

Oral History Interview

with

REAR ADMIRAL DONALD J. MACDONALD

Graduate of the United States Naval Academy, career naval officer, a White House aide in the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration, and commander (1948-51) of the presidential yacht, the *Williamsburg*, during the Truman administration.

Washington, D.C.

August 3, 1970

By Jerry N. Hess, Harry S. Truman Library

The Harry S. Truman Library

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HESS: Admiral, to begin, could you give me a little of your personal background; where were you born, where were you educated, and just tell me a little bit about yourself?

MACDONALD: I was born in Du Bois, Pennsylvania on July 25, 1908. I attended local schools, there, in Du Bois, Pennsylvania through high school, and then I was appointed to the Naval

Academy from the 23rd District of Pennsylvania, and was graduated from the Naval Academy in the class of 1931. And from there I went to destroyers for several years and then battleships for four years, and auxiliaries, which was the policy of the Navy at the time. And in 1938 I came to Washington, as Assistant Communications Officer at the Navy Department. I also had an assignment

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as a White House aide at the White House under President [Franklin D.] Roosevelt. I spent two years here in Washington and was ordered to go as a Flag Lieutenant to Admiral [Robert Lee] Ghormley, who was ordered as Commander Cruiser Division 9, then stationed in Hawaii. But President Roosevelt, knowing that we were going to be involved in a war eventually, wanted to make arrangements with the British to see how we could help, and decided to send Admiral Ghormley over on a special mission.

So Admiral Ghormley released me from my commitment as Flag Lieutenant. But, within a day or two he asked me if I wanted to go to Europe. So I said, "I'll be very happy to go," and I went with Admiral Ghormley to London. We were originally scheduled to go in June of 1940, but due to the collapse of the British army on the beaches, the evacuation from Dunkirk and so forth, we were held up a little bit. We finally arrived in London, as I recall offhand, somewhere early in September just when the Battle of Britain had started. I spent two years over there as a Special Naval Observer and Flag Lieutenant until the spring of '42. By that time we had gotten into the war.

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Then I came back to this country and was sent to a new destroyer, to put it into command as the executive officer, and went out to the Pacific after we had it commissioned and exercised a bit. After six months, I was made commanding officer of that destroyer. It was the *O'Bannon*, which was in all the major engagements in '42 until '44, and the only ship that survived all of the engagements. I was very lucky to survive and ended up by being rather highly decorated, and was ordered back to the USA to start a school, or help assist in a school which they were founding at the time, "Prospective Commanding Officers of Destroyers School," where I went for a couple of months and then was brought up to Washington to assist in the modification of the new destroyer building program, because there seemed to be some question whether the new ships were what they wanted.

While I was in Washington, Admiral [Alan Goodrich] Kirk -- the landing in Europe had just happened -- Admiral Kirk had come back from Europe and he was going back as Commander of Naval Forces, France, and he was told by Admiral [Ernest J.] King that he could take anyone with him that he wanted from here. So, he asked me if I

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would go as Operations and Plans Officer and I said, "Yes, I'd be delighted to," because I thought we could finish the war against the Germans and I still could get back into the Pacific.

So, I spent the year with Admiral Kirk on his staff. We were living just outside of Paris, and we had daily meetings with [General Dwight D.] Eisenhower and his staff. We were to handle the

aspects of all the U.S. Navy connections for Eisenhower, which included the elimination of the pockets which the Germans were all sealed up in, and also prepare and get the Army across the Rhine. And this became quite a serious operation of transporting LCMs and LCVPs up near the Rhine without the Germans knowing about it, so that we could get the Army across, assuming that all bridges would have been destroyed.

HESS: How did you get those boats up there?

MACDONALD: We used tank trailers. Hauled them up from Antwerp and there was a lot of difficulty because those LCMs were 50 feet long and quite wide, they were on what they called tank trailers, we had regular tank trailers, and all the Navy crews were all dressed like Army people and they were trained up at the

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front. We were actually ready to do this job in the fall of '44. But, then the Battle of the Bulge happened and everything was put back so we weren't able to carry out anything and all the troops had to stay up at the front until the spring of '45. Fortunately one bridge was still left.

HESS: Remagen?

MACDONALD: Remagen, to a certain extent, which sort of decreased our Navy participation in crossing the Rhine, but we still used the boats and helped out other places.

Well, right after that when we moved into Germany, Admiral Ghormley who was back in London again after being the Commander, South Pacific, was in charge of the U.S. Naval Forces in Germany. So, then they shifted me over to Deputy Chief of Staff of Admiral Ghormley's U.S. Forces in Germany where I stayed until the end of the war. And then I was brought back here to Naval Operations and where I had an assignment for two years, when the availability of the commanding officer -- the availability of the command of the *Williamsburg* came up and my name was put on the list. I had an interview with the President, a very nice

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one, and he said he'd like to have me as his commanding officer. That was in the spring of '48.

HESS: The spring of '48.

MACDONALD: I took over then and stayed in the same capacity until the fall of 1951, a period of about three and a half years.

HESS: What was your first impression of Mr. Truman when you first met him?

MACDONALD: A very pleasant man, which later proved out that I wasn't wrong in my first impression at all, he was a great man. As far as being his commanding officer, he never caused me any trouble at all. He would tell me what he wanted, and we would carry out his wishes. I had direct communications with him, and he used to come down to the ship a lot. We invariably would go out on weekends; sometimes he would come down on a Thursday, and we might not

get back until Monday morning, sometimes a little bit later. He really enjoyed that ship. It was a place where he could relax, do things and get away from telephone communications and so forth. I think that everyone, Secret Service and everyone else, enjoyed his being there because this became a very easy life for them,

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responsibility of him then became mine, not theirs completely. They (Secret Service), always had it though. Once he was on board the ship I was sort of responsible for him.

HESS: Got him away from the crowds too.

MACDONALD: Yes, but this was a period when people weren't worried about things happening. We would cruise down the river and hundreds of boats would come over and they'd wave to the President, and he'd wave back. He invariably would come up on the bridge when we were going down river, if we were going down in the daytime. Of course, at night when we'd go down, he wouldn't come up on the bridge. When we were coming in, late Sunday, or Monday morning, he'd always be on the bridge. At that time the river had a lot of small boats that were always cruising around for pleasure and so forth. They'd always come over and dip their flags and wave, and no one ever thought that there would be any real danger.

We used to go under the different bridges down the river, and at that time traffic was going normally and they never -- it was only towards the end of my period when they used to -- the Secret Service used to

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notify the patrols, the Virginia patrols and Maryland, to stop the traffic over the bridge when the boat would go through, so we'd have to tell them when we were going through exactly. That only happened towards the end of my regime on that ship. This made life very easy in a way, although cruising up and down the Potomac is not an easy thing to do in a fairly large ship as the channel is narrow and fills up and many a night we had lots of fog and...

HESS: Did you ever have any close calls with other boats?

MACDONALD: Well, I would say not really close, no. At no time did we ever have too much alarm.

HESS: You didn't have to sound the collision alarm.

MACDONALD: We had several sort of periods of little frustrations, like when you can't get the Capitol Bridge to open, I mean get up to where we had to stop and the channel is narrow. That happened about at least three or four times when they couldn't get the Capitol Bridge opened up in time for us. So, we'd be sort of stymied and no place to go, we couldn't even anchor because we might swing around. The channel's not wide enough to turn around. And on two occasions we started out at night after some of his friends

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had left after dinner, and started down the river, and we couldn't get the Capitol Bridge open and so I'd have to back up all the way from the bridge and back along side the dock until they could get the darn bridge open.

We had problems like that, but as far as my running the ship, he, the President, never interfered whatsoever. He basically had certain schedules. I mean I mentioned previously that he invariably would come down on the weekends, but also he would come down many times during the week. He'd call and tell me that he would be coming down for lunch and I invariably would ask him was he bringing anyone else and he'd say, "No, I'm just coming down. I'd just like to have a little lunch." And then he said, "If you'd like to join me I'd love to have you." So, many times I'd join him for lunch.

Then he had a habit which probably has been revealed to you before, that he invariably napped in the afternoon. After his lunch he invariably would take a nap for, oh, an hour and a half, two hours, and after that, why, he'd get a rubdown. He had a pharmacist who was a good sort of masseur. He would give him a

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rubdown then he'd go back to the office. And he really loved this. It relaxed him. And I must say that during some of these luncheon conversations, they were most interesting for me because a lot of things were revealed that he would not have revealed otherwise.

HESS: What do you recall?

