the Fair Deal and the New Deal. And so it was necessary for Mitchell to do three things: To rebuild the morale of a party that had been defeated; to make the national committee into a viable institution, to clean up the debt; and to provide a political line to which the party could adhere.

He brought in for consultation many of the big figures of the party. He kept close touch with Mr. Truman, Dean Acheson, Harriman, all of whom later became members of what we called the Democratic Advisory Council.

This turned out to be very important, because at that time Congress was dominated by the Republicans.

[89]

They had control of both Houses, and Johnson was not well-known then. He was a junior Senator and Sam Rayburn was almost 80 years old. And they were both southerners. And while their outlook was broader than most southerners, the Democrats elsewhere in the country did not feel that they were the best spokesmen for the party as a whole.

The Democratic Advisory Council did provide a consistent guidance, politically, on issues and ideology for the party. The *Digest* got up to a paid circulation of almost 100,000 so it reached almost every Democratic leader of any consequence in the country. It was not given away, they paid for it. So I think those were very substantial contributions that Mitchell made.

HESS: What do you recall about the relationships between President Truman and Stephen Mitchell, after Mitchell had replaced the man that Truman thought should be there?

FRITCHEY: Mr. Truman, I think, showed the true measure of his greatness during that campaign, because a petty man could easily have become offended,

[90]

and would have sulked and have done the campaign harm. But he was big enough, and generous enough, to see what the political problem was. And he knew the seeming disassociation of the Stevenson camp from the Truman administration was wholly impersonal, and was a political operation, and was not directed at him in any personal way. He didn't know Stevenson, really, nor did Stevenson know him, but he knew all the rest of us extremely well. He was sure of our loyalty to him, and he knew we would never do anything that would ever reflect on him. And so he did not take this, so far as I know, in a personal way.

You cannot read a man's mind. I'm sure there must be times, if he was human at all, when he must have been a little upset. But if so, he certainly didn't show it. He cooperated to the fullest, he made himself available, he just gave Stevenson carte blanche to call on him, he agreed to make any speeches we wanted, wherever, and under whatever circumstances. He couldn't have been more first-class.

HESS: How would you evaluate the success of the cooperation between the two campaigns: The Truman campaign and

[91]

the Stevenson campaign?

FRITCHEY: I'm not quite sure I understand you, Jerry?

HESS: Well, Mr. Truman went out on some trips, speaking trips, and was there adequate liaison, adequate cooperation between Mr. Truman's effort in 1952 and the effort that Mr. Stevenson was putting out in 1952?

FRITCHEY: Well, we felt that as self-effacing as President Truman was that it would be improper for us to suggest what his speeches should be, or what he should say.

HESS: Or where he should go?

FRITCHEY: No, he asked for suggestions on that. He realized that it would be foolish to waste ourselves by both covering the same place, or getting in each other's way, or using up our publicity unnecessarily. So there was very close liaison on where and when. There was no problem on that. He simply said, "You say." So we fit it in to the master chart, as to where he would carry the most weight, where he would get the most attention, where he would get the most radio and television time. I don't recall any argument over the logistics on that, or the itinerary.

[92]

HESS: In his *Memoirs* he seems to express that he thought that maybe a little bit of cooperation could have been given. This is on page 499 of Vol. II of the *Memoirs*

Another mistake in the 1952 campaign was that there was little or no coordination between Washington and Springfield. Actually there were two campaigns being waged by the Democrats, and this often led to overlapping and confusion. It was an unfortunate situation that could have been avoided.

FRITCHEY: Well, this is almost twenty years ago now, and I literally cannot remember the details. Of course, we knew where he was going, and I can't recall his ever making an independent decision on that. He may have suggested, "I think it would be better for me to speak in Kansas City, or Texas," or what. I have no doubt that he did. I can't remember any controversy over that.

We did not try to coordinate themes, ideas, or try to suggest or dictate what he was going to say. We felt that Truman was so much an individual that he would simply have to be himself. And we felt it was probably better for him to be himself and for Stevenson to be himself. They were very, very different men.

