

Oral History Interview

with

FRANK HOLEMAN

Reporter and correspondent, New York *Daily News*, 1942, 1946-65, assigned to the Washington, D.C. bureau.

Washington, D.C.

June 9, 1987

by Niel M. Johnson, Harry S. Truman Library

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JOHNSON: Mr. Holeman, I'm going to begin by asking you to tell us when and where you were born, and what your parents' names are.

HOLEMAN: I was born in Raleigh, North Carolina, June 23, 1920. My father's name was James Holeman, and my mother's name was Dixie Hester Holeman.

JOHNSON: And that's where you were educated?

HOLEMAN: I went to public schools in Raleigh, and then I went to the University of North Carolina; graduated in June of 1940 with a BA in Journalism.

JOHNSON: Then what happened?

HOLEMAN: Then I went to New York and starved to death for

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nine months or a year, and finally got a job as a copy boy on the New York *Daily News*.

JOHNSON: And that lasted until...

HOLEMAN: Well, I was sent to Washington on Memorial Day, 1942 as a cub reporter on a theory that I would never be drafted. I worked here for about six months as a reporter; then my Brooklyn draft board heard about my situation, and I was promptly drafted. I went away in January of '43 and came back January of '46.

JOHNSON: But you were here in '42, here in Washington, D.C.

HOLEMAN: Six months of '42. The last six months.

JOHNSON: Did you cover the Roosevelt White House at all?

HOLEMAN: Well, I was in and out. I was just a kid reporter. I was given, eventually, a White House card. I went to the press conferences upon sufferance; you had to stand in the back and say nothing.

JOHNSON: But in the Oval office at the White House?

HOLEMAN: Yes.

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JOHNSON: And I suppose you were impressed with Roosevelt's handling of the press?

HOLEMAN: Well, yes, but again, I was impressed by everything. I was twenty-three years old.

JOHNSON: Except by the Army, maybe.

HOLEMAN: Oh, yes, I didn't care much for that.

JOHNSON: What kind of service did you have then?

HOLEMAN: I was six feet eight and weighed 150. That shows you how black things were in those days; they drafted me. So they eventually threw me into the Medics. But I got out of there, and served most of the time in the Counter-Intelligence Corps in the Pacific. I was eventually assigned to the 214th Counter-Intelligence Corps Detachment with the headquarters of the XIV Corps. My own outfit went from Brisbane, Australia to Sydney, Australia and back up to Bougainville in the Solomon Islands where we joined the XIV Corps. Then we went on up to the Lingayen operation, landed on Luzon, and then to the occupation of Japan. I had the grand tour.

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JOHNSON: Did you ever get to see the U.S.S. *Missouri* while you were out there?

HOLEMAN: Well, not then, no. We were in a little town of San Jose, Neuva Eicja on Luzon when the war ended. We went from there, and on about September 14 we landed in Sendai, northern Japan. It's on the Island of Honshu, but it's north. I saw the *Missouri* later; coming back from Rio [de Janeiro] I was on the *Missouri*.

JOHNSON: You were on the *Missouri* when it went to Rio?

HOLEMAN: We flew down, and came back on the *Missouri*.

JOHNSON: I see. Do you have any recollection of August 14, 1945?

HOLEMAN: Oh yes, everybody does. The night that the Japanese surrender offer was announced, we were watching a movie; you know, an outdoor movie around a tent hospital. The movie went off and the lights came up, and they said, "This is Major Reginald Jackson, Public Relations Officer, XIV Corps. United Press has just carried a flash; Japan has offered to surrender." The question was whether we would take it, and let the Emperor remain

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and all of this. I never will forget, there was a sonofabitch named Kilgore, who was a Senator from West Virginia, and who did not want to stop the war. He wanted us to keep fighting.

JOHNSON: Harley Kilgore?

HOLEMAN: I forget what his name was, but he went to see Truman, told him not to accept this offer, because half of his state was in war plants, you see.

JOHNSON: I hadn't heard that one before.

HOLEMAN: Well, it's true. All you've got to do is look at the newspapers at the time.

JOHNSON: How about April 12th, when Roosevelt died?

HOLEMAN: Well, I was in the hospital again, on April 12, down in a little place just south of Manila. Everybody got sick two or three times. This time I had jaundice. I never will forget; there came a notice on the loudspeaker, "We have just received word"--whatever source it was--"that President Roosevelt has died." And the guy in the bed next to me said, "Slim, I don't believe that shit, do you?" Nobody could believe that Roosevelt was dead.

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JOHNSON: Thought he was immortal, huh?

HOLEMAN: Well, he had been alive all our time. He had been running the country for all the time we were grown.

JOHNSON: I suppose they said, "Harry Who?"

HOLEMAN: Well, we hadn't gotten around to him yet.

JOHNSON: When you heard the bombing, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, what was the reaction?

HOLEMAN: Well, we were all for anything that would end the war. You see, our outfit, we already knew, was slated for what was going to be called operation Coronet, which was the invasion of the main islands of Japan. We had been weighed and measured and assigned ships. So the first landing, as we understood it, was going to be a landing on Kyushu, which is a southern island, but that was a feint. The main assault was going to come on the Kanto Plain, just around Tokyo, and the XIV Corps was in there.

JOHNSON: You were in Counter-Intelligence?

HOLEMAN: Yes, but we were attached...

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JOHNSON: So you had more information than most.