MACDONALD: Well, I can recall two specific incidents that were quite noteworthy at the time. One was in connection with his feelings about [General Douglas] MacArthur. And this was when MacArthur was more or less trying to run the show and was overriding everything. And the President said, well he said, "I'm his boss, he is supposed to be subservient to me, but he won't pay any attention to me." And he said, "I had no alternative but to relieve him, he just would not listen to his Commander in Chief." That's one.

And the other, that is quite important to me, was when he revealed to me part of the statistics and the sort of characteristics of the nuclear weapon that was dropped over Japan and the fact that this was quite a decision he had to make, whether to let

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it go. And he had let it go at that time, of course, but he still felt that this was a great decision he had to make and he didn't know whether it was a good decision or not, but of course, it had to be done or we'd have had to land and probably would have lost a lot of troops.

HESS: What is your personal opinion of that. Do you think that that bomb should have been dropped, those bombs since there was two?

MACDONALD: Well, having fought the war, and having been through the Battle of Britain, I was very fatalistic. I never knew whether I was going to be alive the next minute -- a lot of my night action. And my feeling at the time was, I was a bachelor then and as you do after being

exposed to danger so frequently, you get a little fatalistic. You get sort of tired and say, "Well, if it's going to happen, it's going to happen."

But knowing warfare, there's no doubt in my mind that you just have to overlook a lot of other personal things because your objective is to win the war, and if this is one means of doing it, why, it has to be done. And at that time, of course, they didn't know exactly, except probably theoretically, what

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devastation would have been created. And we were fortunate in that we were able to develop it first, the Germans we knew were working on it, and they had their heavy water plants up in Norway and this thing of course was kept very top secret all through the period of development.

But the Germans were working on it and the Germans had some weapons that were quite lethal too, a magnetic mine which almost knocked England out before they discovered how to handle it, the V-1s and V-2s, they practically had the people demoralized, and they were ready to throw in the sponge. I mean, "Well, here's an atomic weapon that's away ahead of everyone else," so in warfare you're out to win, you've got to use everything you've got. So, that's it.

HESS: Now you took over as commander of the *Williamsburg* at a very interesting time in the administration, in the spring of 1948 when Mr. Truman was planning to run for re-election, or election, in 1948.

MACDONALD: That's right. He did talk about that a number of times.

HESS: What did he say?

MACDONALD: Well, my personal feeling about this was

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that he wanted to run again, there's no doubt about that in my mind. But he wanted to build up Eisenhower on the Democratic side to relieve him, and it was very disturbing to him when Eisenhower shifted his allegiance from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party. And one of the things that I should point out right away is that when I took over command of the ship, the President was very Army oriented. He was enthusiastic and loyal about the Army. He thought that this was the greatest service.

HESS: Having served as an officer in the Army.

MACDONALD: He knew these people and he was very loyal to the Army people and he loved them. And one of our, what I felt was one of my jobs, was to try to sell him a little bit on the Navy, and show him that the Navy wasn't so bad either. But he, when he really pitched in there, according to all the polls and everything, he was going to have a rough time of it, but he didn't lose confidence.

I don't recall him once even thinking that he wasn't going to possibly come through successfully. He just had that wonderful fighting spirit which you might call, a lot of people have expressed as sort

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of "Missouri stubbornness," but he was going to win.

HESS: Do you recall him making any statement about General Eisenhower when he was trying to develop him as a Democratic candidate, before the switch, before the switch to the Republican Party?

MACDONALD: Well, he gave him -- I mean he was Chief of Staff of the Army, he then, I don't know whether the Democrats were exactly the people who wanted to change his image from the purely military to sort of a general type of -- or knowledgeable person, and they had got him the job as President of Columbia University. This was to change his image a little bit and then later he was recalled by Truman and was sent to Europe to start the NATO command. This was, also, to keep him in the limelight.

I don't recall him saying anything exactly to me, except to express -- he did, one time I recall, expressed his disappointment because Eisenhower had shifted his allegiance from the Democrats when he felt that he was doing everything possible to make the way easier for Eisenhower to be President in '52. So, I'm sure that [General Robert B.] Landry -- oh, not Landry, but definitely [General Harry] Vaughan and [Admiral

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Robert] Dennison could shed a lot more light on some of that than I could.

HESS: And you mentioned that you were trying to show Mr. Truman the Navy view, or the view of the Navy. Did you succeed?

MACDONALD: Well, yes. I think we succeeded greatly and he became very fond of the Navy.

But in addition to commanding the *Williamsburg*, part of my job was to handle all of the facilities at Shangri-La and to more or less, my officers and staff, to operate the Little White House in Key West. And we would fly our personnel down and I'd always take the *Williamsburg* down when the President was going to be there, and we'd use that as additional living space. And there were about four or five of the people always lived in the *Williamsburg* when we were down there rather than living in the houses provided, and that was because of the nice facilities that we had on the *Williamsburg*. But also Shangri-La we -- that was a Navy run facility, and not funded except through the *Williamsburg*.

And whenever the President would even go on a train trip or something, my mess boys would go on the

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train trip and take care of his services for him. And we set up the White House mess, it's known as the White House mess today. That was run by the *Williamsburg* staff too. So, there's no doubt in my mind that he became quite interested in the Navy too, and this point really came up when they wanted to put all of the ships, particularly the battleships, in mothballs and he had a strong feeling that he just wasn't going to, and he insisted the *Missouri* stay in commission. But, unfortunately the *Missouri* ran aground, which wasn't too good.

But he -- yes, he certainly did have a better feeling about the Navy after awhile and he realized that they could produce and were very reliable. I think every time we ever had schedules, we had lots of them down the way, whether he was going to go down to Norfolk or down to Quantico or someplace, Patuxent, why, or even around to Annapolis, we'd always be there on time and have everything ready for him.

HESS: What do you recall about Key West? What comes to mind when you look back on those days?

MACDONALD: Well, this may not be right, but I think this November 7-21 was my first trip down there, in 1948.

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And I know that everyone down there, everyone who went down there, seemed to have a lot of fun, it was very enjoyable, very relaxed, very informal.

HESS: This was just after the election.

MACDONALD: Right after the election.

HESS: What was President Truman's attitude at that time, when he went down to Key West at that time? After this stunning upset of his?

MACDONALD: Well, I would say it was one of sort of relaxing. And they used to wear those sort of sport shirts...

HESS: Any more so than any of his other trips though? Was there any difference in his attitude on this particular trip?

MACDONALD: I don't recall specifically because we went down three times a year. He loved it down there because he could walk, he was inside of the base, the security aspect was easy. He loved to walk, he'd get up early, about 'six o'clock, and walk. And, he always did this even on our cruises. We'd put him ashore, and many mornings, like, when we're anchored off Quantico, we would put a boat over and take him ashore, and he'd walk around about an hour, all around

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Quantico. Many times I'd do the walking with him and the Secret Service wouldn't have to go out.

And whenever someone like myself used to go with him, then the Secret Service sort of relaxed a little bit because we were all on stations where there was security otherwise.

He enjoyed his walking and he enjoyed his sort of lunching and napping and his routine was sort of about four o'clock they'd sit down around the poker table and then they'd stop and have dinner, and some evenings -- most evenings, they'd start up again. But he used to turn in early. I really never checked it all of the time, even when he was aboard ship the same routine went on.

HESS: Did you like to join in the poker games?

MACDONALD: I never joined in because I didn't want to. I had been invited many times. I was invited to be back there, I often went back there, but I didn't want to get involved in that while I had the responsibility...

HESS: You were the host.

MACDONALD: I just wanted to see that everything went well and he was happy and well-fed, and on a lot of occasions we didn't have these poker games. We had Mrs.

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Truman and Margaret, other guests, but as a matter of fact Mrs. Truman and Margaret enjoyed riding in the *Williamsburg* on those weekends, cruising around, but they were quiet weekends as far as the family was concerned. And then they'd probably have movies instead of playing poker.

But I can tell you one very wonderful incident that I recall. We were coming in on a Monday morning and -- no, as a matter of fact we were going out. It was after we had been out the week before, and we had been down the river and came in on a Monday morning and our routine was that after we had been gone for the week, outside of the watchstanders, I would let everyone more or less take it easy for Monday and leave.

So. I left the ship and when I came back on a Tuesday, my Officer of the Deck was very excited and he said the Secretary of Defense, Mr. (Louis) Johnson, had sent his Naval Aide down to try to pick out a boat for him. And then I inquired about it after notifying the Naval Aide and I found out that Mr. Johnson had borrowed the Chief of Naval Operations' little PT converted boat to go down the river Saturday

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night for dinner and to stay down there with some guests, and there were accommodations for sleeping on this boat and they anchored off of Mount Vernon. But they didn't realize that the motors, the generators, were underneath the bunks. So, about 10 o'clock Johnson was very unhappy with the noise when they decided to turn in and told the Chief Petty Officer who was in command to bring the boat back.