I've always thought that President Truman's choice

[93]

of Stevenson was based not on a matter of personal friendship or the advancing of an old associate; I think it was a very impersonal decision on his part. To the best of my recollection, he knew Stevenson only in a slight way, but that in looking around, he simply decided that he was probably the best candidate the party could produce.

He was the Governor of one of the key states, had made a very good record, was almost sure of re-election, and had won the support of many Republicans and Independents in Illinois. His reputation had radiated nationally in that way. It was clear to us that we were going to have to have that broad support to hold off anyone like Eisenhower.

The personalities of Truman and Stevenson are about as distinct as you can imagine. What held them together was a rapport on the ideas that held the Democratic Party together, because in style, personality, background, and tastes, and so on, they were very, very differently cut. This became more marked during the campaign and after. Both men in the years after the election maintained contact and communication, but essentially it was polite,

[94]

cordial, but never warm or the crony type.

I think there were many things about Stevenson that puzzled Mr. Truman, more so as he got to know him. Many of us admire Mr. Truman for a certain bluntness, whereas Stevenson was

always suave. Mr. Truman was plain-spoken; Mr. Stevenson was essentially a man who was devoted to wit, not always the most successful thing in politics.

So, during the campaign, there was some communication between them, but not a great deal. I think that perhaps is the basis of the reference you just read from his *Memoirs*, but there was considerable communication between the two camps, so to speak. I, myself, encountered very little hostility or any sulking on the part of the Washington camp, so to speak, during the campaign. It may be that I was on naturally good, friendly terms with them, having been a part of them, but also that very fact would have seemed to me to have encouraged them to have expressed to me any concerns, or feelings of estrangement they might have had.

I think it's fair to say they felt out of it, as indeed they were, because this was a deliberate policy, as I say, to try to overcome the principal

[95]

slogan of the campaign, which was "Time for a change." The whole effort was to project Stevenson as a new entity. This, inevitably, resulted in a somewhat arm's length operation.

HESS: What are your thoughts on the idea of a change, the idea of a need for a change? Do you personally think it's a good thing for one party to have the responsibility shifted to them every so often?

FRITCHEY: Well, I resisted the idea then, and I still do. But I am less certain of it today than I was then. Of course, I was more partisan because I was involved in the campaign. I regarded it as a purely contrived slogan, and I did not want to see the kind of changes that I thought would be introduced if they came to power.

As against that, looking back in perspective, I think it is fair to say that in a democratic society the longer you keep a party out of power, the more irresponsible it becomes, the more savage it becomes, the more partisan. This makes it increasingly difficult to conduct government, especially when the "outs" acquire a sizable representation in the Congress, either

[96]

a majority or a near majority. And then, feelings become so strong, it's almost impossible to get a coalition to get anything done. They can veto the President; the President can veto them. You end up with stalemate government. I'm not sure that there doesn't have to be a change from time to time to maintain our type of two-party system.

I don't know what would have happened to McCarthyism, for instance, if the Democrats had remained in power, because the Republicans would have continued to use him to the hilt, probably even more desperately than they did before, regardless of the consequences. What destroyed McCarthy, of course, was Eisenhower coming to power. They no longer had any need for him or use for him, so they liquidated him, as they did many other of their old shibboleths: The balanced budget, public debt, all these things went by the board as soon as they came into power.

HESS: Do you think McCarthy's attacks in that year, or in those years played a part in the Republican victory?

FRITCHEY: Yes, I do. That's why the Republicans embraced him. He was an effective instrument for them. It seems

[97]

logically impossible to have ever conducted a campaign against Mr. Truman on the basis of his being soft on Communists, the man who introduced the Marshall plan, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the Truman Doctrine in the Mediterranean, the Korean war. He's the greatest anti-Communist fighter this country has ever known, and to think that you can convince a number of millions of Americans that there was something to this, the fact that you can charge General Marshall with being a Communist agent, I think, indicates how extreme our politics has become, and to what lengths a party will go to when it's been defeated five straight times. It will use any weapon whatsoever, no matter how destructive it is to the country, in order to get back to power, and it may be that the Democrats will do the same thing if they are ever denied office in five straight elections. It's something to worry about.

Yet, it seems on the other hand, hardly desirable to put a party back in power out of blackmail when it says, so to speak, "If you don't put us back in power, we'll destroy the political fabric of the country." So, as you can see, I'm of two minds now, where I was

[98]

of only one mind then.

HESS: Do you recall General Eisenhower's statement that he would go to Korea and try to straighten the thing out? Did that cause any particular problems or trouble during the campaign?

FRITCHEY: Yes, it did. The truth is in Springfield we had high hopes right up until the election. This is primarily based, not so much on our instinct, as on the polls, which showed a very close race. The penultimate poll, I believe, showed Eisenhower winning by one percent, 51.49.

We knew from past experience that the Gallup poll, for instance, had made a consistent error of 3 percent against the Democrats for many years in many elections. On that basis, I myself had concluded that Stevenson had a chance of squeezing in.

I made a point of going back over the polls all the way to 1936 and every year there was the same error of 3 percent. I think this is perfectly legitimate on Gallup's part. I think it's just that there is a bias, a Democratic bias that cannot be totally caught by ordinary polling, especially first and second generation

[99]

Americans who, in the old country, would never tell anybody how they vote. And they're all Democrats. Many workers have nameless fears against revealing their political stand. As many

of them said to me, "Big Boss Republican." So they don't tell you the truth or they don't say anything.

I think Gallup is trying to make a perfectly sincere, scientific effort to get at the exact truth. But he couldn't. I have since been told that Gallup himself felt that since this error was so consistent, that he ought to make some allowance for it. I don't know whether he did or not.

HESS: But the 3 percent wasn't there in 1952?

FRITCHEY: The 3 percent wasn't there.

It's fair to say that the reporters didn't understand our confidence because they felt in their bones that Eisenhower was going to win, as most people did. But I had become impressed by this 3 percent factor over a number of years, and had bet on it in 1936 and 1940, also, in 1948. I bet on Mr. Truman, fairly heavily for me, using the Gallup poll as a basis, with a 3 percent

[100]

deduction from the Republican total. This formula showed Dewey carrying just sixteen states and that's precisely what he carried. In 1940, it showed Willkie carrying nine states, and he ended up carrying eight. In 1936, it showed Roosevelt carrying 45 and he carried 46. That's how accurate the formula was.

But you asked what the feeling was in the camp, and I know some of my colleagues in the camp at Springfield were surprised when I made a bet of several thousand dollars on this. One of them said, "Are you doing this just to cheer up the camp?" So I told him the theory.

HESS: And did you feel that Eisenhower's statement that he would go to Korea swung some votes the other way?

FRITCHEY: Oh, yes. We now feel, all the pollsters feel, that this must have caught all the undecided. There was almost a unanimous feeling about this, that there was a shift, a very, very big shift, in the last week or ten days because of this. This had an instant impact, and there was no way of answering. All you could do was make fun of it. That's not a good answer. It fitted in with Eisenhower.

[101]

HESS: The military man going to visit the battlefield.

FRITCHEY: And it fitted in with the cravings and wishes of the country, just like today in Vietnam. They want to get it over with. No question about it, it was a remarkable political ploy. It suited Eisenhower perfectly.

HESS: Were there any mistakes that the Democrats made that year?

FRITCHEY: I don't think so. Of course, we had endless postmortems. The fact that Stevenson was renominated, virtually by acclamation, four years later, I think is the best proof of the fact that the party felt that no one could have defeated Eisenhower.

HESS: Did you work with Stevenson in '56?

FRITCHEY: I was his press secretary in the '56 campaign.

HESS: Did you do anything differently in 1956?

FRITCHEY: Very little, no. Of course, in the fall of 1955 the party naturally thought it was going to return to power after Mr. Eisenhower had his heart attack. No

[102]

one dreamed that he would be running again. It looked like a very severe heart attack, as indeed it was. He made a remarkable recovery. I don't think, at the time, Mr. Eisenhower himself dreamed he would ever be a candidate again.