So, on that following Monday he wanted another boat, one comparable to Secretary of the Navy's *Sequoia*. So, he sent his Naval Aide down to look over the President's boat. Well, nothing developed there except the following Saturday or Friday, I guess it was Friday, we were going

down the river and Margaret Truman was standing up beside me and the President right behind me as we were going down the river. And I just happened to say, after Margaret Truman said, "Whose boat is that?"

I said, "Well, that's the *Sequoia*, the Secretary of Navy's yacht." And I said, "Incidentally, the Secretary of Defense would like a yacht like that."

And Mr. Truman said to me, "What does he want a yacht for. He's not going to be around that long."

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HESS: About what time was this?

MACDONALD: That was just one month before Louis Johnson left and I had to keep that to myself.

HESS: He left in September of 1950 so this was in August of 1950.

MACDONALD: Yes, just about a month before, and I had to keep quiet about exactly what the President said, but he did say, "What does he want a boat for? He's not going to be around that long."

HESS: Was this the first that you had heard that Johnson was on the way out?

MACDONALD: That's right.

HESS: What was your impression of Secretary Johnson?

MACDONALD: I never really knew him. He was never really a guest down there that I recall. He may have been down once or twice, but probably just on a little official visit because we did have some rather important high-level meetings down there, but he was never a guest of the President's down there.

HESS: Which Cabinet members did seem to be...

MACDONALD: This did seem -- this did come at a time right after the decision to stop building the carriers, and this was an indication to me that President Truman

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was a little upset about the cutting back of building of Navy ships at that time, but I'd have to sort of refresh my memory on a lot of this, but that point did come up and I never mentioned it to a soul at the time, nor could I because of that statement, but later Johnson was out.

HESS: Well, that was also about a month -- if it was in August, that was about a month or so after the Korean war started. The Korean war started the last of June of 1950.

MACDONALD: Well, this as I recall, was at least a month before Johnson left, at least a month. Or maybe a little bit earlier.

But needless to say Johnson never got a boat for the Secretary of Defense.

HESS: He didn't get a *Sequoia*.

In your own mind, do you think that Johnson's leaving would have more to do with the carrier matter than the Korean war matter?

MACDONALD: At the time I think I only thought in terms of the carrier matter, where they stopped...

HESS: Mr. Truman was President. If he had wanted that carrier built, wouldn't it have been built?

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MACDONALD: Well, yes, but some of -- you know those appropriations committees and the Department of Defense, they ask for the things that they want appropriated. Now, I don't know that Johnson and Mr. Truman talked together about the programs, but it did come to light in connection with the funding for the carriers, and it wasn't -- Johnson wasn't backing them and I don't recall at that time whether he was backing bombers or what, but I'd have to get this all in proper time intervals, but...

HESS: One of the questions on that is: Was it Mr. Johnson's idea or was he merely obeying orders, and the orders come from...

MACDONALD: He wasn't obeying orders. He was doing what he felt he wanted to do, or...

HESS: To cut back on carriers.

MACDONALD: That's right. He wasn't obeying orders at all, he was just going to do exactly what he thought the Secretary of Defense had the right to do.

HESS: He was replaced by General Marshall. Do you know why General Marshall was chosen as the replacement?

MACDONALD: I can only say that President Truman was exceedingly fond of Marshall at all times, always had

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great respect for him. He was an Army officer and always a capable officer and Truman had great respect for him at all times.

HESS: Was he ever on the *Williamsburg*?

MACDONALD: No, I don't recall him being there. I don't recall him being there at all.

HESS: Who were the usual guests? Which Cabinet members and which high officers of the Government do you recall as being there on the *Williamsburg*?

MACDONALD: Well, the President had different groups that he got organized and the different groups got organized in different ways.

Basically Clark Clifford used to do a lot of the organizing of the groups for the weekend, and depending on which group went down there, this was how they played poker, stakes and otherwise. Some groups probably were way above the others, but when they had the -- sort of the family group, military aides and all that business, they played a game where no one could lose more than a certain amount of money, but when the other people joined up, they played quite unlimited stakes probably. Now the -- Clark Clifford joined both groups on occasion, but he didn't go down

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all of the time.

Stanley Woodward used to go down occasionally. George Allen was in the expensive group. Justice Fred Vinson was in the expensive group. Senator [Clinton P.] Anderson used to go down quite a bit and then he would have, occasionally, other people. But he well...

HESS: John Snyder, the Secretary of the Treasury?

MACDONALD: No, he never, he would go to Key West, but he never participated really in that type of business. Nor did many of the staff members other than Clark Clifford. The aides would play poker at different places where their gang was playing, and even Charlie Ross used to -- well Charlie Ross was the secretary for public relations at the time, a great person, he used to join in occasionally. Steve Early I think was the first public relations, and then Charlie Ross.

But many a time we used to have these dinners and poker parties and then they would leave and the ones who couldn't go down the river would leave and then I'd get underway and go down the river and the President would go to bed, And this happened quite often. We would clear the dock and go down to Quantico,

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Blakiston Island, or someplace and anchor.

Well, I'm a little wrong about -- the President did like to swim, we used to anchor off of Blakiston Island and the President would invariably during the days when the water pollution wasn't too bad, he used to swim, and lots of times there was quite a current there, and there it was a little tricky so that always two or three of us were always in the water prepared to take care of the situation, but he did swim. He'd breast stroke around for awhile and come back up, he always wore his glasses. But he did, he enjoyed swimming and that was one of the jobs we had to make sure of -- the doctor -- we always brought samples of the water back to be tested to make sure

that the pollution wasn't getting too heavy, but boy, right along it was increasing every year, even as far down as Blakiston Island which is just north of where the Potomac goes into the Bay, and a lot of tidal...

HESS: Was that along about Point Lookout?

MACDONALD: No. Well, Point Lookout is at the end of the mouth of the Potomac, but Piney Point...

HESS: Piney Point.

MACDONALD: And Blakiston is just -- you can see Piney Point.

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HESS: I know where Piney Point is, but I don't know where Blakiston is.

MACDONALD: Well, Blakiston is just up the river a little bit. It's a little island that's uninhabited and we used to anchor off of there because it was very quiet and at that time mail used to come down in a little seaplane or some of the guests would come down and we would send a little boat out and pick them up and so forth.

HESS: Did you ever have any problem with sea nettles?

MACDONALD: During the season when they were around, occasionally they would come through there, definitely. Before the President would go in we'd sort of look the situation over. But during the summertime when we would go down on these trips, he'd swim down there.

HESS: One question on the seaworthiness of the *Williamsburg* itself. There had been some additional work done on the *Williamsburg*, on additional superstructure, is that right?

MACDONALD: Yes.

HESS: And did that diminish the seaworthiness?

MACDONALD: Well, it certainly did.

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The *Williamsburg* was designed as a seagoing yacht for Hugh Chisholm way back in 1931 and it was built as a seagoing yacht and it had a draft of probably around fourteen feet and it was used in that sort of condition, even as a patrol craft when it was the flagship of Commander Iceland, during World War II, but it wasn't considered very stable then and after the war it was sent down to the Navy yard and it was altered quite a bit.

They put a superstructure deck on, this was the President's own cabin, sitting room and another double bedroom and bath and all that business, and then we put lots of communication equipment on that level and this was done just before I took it over. And in order to -- and they

put air-conditioning in the ship so that putting all this additional weight on topside, they had to ballast down. So, in the bilges they put in something like a couple hundred tons of pig iron which was supposed to give it -- lower the center of gravity -- more stability -- when you talk about seaworthiness, it was almost a one compartment ship. I mean none of the doors were what you call watertight doors, and this was always in the back of my

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mind that if we ever had a collision, why, you'd just go down like a rock. There was no way of stopping the flooding in any single compartment and this was always a bother to me.

And particularly after they re-equipped her to be the yacht with all this additional equipment and weight that they had put on, she developed some very peculiar characteristics of rolling and yawing and everything else.

As Admiral [William D.] Leahy said on a trip when he went on one trip he said, "She has a motion all of her own. Kicks up her heels and dives in."

And Mr. Truman made several cruises on it at sea, and particularly the only one that I -- actually I took them down to Key West once and we ran into some pretty rough water off Hatteras and I didn't see any of them for a couple of days until we got into calmer water.

HESS: Were they a little seasick?