And by that time, it was pretty certain that Stevenson would be the nominee again, and there was an almost universal feeling, right or wrong, that he could defeat Nixon. At that point Mr. Nixon did not have a very impressive position even within his own party, as you know. President Eisenhower showed no inclination to have him with him again in 1956.

None of us in the 1952 postmortem felt that the outcome would have been substantially changed by any different type of campaign. Secondly, Stevenson could only conduct one kind of campaign, so it was foreordained as soon as he was nominated that it would be pretty much as it was before. Of course, by that time, television was a much more broadly used instrument. It was just barely coming into use in 1952. We had to be very careful how we plotted the itinerary in '52, because there were many cities where you could not broadcast from. There

[103]

were not the sending facilities. By 1956...

HESS: They had to be on the coaxial cable at that time, didn't they?

FRITCHEY: And the coaxial cable was by no means complete, where in 1956 it pretty much was.

HESS: How would you characterize Governor Stevenson, what kind of a man was he -- from someone who worked so closely with him?

FRITCHEY: Well, in a sense, he and Eisenhower both came to politics quite late. They were both products of the war. Had it not been for the war, the world would probably never have heard of either one.

Eisenhower's career during the war, of course, surpassed anyone else's. But during that time, Stevenson was acquiring a small reputation, and when he returned to his own city, he became quite active in civic affairs, and he did a great deal of public speaking in and around Chicago, and this, I'm sure, is how Arvey happened to spot him.

Also, I'm told (I've never checked this out but

[104]

I believe it's substantially true), on a trip East, Arvey saw Jimmy Byrnes and said, "We've got a very, very big election coming up [this was in 1948], both a senatorship and a governorship. The Republicans are in disrepute, and we have a chance if we can find the right kind of candidate to contrast with the ones the Republicans are going to nominate. Our man's got to have class, integrity, no flavor of bossism about him."

And Jimmy Byrnes said to Arvey, "Well, why look any further. You've got a fellow back there who was with me during the war, you know (State Department, United Nations, and so on) Adlai Stevenson, and he's quite a gifted speaker, he's got a good war record, been Frank Knox's assistant during the war, and was on the advisory committee to set up the United Nations. It seems to me that his credentials would be just right."

I don't think Arvey knew Stevenson personally at that time. In any case, I think that had a lot to do with Arvey's later actions. As you know, they went out and recruited Douglas and Stevenson, and it was a potent combination.

[105]

The two candidates wanted to reverse their positions: Mr. Stevenson wanted to run for the Senate, and Douglas wanted to run for Governor, but Arvey, and the other political leaders out there at that time, felt that the ticket would be better served the other way. So the result of this was that Stevenson, in politics, began at the top, so to speak, sort of like Eisenhower: One began as President; the other began as Governor.

Adlai's son, on the other hand, young Adlai III, at the age of 38 had far more political experience than his father had at 48. This is a round-about-way of answering your question of what he was like, for he had none of the conventional attributes of the politician; for instance, he had not been in a city council or a state legislature or in Congress; he had none of the caginess, or to put it in a nicer way, none of the sophistries of the professional politician. Not that I think political experience is a liability. Quite the contrary. I'd much rather vote for a politician than a football coach, or television star, or opera singer, or astronaut, or whatnot.

[106]

But, politically, Stevenson did start out almost as a dilettante, although he had certain advantages that Eisenhower did not. He had the advantage of being a lawyer. He had the advantage of having served in the New Deal. He was in the AAA, and a couple of the other New Deal agencies, and he served largely in a political role as Frank Knox's assistant in the Navy, and then in the State Department and the UN. So he was politically sophisticated in the large sense of issues and policies, even though he had no background in day-to-day politics. In men around

him, as you know, he probably had one of the most remarkable brain trusts that anybody has ever put together.

He was perhaps a little too fastidious for day-to-day politics, but he had an underlying natural good sense. He was a rational man, a logical man, and he was able to get along with politicians because he understood their problems. I don't suppose we'll see anyone quite like him for a long time again, because he's kind of an accident in politics, a sport in politics.

HESS: Just briefly, how would you rate the Presidents of recent years, administrative ability and intellectual

[107]

ability, starting with Mr. Truman?

FRITCHEY: Well, to start with, Roosevelt: I think we'll see as time goes by that he's really one of the giants of all time in politics; that is to say, he brought off something the world has hardly ever seen: A revolution by democratic means. Seldom has a country been so immensely altered so peacefully, and without any interruptions or derailment of the democratic process.

Mr. Truman's reputation will be different, but I believe it will be notable because he brought to the office qualities which were pre-eminently desirable at the time he was in office; that is to say, he had a certain raw courage, a disdain for catering to popular prejudice, a willingness to go against the grain if he felt it was right. He would always risk his own political gain to do what he thought was right, and he didn't get up and make speeches as Nixon did the other night saying, "I could take the easy path to do so-and-so, but I'm going to take the hard path." He just took the hard path, and it was, many times, momentarily unpopular.

He came to power at a time when the other great

[108]

leader of the world (Stalin) was a man who understood only Truman's kind of language.

I believe Stevenson made a great contribution to the party in the fact that he sustained it on the highest level, during the interregnum of Eisenhower, for it was interregnum. It had to do totally with his personality. It seemed to me that Eisenhower neither tried to do anything. It was a very bland period. I think he will always hold the affection of the people, even historically, but he did not change his party. I don't believe he made any lasting contribution of any kind.

With Kennedy, as you know, the record of the first two years, was not remarkable, but the potential was remarkable: From the spring of 1963 on, he began to move.

When Kennedy came to power he lacked appreciation of the New Deal and the Fair Deal, and of Stevenson, too. Kennedy, at that time, was far too impressed by the hard-liners. I suppose this was to some extent due to his father and his background, but he learned awfully fast. There was no hypocrisy about him. He

[109]

attracted to him men of the highest caliber; he knew how to treat them, how to respect them, and the team was improving in quality all of the time.

As you know, his last statement, about three or four weeks before he died, on Vietnam showed pretty much which way the wind was blowing. His last statement was that it was essentially their war, they must fight it, and that there must be reform in Vietnam, and if Diem didn't reform, he would have to look out for himself.

His successor had certain advantages, obvious advantages, coming to power on the momentum of an assassination, which created a great deal of good will for the Democratic Party and the Democratic program.

It also, in fairness to Johnson, presented many problems for him. Most Presidents, including Mr. Truman, quickly changed the team. Mr. Truman changed the entire Cabinet within a few months, as well as his personal entourage. This was difficult for Johnson to do because it was necessary, for many reasons, to carry on the Kennedy administration until he could get elected himself. So for over a year, and for much

[110]

longer, he continued to be surrounded by men he inherited, which was both good and bad for him. I have always felt it was better for any President to bring in his own team.

The Vietnam war, unfortunately, exposed fundamental weaknesses in Johnson and, of course, led to his downfall. Once you make a mistake on a very big issue, it tends to upset you on other ones. Vietnam upset Johnson's economic programs; it upset him on taxes and inflation. He wouldn't consider wage and price controls, because if he had it would have made the war unpopular; it's hard to estimate the radiation of his fatally bad war decisions.

During the years that he was on the Hill, Johnson's personal energies and time were spent with the Armed Services Committee. He had a natural sense of power. The Pentagon can do countless things for any politician. He had many friends, many men he admired, in that area, and I think it was a great misfortune that he listened to them instead of men like George Ball. You know how his pride has been part of his greatness, but like all pride it can lead to stubbornness and refusal to admit an error or correct it. I still believe that he could

[111]

easily have been re-elected. If he could have brought himself to alter his Vietnam policy, he would have been easily renominated, and, I think, would have been easily re-elected. But, as you can see from his statement in Chicago the other day, he still thinks he's right and still wants to be proved right.

Now, Jerry, I think I'll have to go to my public piece.

HESS: Thank you very much.