MACDONALD: Yes, I think they were all sort of confined. No one came up. It was a pretty rough trip. And that was the last time that he ever went to sea on it, although I used to take Margaret and Mrs. Truman to

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Havana in her, and occasionally when we would go around on some of these week long trips in the summertime up through the Chesapeake Bay canal and down the Delaware River and we'd come out down the ocean, we'd only do this if the ocean was flat and then come in down at Norfolk and up the Bay.

She was fine in the Bay, she was quite comfortable in the Bay because it didn't get so rough. But out at sea she would get pretty rough and I would say that her seaworthiness was always something that was sort of in the back of my mind and is somewhat questionable to me.

HESS: Didn't the President go to Bermuda once?

MACDONALD: He went on a trip -- yes, he did. He went -- that was when Captain [Charles L.] Freeman who was the first commanding officer of this ship, Larry Freeman, he took the President on a trip. I think it was to Bermuda and I think he also took them around the Caribbean down near St. Thomas or something.

HESS: Was he the first captain for Mr. Truman?

MACDONALD: As I recall, he was the first one, and he put the ship in commission about a year or a year and a half before I commanded it.

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HESS: Who took over after you left?

MACDONALD: A man called Ed Miller, Captain Ed Miller, at the time, he later became a Rear Admiral.

Ed Miller relieved me, but he didn't have the ship very long because Eisenhower became President in '52, and Eisenhower as you recall in all of his sort of economizing statements, one of the things he was going to do away with was the luxury of the presidential yacht. But before -- before I actually -- Miller had it a short time and then he had a heart attack and so then his exec had to take over and his exec was in command on the one trip that Eisenhower made on it around to -- but Miller did take the ship down to Key West right after the elections in '51, and it was shortly thereafter that he had a heart attack. And I've forgotten the name of the exec who later commanded it until it went out of commission.

HESS: According to Commander [William M.] Rigdon's logs there were two executive officers. There could have been more, but according to his logs there were two during your period of time. Jesse Gay...

MACDONALD: JesseGay, yes and a fellow called...

HESS: Hurst, W. J. Hurst.

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MACDONALD: Bill Hurst, yes. Bill Hurst. They were my execs. Jesse Gay, being a bachelor, was also the senior White House aide at the same time.

The President did talk about that decisions about Korea which was also another tough decision for him. He used to talk about some of these tough decisions he had to make, Potsdam and Korea.

HESS: What did he say about those two subjects?

MACDONALD: I don't recall too well what he had to say about Korea, but he really made a real quick decision to send our troops over there, and I do recall his discussing with me at one time, not that I was such an important person in his setup, but the thing is that he said often that he liked to get sort of an informal, unbiased, uncomplicated person's opinion on some of these things. It was when the United Nations problem of setting up an independent State of Israel came up, and as I recall in what he said, he wasn't exactly for setting it up at the time, but the pressures that were being brought to bear, he seemed to have no alternative.

HESS: What were the pressures?

MACDONALD: Well...

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HESS: And who delivered them?

MACDONALD: I don't know where the pressures were all coming from, but if you remember he had representatives on his staff representing minority groups.

HESS: David Niles was one.

MACDONALD: Oh yes, he had...

HESS: Philleo Nash was one.

MACDONALD: He had people representing the various minority groups, one of which was Jewish, and so forth. They were considered minority groups at the time, and at that time the only real strong minority group was the Jewish.

This feeling that I got was that he personally wasn't for it, but due to the pressures he just felt that he had to go along with it and he used his influence in the United Nations to go ahead and pass the legislation necessary to give them their independence and set up the territory as a nation.

HESS: Did he feel that it was just politically necessary to do that? More Jewish votes than Arab votes, in other words?

MACDONALD: Oh I'm sure it must have been that, because he never -- all these Jewish refugees poured in here in the

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'30s unbelievably and there was sort of other things in mind. The thing was that we had opened the gate to all these people pouring in during the late '30s -- also it was evident that there was possibly a lot of them might not want to stay here and here would be a place for them to go, but as it turned out no one left.

HESS: Mr. Truman had had a Jewish business partner back in the haberdashery days as you will recall, Eddie Jacobson. Did you ever see Eddie Jacobson on the *Williamsburg*?

MACDONALD: I don't know that I did. He had a lot of guests occasionally, particularly family. He had his family down there, and brothers and their children, and things like that, but I don't remember whether Jacobson was there or not. If he was he may have been in the group, sort of a family group that came down. I'd have -- Truman, President came down so often that it would be awfully hard to try to pinpoint exactly, because he really liked that setup, he really did and he...

HESS: Just as an opinion, what do you think that Mr. Truman enjoyed the most, Key West, the *Williamsburg*,

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or Shangri-La?

MACDONALD: Well, that would be hard for me to say. It's very hard for me to say he enjoyed...

HESS: He probably enjoyed them all.

MACDONALD: But he didn't -- no, I would say that Shangri-La was really way down on the list.

HESS: Was it?

MACDONALD: Yes, he very seldom went up there. He let the staff people use that quite a bit.

HESS: Did Mrs. Truman enjoy Shangri-La more than he did you think?

MACDONALD: Yes, she did. If you put it that way, she did enjoy going up to Shangri-La, and the reason I feel this way is because we redecorated it to suit her taste several times and we did a lot of work like landscaping and so forth. And we tore...

HESS: Ripping out the brush and the trees.

MACDONALD: He usually always cleared things out with her in connection with what they were going to do up there. She was more...

HESS: That was more or less her place, is that right?

MACDONALD: Yes -- well, she didn't go up so often either. But they did build what they used to call the

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Truman cottage, which was -- I don't know whether you've ever been at Shangri-La, well, it's obviously changed a great deal, but they had the main lodge setup where President Roosevelt used to be all of the time and then they set up, and they built another, rather modern, rather complete little cottage arrangement and they used to call it the Truman cottage. This had its own sitting room its own kitchen and all of its facilities and this originally was where the President and Mrs. Truman stayed, in the Truman cottage. They didn't use the big lodge all the time, but it was later that they started using the big lodge.

And the only personnel up there were all Navy, and they were all assigned to the *Williamsburg*. And it was when we would try to get monies to try to renovate it or really fix it up, I found out it was on no one's books. No one had ever put the Camp Shangri-La on the books for budgeting, so I had to go to the Navy and try to get some money, which I did out of contingency funds and so forth, to help our setup there although the people were all mine. But I do know that the President loved Key West. He

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really loved to be down there, it was so relaxed.

Margaret and Mrs. Truman went down with him sometimes, but not always, not always. And if they were down there they certainly didn't interfere with his doing what he wanted to do.

HESS: Was there a certain amount of work that was done each day?

MACDONALD: Oh yes, absolutely.

HESS: I understand a pouch was delivered each day.

MACDONALD: The pouch was -- well altogether, there was something like a couple of hours in the morning, from ten till noon or something. People would work on the papers and he'd go over the messages, budget messages, and the necessary people would fly in and go over and talk to him during these periods, and bring their drafts and all that business. Yes, there was business done every day, but it was done after lunch, because as I said, the President enjoyed having his lunch and his nap and maybe go out and walk a little bit and then start playing poker about 4 o'clock.

HESS: Regarding one particular trip that Mr. Truman made aboard the *Williamsburg*, in Volume 2 of his *Memoirs* on page 361, he mentions that on September 30,

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1950 -- this was during the time of the Korean war -- he said he went aboard the *Williamsburg* for a weeks cruise and work, on the Potomac. This was after the start of the Korean war and before Mr. Truman's trip to Wake Island. As you recall, he took a trip the middle of October, October the 15th, 1950 to Wake Island to see General MacArthur.

MACDONALD: MacArthur, yes.

HESS: And this was -- they had a one week trip aboard the *Williamsburg* at the last of September, on which the main subject of course, was the conduct of the Korean war. Recall that?

MACDONALD: Well, I remember that week's trip, yes. Yes, we went down on the Bay and we anchored off Patuxent, and then as I recall we had this whole week to spend, so I had to sort of plan something a little bit interesting and so forth to do. But basically, he was with me for a whole week at that time. That was the time that I mentioned that we went up through the Chesapeake Canal and down the Delaware River.

As a matter of fact, I also took him a couple of times up to Philadelphia when he was going to make some speeches or something. And we took him up on

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the *Williamsburg*, up through the canal, up through the Delaware River and we tied up at the dock at the Navy yard there. I've forgotten, as I said there were so many trips and he was with me so often I'd have to almost look at a schedule like Bill Rigdon produced or my logs to sort of refreshen my memory.

HESS: I'd like to ask just a few questions about...

MACDONALD: On a trip like that we always had mail planes coming in, or people would fly to Patuxent and we'd go over and pick them up or send them back. And we've had several parties when we were down around Patuxent on the Fourth of July, get the ship all decorated and we had big gala affairs, also on birthdays. Several birthday parties we'd -- have his family and so forth down there. I do think that Mrs. Truman and Margaret were with him on that week long trip, but they were with him other times too, but not all of them.

HESS: I'd like to ask just a few questions about some of the people who served on the White House staff, just what do you recall about them? Were they down on the *Williamsburg*, and just what kind of men were they? Let's start right at the head of the list

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with Fleet Admiral William Leahy. What kind of a man was Admiral Leahy?

MACDONALD: Well, of course, he was a great person, and at that time he was a carry-over in his position under Roosevelt as sort of Chief of Staff to the President. He was the top military man and he was sort of an adviser of the President at the time, and he was aging by the time that I took over to the point that he didn't go with us very often. He went down a couple of times and also he had had several sort of serious operations and he wasn't too well, but he did spend a little time with us, on occasion, and he was very down to earth, very solid type of man.

And I can only say that there was never any time that anyone ever disturbed me in connection with the command. They never told me what to do, in the way that they weren't happy about anything, and the only person I had to please was the President and he was very easy to please. I'd ask him to check out things and see whether he would be agreeable to do this or that and if he said, "Yes," I went ahead and did it.

HESS: Just how was your chain of command? Were you under the Naval Aide or not?

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MACDONALD: Yes, I was under the Naval Aide.

HESS: The Naval Aide when you first went there was James Foskett, is that right? He left...

MACDONALD: No. No, the Naval Aide when I went there was Admiral Robert Dennison. Foskett had just left. Dennison had command of the *Missouri* and the President went to South America and he came back...

HESS: Back on the *Missouri*.

MACDONALD: ...and was made Naval Aide.

And then that was shortly thereafter, Dennison became Naval Aide and that was when I was called over as the new commanding officer of the...

HESS: Oh, that's right. Now, Mr. Foskett left on January the 28th, of '48.

MACDONALD: '48 yes.

HESS: That's right. And then you came in the spring. You came when Robert Dennison was Naval Aide.

MACDONALD: Yes, he was Naval Aide.

HESS: What kind of a man is Admiral Dennison?

MACDONALD: Very smart, very intelligent, very methodical, an analytical type man and a very serious-minded person.

HESS: I understand he did not confine himself to just

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matters of the office of the Naval Aide, that he was called upon at other times for his advice.

MACDONALD: He was called upon by the President to help out in drafting legislation in other fields. The President admired his knowledge and his ability along the lines of other areas, and he used to help out and he worked on a couple of committees for the President.

Now, this wasn't exactly true in connection with Vaughan or Landry. I think that the President never relied upon them in the same capacity that he relied upon Dennison, but Dennison did, he was a very -- did assist in drafting legislation and coming up with a couple reports as I recall, as a member. And it was due to his sort of knowledge and sort of ability to handle these things, and the President had great confidence in him.

HESS: Did General Landry often go aboard the *Williamsburg*?

MACDONALD: Oh yes, he always -- he never let the President get out of his sight.

HESS: What kind of a gentleman is General Landry?

MACDONALD: Well, I don't know that I could even describe General Landry other than he -- his job was never to get away from the President. The Air Force probably told

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him that, "You stick right with the President. You're the Air Force Aide and you make sure that the Air Force is represented," and he always went with him, but he never contributed anything that I know of.

HESS: Don't let those Navy guys get one inch in front of us.

MACDONALD: That's right. But his job was to run the air -- make sure that the President's plane was always there on time and so forth, basically that's all, so far as I know, he never had to really, had the responsibility for, to make sure that the President's plane was going to be used that it was done efficiently. And they had a pilot, by the name of [Colonel Francis W.] Williams, who was a very senior pilot, flying the President's plane. He was a commercial pilot to begin with and after he left the service he went back in commercial flying, but he was a well-qualified pilot.

HESS: What about General Harry H. Vaughan.

MACDONALD: Well, I can only say a great guy. A great guy. Really, I see him all of the time, even today. We're very friendly, he loves to help people and he has got a big heart, kind, thoughtful, and he and I are directors on the USO together. And he does a great

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job with the USO getting cookies contributed by different organizations for the troops and, oh, he has a big heart, he's kind. I won't say that he had the intelligence or the brain, he didn't have the capacity that Dennison had. But he's a man that men would like to know. He's always sort of gay and he used to keep the President happy. I mean he could tell stories, stories that no one else could tell the President and get a kick out of it, and the President would listen to him. He's the one person that could talk with the President as though he was his brother. He could talk with the President and tell him you're -- he's crazy or something like that, and get away with it, because there was a very close bond there, and in World War I.

So, General Vaughan was what the President needed, sort of a guy to buck him up and keep him sort of happy and who -- Vaughan would give a frank comment if asked for his opinion and I think that the President liked that. Very much so. No hedging with General Vaughan, he just forthrightly would tell you exactly what he thought and what should be done.

HESS: Now, Commander William Rigdon was Assistant Naval Aide.

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MACDONALD: He was Assistant Naval Aide, yes, and he ran the Naval Aide's office.

HESS: Did he assist you in the work at the *Williamsburg*?

MACDONALD: Oh yes, definitely, greatly. Rather than bothering the Naval Aide, particularly on a lot of parties that were coming up, and scheduling and so forth, I'd do an awful lot working with Bill Rigdon about the details. We worked out the details together on making sure that the people were at the right place when they were required and all that business.

But basically, the President would tell Dennison that he would like to go on down the river or go someplace, Shangri-La, Key West, at a certain period, Dennison would then convey it to me, and then we'd have to start working out the details, except when the President during the daytime, when he'd come down, not telling anyone. Just pick up the phone and he'd just say he was coming down. But on anything like a scheduled trip, yes, Rigdon was really a great, great help. He was a Navy yeoman to start with and he could take dictation and all that stuff. He was a great asset.

HESS: And you mentioned a little while ago about Clark Clifford helping to organize some of the groups that

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would come down?

MACDONALD: Yes.

HESS: After he left did Charles Murphy, who was the President's Special Counsel, did he fulfill the same role?

MACDONALD: Murphy didn't have the same characteristics. No. Murphy never got into the picture like that. He was a serious-minded type fellow. He's not the same type, he'd never fit into the picture. Yes, he used to go down to Key West with Steelman and so forth and be around, and I never knew too much what Murphy was doing at the White House anyway.

But there was a person, Bill [William] Hassett, who used to go down with us a lot, who was one of the great individuals.

HESS: What do you recall about Mr. Hassett?

MACDONALD: Oh, I've got many letters of correspondence with him. He had a memory like a computer. He was so well read in all aspects. He had been a journalist for so long, he'd been so many things in the past, and his capability of writing letters in such a beautiful fashion was why he was on Roosevelt's staff. And Roosevelt I can remember made a comment once and said

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Bill Hassett was the only person that could write a letter and say, "No," where the person wasn't sure whether he was saying, "Yes," or "No." He'd put it in such flowery words and everything in turning someone down in a way that the guy felt flattered. But he handled a lot of the delicate answers, particularly religious questions and some of the diplomatic problems that had to be answered in the White House. He had a great capability of writing beautifully. He had terrific command of what you call the English language, but his memory was unbelievable.

HESS: I've heard that Mr. Truman and Mr. Hassett liked to discuss military and naval history. Did you ever hear them do that on the *Williamsburg*?

MACDONALD: No. Mr. Hassett very seldom sat in with them much. He used to come up in my cabin a lot, have coffee, talk. He'd talk about Pope John, Popes, he knew all about the Irish Rebellion and journalism and -- oh, his knowledge of past history was unbelievable. But he could remember everything. He had some problems during his lifetime of alcohol and so forth, but finally, due to his health going down so badly, he had

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to lay off, and he then recovered all of his real faculties. I have letters written by him, the most beautiful things you've ever read. And he gave me a lot of books, autographed. Instead of just autographing a book, he'd write a whole story about it, unbelievable. But he -- at that time the President's staff was very small and everyone knew what the other guy was trying to accomplish or at least they all worked together.

HESS: Who do you recall at that time?

MACDONALD: Well, I remember the meeting we had there, a birthday party for President Truman, when he got up and he looked around and he'd invited all of the members of the staff, and he looked around the room and he said, "When you think of the fact that we ran the Government with the few people present here." And he said, "They all seemed to know, we tried to keep everyone abreast of the problems and worked together and so forth," and he said, "look, here's about forty-sixty people here, all were on my staff," and he said, "now, at this time; he said, "the White House staff consists of almost three thousand," with no Chief of Staff it's got so vast.