Index

Acheson, Dean, 5, 39, 41, 88
Agar, Herbert, 68
Arvey, Jacob M., 84-85, 103-104
Barkley, Alben, 49-52
Ball, George, 71, 109
Bell, Dave, 20, 34, 55, 68, 71, 78-79
Biffle, Leslie, 37, 50
Bingham, Barry, 79
Blair, Bill, 57, 71
Bradley, General, 16
Brightman, Sam, 44
Brownell, Herbert, 33
Byrnes, Jimmy, 104
Clifford, Clark, 24-25
Cohen, David, 68
Connelly, Matthew, 32-33
Dawson, Donald, 26
Democratic National Committee, 42-44
Dewey, Thomas, 100
Edwards, India, 43, 63
Eisenhower, Dwight David, 14, 32-33, 44, 59, 72, 98-103, 108
Flanagan, Bill, 77
Feeney, Joe, 35-37
Fritchey, Clayton, 1, 12, 39-41
 Liaison with DNC, 42-45
 Stevenson Campaign – 1952: 54ff
 Duties, 65-67
 Press relations, 76-78
 Speechwriting, 66-71
 Communications, 83-84
 Springfield Ambience – 73-75
 Stevenson Campaign-1956, 101
Fulbright, J. William, 36, 68
Galbraith, Kenneth, 68, 79
Gallup Poll, 98-100
Harriman, Averell, 88
Hersey, John, 38
Humphrey, Hubert, 68
Integration of Armed Services, 3
Johnson, Louis, 2-3
Johnson, Lyndon Baines, 37, 89, 109-111
Kefauver, Estes, 48-49, 52-53
Kennedy, Jack, 23, 38, 71-72, 108-109
Knox, Frank, 59, 104, 106

Korean War, 2-16
Lawrence, David, 47, 54
LeMay, General Curtis, 16
Long, Russell, 36
Lloyd, David, 20, 38
Lovett, Robert, 11-13
Marshall, George C., 1-3, 8, 10-11, 15-18
MacArthur, Douglas Genl., 3-11, 13-14, 30
Maylon, Charles, 35
McCarthy, Joseph, 96-97
McGowan, Carl, 57, 70-71
McKinney, Frank, 43-45, 85-86
Mitchell, Stephen, 44-45, 64, 85, 86-89
Murphy, Charles, 22-26, 38, 50
New Orleans *Item*, 1-2
Nixon, Richard M., 102
Pace, Frank, 11
Partisan politics, 95-98
Perlmeter, Irving, 20
Rating the Presidents, 107-108
Rayburn, Sam, 89
Reddig, Bill, 68
Rosenman, Sam, 25, 38
Roosevelt, Franklin D., 20, 100, 107
Ross, Charlie, 19
Schlesinger, Arthur, 68, 79
Short, Joe, 13-14, 19, 26-27
Sparkman, John, 66
Steelman, Dr. John, 21-22, 24, 26
Stevenson, Adlai: 38, 90, 93-94, 102-106, 108
 Nomination for 1952 election, 46-53, 92
 Campaign – 1952: 53-76, 79, 81-83, 92, 98-99
 Logistical team, 80-81
 Communications, 82-84
Truman, Harry S., 1-3, 5, 7, 8, 11, 14, 16-18, 20-21, 25, 31-32, 43, 46, 85-86, 88-89, 92-94, 97, 99, 107, 109
 Congressional liaison, 35-36
 Decision making style, 30-31, 37
 Press conferences, 27-31
 President's Role in 1952 Campaign, 54-64, 89-90, 91
 Speech writing, 37-42
 Staff meetings, 21
 Staff functions, 41-42
 Stevenson nomination, 47-53, 57-58, 92-94
Tubby, Roger, 19, 27, 29
Vaughan, Harry, 35

Vinson, Fred, 53
Wake Island, 5
War with limited objectives, 14-16
White, Harry Dexter, 33
Wilkie, Wendell, 67, 100
Wyatt, Wilson, 65-66, 71, 74, 78, 80, 82-85, 87