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So, life was a lot simpler. Just like I was telling you, we could go down the river and boats would come up and wave and no one was worried about someone coming out with a gun or something like that. Life was simple then.

HESS: What do you recall about Mr. Matthew Connelly. Did he like to go along on the trips?

MACDONALD: Yes, he liked to go on the trips south because he was more of a playboy. He was Appointments Secretary and I didn't have too much dealings with him except to see him and so forth. And he used to branch off when we would go to Key West, he'd dash up to Miami Beach or someplace like that.

HESS: He didn't stay around Key West?

MACDONALD: He didn't stay around because he wasn't interested in the things that the President was interested in. But he also was in a position where, being Appointments Secretary, a lot of people played up to him, so he had innumerable invitations, innumerable invitations, and enjoyed this type of thing.

HESS: As you will recall, after the Truman administration was over he had some legal difficulties.

MACDONALD: Oh yes, he ended up in jail. Well, I really

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never knew Matthew Connelly very well. I used to -- when I periodically would go over to the White House for something, of course, I came into his office. He had the office right outside of the President's.

HESS: There are several others, we won't cover them all, but what do you recall about Mr. George Elsey?

MACDONALD: Well, George used to be on that sort of writing staff so far as I can recall, and when the President would go to Key West, they would ask around who would want to go, because we could only accommodate so many. There always -- all of his secretaries, the ones who were then called secretaries, they were always invited to places, and then the assistants to them, if there was room they would let them go. Or sometimes they might be working on a message or a speech or something and that they would go down there and continue their work down there as well as here. My contact with George at the time -- yes, I remember he went with us -- rather went to Key West several times. I don't recall him ever being on the *Williamsburg* on a trip, but Key West, yes. And at the time I was not sure what capacity he was working in, except he had been with Samuel [Eliot] Morison when they were writing the history

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of the Navy and he and I talked together a number of times, because there were a lot of mistakes in that history which I always felt should have been rectified and George and I used to discuss this.

HESS: Did he agree with you that there were errors?

MACDONALD: Well, he said, "Why don't you write and have it changed?" Well, as a matter of fact, I talked with Captain Morison many times.

HESS: What did he say? Did he think the book...

MACDONALD: Well, the books -- no, Morison's attitude was he wrote this history the way he wanted to write it. This is his history. Goodness knows, when I was in London, Morison -- and later in France, Morison came over and talked with us and we told him just what had happened and everything, but the way it came out was entirely different and then later when I was -- and particularly some of these battles and so forth, when I tried to say, "Why, this isn't exactly right, you're putting someone else's philosophy into this thing."

And he'd say well, this is the way he felt that the war should have been fought, and the way it was going to be produced for history. It's very hard. When a historian writes, he writes for himself. He

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doesn't get all of the feeling that someone else does. The same idea as the book that was written about me in the Pacific, and the comments in the *New York Times* was that: "The wrong person wrote the book." It was a, you know, one of these collaborators. They said the book should have been written by me. Well, absolutely right, because this guy ends up, when I was away, ends up with his own thinking and he wasn't around. So, I understand that this is the way these things are done.

HESS: What's the title of that book?

MACDONALD: *Action Tonight*. James Horan was ticked off by Putnam to collaborate with me. There might be a copy of it around here.

HESS: And awhile ago we mentioned Dr. Steelman's name too. Did Dr. Steelman like to go down on the trips?

MACDONALD: Yes, he liked to go on them. As a matter of fact, I don't think he was with us too many times on the *Williamsburg*, but the Key West deal, as I say, we were down there at least twice and probably three times a year. He loved to go down there, too, they all did. It was such a relaxed place, they always wore informal clothes, their meals were always ready on time, and everything else.

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HESS: Don [Donald] Dawson like to go down?

MACDONALD: Oh yes, Donald Dawson, yes.

HESS: David Stowe?

MACDONALD: Yes, David Stowe and Bell, David Bell. Yes, they all went down and in the same group. They were the same type and they probably stayed together too. Yes, David Stowe, he used to go down a lot, and they were more or less the ones that stayed.

There were a lot of people that would come and go and we'd have to schedule them in as far as living accommodations were concerned. Some would come down and stay for one or two days, leave, and someone else would come right in.

HESS: Fill their spot.

MACDONALD: Fill their spot, yes. Basically when you're working on the different messages, the State of the Union, and the budget message, the President usually -- he used to go down in December and this would be the period of trying to get the budget message, the State of the Union message, and some of the bills ready to send up. And people would be flying in every day, drafts and so forth, but the President did work and Bill Hassett definitely used to try to keep things

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moving and Clark Clifford, in the morning from about I'd say 10 o'clock till noon anyway working on it.

HESS: What in your opinion were the major accomplishments of the Truman administration?

MACDONALD: Well, I feel personally that Truman should go down in our history as a great President. He really had to make some really fantastic decisions, were sort of real historic decisions and he made them. He was capable of making them, and he could make up his mind, and he wasn't wishy-washy. In comparison with some other late Presidents, I'd say that he could make up his mind and make a decision, where they wishy-washed, he knew that he had a pretty good feel of political attitude and so forth, but he was also being a fundamentalist and basic type guy, he said, "Well, what's good for me is probably good for them too."

So, I would say that I feel that the President really should be considered a great President although his background and everything was, I say, against him to start with, probably wasn't a selling point in his favor, but on the other hand, he had this capability of doing things and getting things done in the right way, it was great, because he just did them. Even

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though these people, some people probably were unhappy about it, but he just did them.

HESS: How would you compare the Presidents of recent years as to their administrative ability, executive ability, and just as men? Starting from Mr. Roosevelt?

MACDONALD: Well, of course, I was sort of a young officer when I had contact with Mr. Roosevelt and I certainly wasn't in any policy-making area. I was in the social aspect of it as far as the White House was concerned. But I really loved it. It was a great life. And between Mr. Roosevelt and Mrs. Roosevelt, for the few White House aides they had at the time, they treated us like members of the family.

Many a time Mrs. Roosevelt would call up and say, "If you're not doing anything, come down. We're having a family dinner tonight." I'd go down to the White House, he just wanted some companionship, or if she had some of her nieces or nephews -- nieces around, why, he'd invite us down.

We attended all of the other official functions, of course, but I also, being Assistant Communications Officer at the time, knew how Mr. Roosevelt felt, and he always, he would pick up the telephone and call the

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Communication's Watch Officer at the Navy Department and talk with him. And he always said, "I want to be told immediately when something has happened rather than to read about it in the paper, or for you to delay even going to the Secretary of the Navy, or Chief of Naval Operations," he said, and he left word, we had standing orders to notify the President direct and we could call him on the telephone direct if something should happen in connection with a collision of a ship or fire in a Navy yard or something like that. He wanted to know right away.

HESS: As Communications Officer, were you stationed in the Map Room?

MACDONALD: Oh no. No, I was in what they call -- we handled all of the codes and ciphers and basically one of the big things was the situation of Japan and China, and the Japs sank the *Panay* and so forth. We were constantly getting lots of coded messages from China at that time.

And I, in my capacity, there were only two people that could handle the messages between Roosevelt and Winston Churchill. And many a night I was out on a party and I'd get a call because one of these messages came in and I'd have to come down and break

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them down and then notify the President that the message was in and the President invariably, depending on what it was, would send me over to talk with [Henry J.] Morgenthau who he had ticked off to be his man to work with the British.

We handled all of the messages between England -- what they used to call the "Naval Friend Messages" -- for a year and a half before we got into the war, oh, more than that, two years. And Churchill kept the President informed of the situation all the time, starting way back in '39, direct. Messages would come in from Churchill to Roosevelt, and they'd go back the same way.

HESS: They had quite a good relationship didn't they?

MACDONALD: Oh yes, they certainly did. They certainly did. And these were all very highly classified messages. They weren't coming through the State Department because no one had any confidence in the codes of the State Department or anything else through that channel.

Joe [Joseph P.] Kennedy was Ambassador at the time and I was even on his staff when I went over there in 1940, but we handled all of the communications

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back and forth in the Navy channels. One of my jobs when I went over there was to handle it from the other end in addition to what I did normally.

HESS: Was it felt that there were leaks in the Ambassador's office, or just that the State Department was not to be trusted?

MACDONALD: I can't tell you that except that their coding system, there was a possibility of compromise. So, that was what I was told and the Navy had the most secure codes and ciphers at the time and we were handling all of the business. There were other factors, but I don't think I'm qualified to elaborate on those at this time. The British attitude toward Mr. Kennedy, who was then the Ambassador was not good.

HESS: Was not good at all was it?

MACDONALD: Was not good and he was by-passed, and this was one of the reasons why the situation just went from bad to worse. When you start by-passing somebody, trying -- they don't know where they stand. So, he was by-passed, absolutely. As I said, things came in direct and there were only two people, the Communications Officer and myself that could -- and anytime a message

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came in like that we were the only two that could handle it. And this thing was kept very, very quiet what we were doing.

HESS: And you were sent over there specifically to do that.

MACDONALD: Well, no, no. I went over as aide to Admiral Ghormley, but in so doing I took over with me certain things which we used over there, ciphers, which were sort of a one way deal.

HESS: But your general evaluation of President Roosevelt, then I take it, would be quite high, is that right?

MACDONALD: Oh yes. I never -- my association with him of course, was -- I had great admiration for his ability. He was always cheerful and everything. I don't know what went on behind the scene at all. There were other political aspects of it. But my association with him was extremely high.

Truman was great. He didn't have the same flamboyant flair that Roosevelt had, and he didn't have the background, the polish, that Roosevelt had been exposed to, and all that business, nor did he have the friends that Roosevelt had, or the enemies either, but he still turned out to be a guy who could make up

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his mind and this is what you need sometimes, someone who can make a decision.

HESS: How would you evaluate the President that took over from him, General Eisenhower?

MACDONALD: Well, I was on his staff as I told you. I used to go to a lot of his Chief of Staff meetings. And I used -- of course, General [Walter] Bedell Smith ran the show. He was really the brains behind the operations. He ran the show at all our meetings, and Eisenhower was the sort of figurehead arrangement.

It was quite obvious to me, even in '44, that Eisenhower had aspirations to become President. I mean his sort of reputation, and everything, was just going sky high, riding on a real star. He wasn't about to upset the applecart on this thing either. And I don't think that Eisenhower had the knowledge that Bedell Smith had, but thank God he had a capable guy helping him.

And then he had some wonderful Army commanders like [General Omar Nelson] Bradley and [General George S., Jr.] Patton and [General Alexander McCarrell, Jr.] Patch, those fellows. They were great.

Bradley was extremely good. I had dealings with

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him over there and he was kind, thoughtful, very sort of meticulous type of individual and worked out his plans and so forth.

I never thought that Eisenhower was much in the way of a President, in that he was riding on his fame and glory. But he did know something about, due to his background in military training, that the economy was better off if you had a balanced budget, and I think he was conservative in his approach and he did try to keep the country in a balanced way. And now we're suffering the deficit spending concept, all the other high ideas that someone has put into effect.

HESS: How about the gentleman that took over from him, John Kennedy?

MACDONALD: Oh, I don't know. I had sat down with him when he was Senator several times up at Mr. [Hugh] Auchincloss' house in Newport, we were at the same dinner parties a number of times. We sat down and we had long discussions and especially at that time when he was Senator, we sort of reviewed some of the operations in the Pacific because he did have a PT boat, and when I was commanding officer of a destroyer we escorted the first PT boats up to Tulagi [Solomon's]

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and then we had to operate with the PT boats. But this only lasted a couple of days because the PT boats were supposed to stay in one area and we were supposed to be in the back area ready to come in when they sighted something. Well, after a couple false alarms and also being almost torpedoed by our own PT boats about three times, we said we can't operate at night with those boys. So, they'd go out one night and we'd go out the next night.

HESS: You weren't torpedoed by PT 109 were you?

MACDONALD: No, but several of the PT boats fired torpedoes at our own ships, and were sitting over there to come in when they saw the enemy coming down "Tokyo Express," we used to call it, so that it was only just the second night of this double operation when it was just impossible. We never had any idea where they were and they never knew where they were themselves, so if they saw anything it was always enemy. So this was it, a nightmare, but operating singly by themselves with no one else out there they could probably do a better job.

Well, I had discussions with John Kennedy. I never -- I think that after he became President, I think he

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had a lot of good ideas. The thing that I didn't like about him was the group of people that he brought in. I mean they were all sort of like throwing over the whole -- sort of administration, getting his own people in and not all of them -- and I know a lot of them, I met them later, Adam Yarmolinsky and types like that, but I'm sure they had brains, but boy, they just didn't fit into my way of thinking. This is what -- as a President I never -- well, I never had any real contact with him afterwards, but McGeorge Bundy was on the staff with me in Paris and of course, McGeorge was sort of one of his top advisers and I used to see McGeorge occasionally.

And incidentally, McGeorge Bundy is the fellow, having worked with him for a year, he was on the same staff with me, this fellow had the most brilliant brain of any man I've ever had any experience with. He really had a brilliant mind, but he never, in any aspects ever carried any responsibility, and this was one of the things that I think is essential for people who have to make decisions, to carry some responsibility.

HESS: And not just advise others.

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MACDONALD: And not just advise, and this is one of the weaknesses of all of this.

Well, it has been my good fortune to have been associated with a lot of these people in different ways during my lifetime. My first association with President [Lyndon Baines] Johnson was when he was on a Naval Affairs Committee. And the Naval Affairs Committee went to France and I was ticked off by Admiral Kirk to sort of handle their arrival over there. And the first question that came out of Eisenhower's staff was, "What are they doing over here?" And we couldn't produce any real answer except just a trip to see, but one thing we found out and what they said they wanted was that they said they'd like to get up on the front lines and maybe see a couple of their constituents.

Well, they were in Paris and I arranged this, and arranged a meeting with General Eisenhower at the time. At that time his headquarters, the attack headquarters, had moved up to Rheims, France. So, they went up there, the Naval Affairs Committee, and they talked with General Eisenhower and he immediately asked them, "Well, are you being well taken care of and so forth, and what do you want?" Without even getting an answer

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he picked up his red line, which was directly down to my office, and asked me, he said, "I have before me the Naval Affairs Committee here. Are you taking care of them properly?"

And I said, "Yes General, I think we are. We've more or less lined up meetings and visits for them."

He said, "I want them to be shown anything they want."

And I said, "General I think we've got it under way, but just in case I need a little bit of help, who have you ticked off for me to make sure that we can do this thing?"

So then he mentioned some other top general and I never heard of him before and he said, "Get in touch with him." And he said, "I want to make sure that they have a very pleasant and wonderful visit."

Well, it was shortly after that, that I began to realize that the guy had real aspirations.

But Johnson was among them. And he, [W.] Sterling Cole, and [F. Edward] Hébert and a few others were there and he set up some parties for them too. They did go up to the front line and they did meet some of their constituents who were brought up out of the front

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line and talked with them and so forth.

That was my first experience with President Johnson. I always liked him in that category, but I do think later when he became President that he just didn't -- he lacked the qualities for good leadership. So many things have happened that I thought if he'd just stepped up in time and not worried so much about the political aspects, but made a decision in a positive way, we wouldn't be in the condition that we are today.

For instance, they talk about all this inflation running wild, and budget deficits going up all the time, he never took any positive steps to change anything. And now they're screaming about wage control and all that, price controls. Well; this should have been done three years ago, not now, it's too late.

So. I don't -- I think Johnson may be a good politician, but boy, he certainly wasn't a good President. He just never could make up his mind in the right way. I don't know that he ever made a real big decision. If he did, each time you ever heard that he had one to make, he just sweated the thing out back and forth and never came up with anything except

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what's good for the politicians. And of course, his sending out people like [Robert] McNamara who was Secretary of Defense, into Vietnam and every time he came back, McNamara was a mouthpiece for him. And the blame shouldn't all be put on Johnson, it should be put on these other guys who were sort of without intestinal fortitude to come up and tell the real truth.

But McNamara came in under Kennedy and this fellow was considered at the time, you know, one of the brainy types that could computerize everything. But look at what a mess he made in the Department of Defense, or the situation the military got into, really a lot of it stems from him, and yet he's not the one that's going to get the blame at all.

HESS: What do you recall about his involvement in the TFX matter?

MACDONALD: Well, I happened to be still in the Navy when that thing came up, and the Navy was all against it to start with. And he rode over -- rode roughshod over the Navy as far as getting one plane for the Air Force and the Navy.

At the time I was somewhat in the middle because

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I was Deputy Plans and Operations for the Navy, and the Navy wanted to build its own plane that we could use from carriers and we needed a new fighter plane desperately. But he insisted that they could build one plane for all purposes as far as fighting and so forth.

Now this thing's gone on for ten years and they never have produced them and all this money has gone down the drain really on the TFX.

The Navy fought this thing all along the line, but they were told to shut up. And then they had to back down on it, and even three years ago the Navy was still fighting to try to get the characteristics so that it would fit on a carrier. And the Air Force kept working on this thing, forcing the issue down, because the Air Force was considered the prime service in this development.

HESS: Was the Navy favoring the Boeing model over the General Dynamics model?

MACDONALD: No, the Navy wanted to go on their own. That was something else again. That was completely -- the Navy had and could have on its own, like the McDonnell Phantom and even at that time they used to have Chance

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Vought and Grumman and all these people who really could develop good planes for the Navy, who had been building them and so forth. They even had good plans, all of those companies, for a Navy fighter to suit the requirements of the period. Because from the time you start one of these things, by the time you get it budgeted, by the time you get it produced and everything, it's seven years.

It takes seven years to bring these things into production. When you start on the planning phase and so forth, seven years, because a lot of it is in research in order to make sure that you've got the best advanced equipment and the research has to start right away and the planning for the money and the budgeting starts two years ahead. Definitely two years ahead or longer, so that that thing when it became forced upon everyone that there was only going to be one plane, then it was the matter of which contractor was going to get it.

And of course, the Navy was out of it then, the Air Force was the prime service and the only thing is that either one who got it had to meet the requirements, supposedly, that the Navy was going to

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place on it, which meant that it was capable of landing and flying from a carrier and still getting the speed and altitude requirements, and the arms and equipment of carrying the communication equipment and all that. But the thing about the TFX is that McNamara never went up on the Hill to answer these questions. He sent Roswell Gilpatric. He never faced up to any of them, he never went up. And after he'd made all these basic decisions which all have gone down the drain, he

never went up to try to fight through his own decision on the Hill. Congress never forced him to account. So, they can't accuse him of anything up there, supposedly. Gilpatric was the one who went up there, and never did answer them. They said, "Well, you get the answers and come back," and no one ever went back. I don't know how they run these things, but you could blame Congress too for not insisting that he come up there, but they didn't.

HESS: What would be your general evaluation of the present occupant of the White House, Richard Nixon?

MACDONALD: Well, I'm Republican, I voted for him, and I voted him for this purpose. He wasn't the man I thought -- I mean, isn't the man I would have liked to have

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had to turn this administration around. I think the administration, Johnson administration, was just ruining this country all around, and never -- my expressions were that it was leaderless and lacked the fortitude of making any positive decisions, and I thought anyone who could come in and change this thing around I would be for.

And all the time, ever since Nixon has been in office, my feeling has been, "Let's try to back him. Let's give him a chance to see what he can do." But they haven't. People haven't backed him, they never, they started fighting him from the very beginning instead of giving him a chance to try to do something. I think that he basically wants to do the right thing and I think that he had that in mind and maybe he still wants to. But he's running into a lot of difficulties now.

The thing that I don't like about Nixon at the present time is his sort of building up a fantastic empire down here in the Executive Office, a fantastic empire. And it's not going to work. They're going to be fighting all the time this way.

This is sort of a weakness I think at the present

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time as far as Nixon is concerned, and yet I still tell all my friends and everyone who wants to criticize, "Give him a chance." They really didn't give him a chance and his legislation that he sent up when he wanted to try to be conservative and slow things down, and they're not going along with it. Just like he's sent down two warnings in the last month or so to Congress, "Either raise the taxes or cut the spending," but they're still spending like money is going out of style.

Well, basically going back, if you don't mind, one of the things I think personally where Johnson was at fault was when they started really demonetizing the dollar. Legislation cancelled the gold reserve backing as far as the requirements were concerned, as far as money in circulation. They used to have twenty-five percent, he threw that out the window.

They had gone ahead on a lot of things, they inflated and diluted the dollar, with special drawing rights and so forth. And they never cut back on their spending abroad so our imbalance of payment is just still going up and the deficit is still going up.

Nixon had to ask for 19 billion more and I think

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we're in bad shape, and no one is trying to get us back on the right track, very quickly anyway. I hope they're successful, but it has a bearing on the present economy situation and I think it'll even get worse before it gets better.

HESS: What do you think is the greatest danger, depression or inflation?

MACDONALD: Well, we've had inflation, we've been having that.

HESS: I mean runaway inflation.

MACDONALD: We've had a lot of inflation. And there's the two ways of slowing it down. One is that sort of fiscal way of trying to balance the budget. You only have so much in taxes, don't spend any more, which they try to push down Congress' throat and they're not successful. The other is the monetary arrangement which the Federal Reserve Board can handle, like margin requirements and interest rates, discount rates, where they can set those, and also the keeping so much currency in circulation. These should eventually slow down inflation, but they can't do it and let all of these wages and prices continue to go up.

And I think the inflation we've had, and the net

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result will be that we probably will end in a real serious recession. We're in it now. Look at the stock market. We're in a recession, no doubt about that. Whether this goes off into a real depression with the unemployment going up more and more, I don't know, but boy, it looks like we might.

I think they absolutely have to cut back, and his expanding the government employees, the raising, okaying all of their salaries and everything just doesn't help, because the first thing that I think that he did wrong, and boy I'm still behind Nixon, because I think that he meant well and still wants to do well, was when the increase in the congressional salaries of the Cabinet officers and all that was raised forty-two percent.

No one fought it. How do you expect the other guys in the streets and everything not to want more when these guys are getting it so easily, and they just automatically increased everything for themselves. Well, everybody else wants to get in on the same bandwagon. I think that should have been cancelled right off the bat, as the first step in his deficit.

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That was his first bad mistake I think he made, not to slow it down right then and there, even on his own. Instead of doubling his salary he should have put it away in trust or something instead of just accepting it. So, I think we're going to see more difficulty, although the President seems to be optimistic the other way.

HESS: Well, back on Mr. Truman. Do you have anything to add on Mr. Truman and the White House days?

MACDONALD Well, I can only say this: When you evaluate Mr. Truman, or I sort of evaluated the thing, in comparison to the rest of them, Mr. Truman did a magnificent job. He really did. He kept his feet on the ground. Sure, he got a little upset with some of these people and flared up and so forth. This is the way he felt at the time, but at least he expressed himself, but when you boil this down, you find that he kept the thing on the railroad track, whereas right now -- of course this Vietnam thing.

Johnson was in a position where I was sympathetic towards him in connection with Vietnam. You can't win out there. I mean it is an insolvable problem, and Nixon inherited it, and he'll never be able to get out of there and save face and all, he can't.

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But it takes real positive action to do something in a really sort of constructive way. Maybe we should get out, I don't know. I don't think we can ever win out there now. Of course, it's tied in with national security and some of those things that a layman doesn't really know all about.

I, having been in the service, I do know when we have these strategic plans and so forth and we try to make sure that we have proper relationships and controls in certain places, but I think I was sympathetic with Johnson. I never would criticize him in connection with Vietnam because this was a tough one and he couldn't handle it. It was impossible for him, but he wasn't able to handle anything else either. He's the one that should have put wage and price controls in when he knew that the war was going on, and that we were spending so much money. He should have tried to hold the thing steady.

No -- and I think that you're going to see before long, poor Mr. Nixon is going to be confronted with the first real difficult decision that he's going to have to make and that's in connection with the Middle East. The Vietnam thing is something that they're

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trying to work on, but they can't solve it. But the Middle East is really going to flare up in a way that is going to cause him to either win or lose in it, because I've spent time out there in the Middle East and the hatreds out there are unbelievable.

And you've got the Russians sitting over there who want that damned canal open again, and why shouldn't they get it opened up, it's the only access they really have to the Far East, through the canal without going all the way around Africa and they're building up their fleet and they're getting air bases that we built. When they get that we'll have to withdraw the Sixth Fleet.

No, the President's going to be confronted with a very tough decision on that Middle East situation because the Arabs have now placed them over a barrel. They have accepted his peace proposal, but you'll find that the Israelis will not conform, they'll have their own. They'll say, we'll go along with it, but they won't withdraw from those occupied areas, and it's tough.

So, how's he going to force that down their throat? Cut off all of their equipment that they're

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getting from us? And if they do, where will they get it? Israel will fall. If they went to war, neither one of those nations could fight longer than a week. I mean they'd ruin all of their equipment and they'd be finished, they just couldn't fight a long war and yet this thing has been dragging on for -- well, Israel was set up in '48 and been dragging on every since, hatred and all.

Well, I'm sorry I have sort of deviated from Truman situation, but...

HESS: You just answered the question, that's all.

MACDONALD: This all points out to me that this fellow was a greater fellow than the rest of them. He really was.

HESS: Thank you very much. All for one day?

MACDONALD: Yes.

HESS: Thank you very much.

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