HOLEMAN: No, no. We didn't have any. You know, we just had scuttlebutt. This could all be checked somewhere, but we believe that was the case. We knew we had been weighed, how many pounds and how many cubic feet, and assigned ships. So we were going to be in on the invasion, and we were the boys who were going to get hit.

JOHNSON: When did you come back then to the States?

HOLEMAN: We left Sendai in November, and forty days later, on Christmas Eve of '45, we landed in Galveston. We came on an empty Liberty ship, with their merchant gun crews, you know. Only 14 GIs were on it; we had a wonderful trip home.

JOHNSON: Did you go around the tip of South Africa?

HOLEMAN: No, through the Canal.

JOHNSON: Sendai.

HOLEMAN: It's a town about like Baltimore, north of Tokyo. It's in Tohoku Prefecture; it's the site of the University of Sendai.

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JOHNSON: When did you get your discharge?

HOLEMAN: January 1, 1946, at Fort Bragg. I couldn't get out fast enough.

JOHNSON: What did you do then?

HOLEMAN: Immediately back to the Washington Bureau of the *News*. I had gotten a letter, after the surrender, from the head of the Washington Bureau, saying did I want to come back to the Bureau, or go to New York. I said I would like very much to come back to the Bureau. So they let me back.

JOHNSON: Where were you located here in Washington with the Bureau?

HOLEMAN: In Room 1272 of the National Press Building.

JOHNSON: The building we're in right now.

HOLEMAN: Yes.

JOHNSON: What was your first job then?

HOLEMAN: Well, the first hearing I covered was a hearing where Averell Harriman went up on the Hill. He was

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then Secretary of Commerce, I think. I went up, wrote the story, scared to death. But the woman who was running the Bureau that day, Ruth Montgomery, was very kind to me. She

cleared the thing through and just said, "It's too damn long," but nothing outside of that. So I was back in business.

JOHNSON: That was your first article.

HOLEMAN: After returning home from the war. I had written for six months before getting into the war. I covered the Battle of Midway, from Constitution Avenue, you know, from communiqués.

JOHNSON: So Harriman was the first Truman appointee that you really got familiar with.

HOLEMAN: Covered, yes.

JOHNSON: What was your primary job?

HOLEMAN: We had a roving assignment system. The news editor of the Bureau, whose name was Ted Lewis, would look at the lineup of stories coming up today, and say, "Well, we're going to cover the top five, or four." Then he would

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pick those men. There was a man-to-man coverage, as they say in football; follow the story wherever it went.

JOHNSON: Who else worked with you for the New York *Daily News*?

HOLEMAN: The head of the Bureau was John O'Donnell, who was a columnist. He wrote a column called "Capitol Stuff;" the news editor was Edward Lewis, known as Ted. All these people are dead. The military editor was Jerry Greene, who is also dead. The State Department—we didn't have a regular man over there at that time, but later we got a guy from the UPI named Mike O'Neill, who is still alive. Paul Healy was a good, general, all-purpose man; he was a great personality-profile writer. He's, unfortunately, dead. Gwen Gibson came after the Eisenhower heart attack.

JOHNSON: Gwen Gibson.

HOLEMAN: She came from Denver where she had made an impression on people with her work for the United Press on the Eisenhower illness. I'm trying to think. The woman was Ruth Montgomery. She's still alive; she's still here.

JOHNSON: So you rotated, and you were covering State, and the War Department, and the Congress.

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HOLEMAN: Congress and Defense, and the White House occasionally. Investigations were great in those days, you know. Truman's old committee was kept going under the Republicans, under Senator Homer Ferguson, investigating Howard Hughes and all of that stuff. I had some of that.

JOHNSON: Do you recall when you first met Truman, the President?

HOLEMAN: Yes. Well, we're talking about covered. He, as I say, he would not know me now if he appeared. He might remember having seen me someplace.

JOHNSON: Because you stood out.

HOLEMAN: Yes, that's right, but we were never buddy-buddy. I was not one of his friends; he did not like my newspaper, or any of the rest of it. I was just one of the guys that followed along, one of the king's bastards that went on the back of the train. It would be a trip like Christmas of '46, or it could have been the 4th of July of '46, when they needed some one to cover. Married people didn't want to leave home, and off I went.

JOHNSON: Did you remain a bachelor all those years?

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HOLEMAN: All that time, up until '57. I got married in '57. During all the Truman years I was a bachelor.

JOHNSON: I think he flew out to Independence in 1946 in bad weather, very bad weather, and he got a kind of a bad press from that.

HOLEMAN: Well, I'm not sure whether I was on that flight or not, but I was on several when lightning struck the plane, and you know, balls of fire rolled from one end to the other, and everybody reached for a drink. This was before jets you understand. TWA had all of the charters. Tom Bell, who is still probably around here, ran the charters--the TWA charters.

JOHNSON: You chartered the plane that followed the President's plane?

HOLEMAN: The White House chartered the press plane, that followed the President.

JOHNSON: So you followed the President.

HOLEMAN: And they billed us individually. They would fill up the crew with some leftovers from the White House, like Secret Service men. So there would be two

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poker games; there would be the reporters' poker game and then there would be a Secret Service poker game.

JOHNSON: So that's what you did when you were flying behind the President, playing poker.

HOLEMAN: That's right.

JOHNSON: When lightning was hitting the plane, you were...

HOLEMAN: We were drinking as fast as we could go, I'll tell you.

JOHNSON: That must have been some experience, to be flying behind the President in those days.

HOLEMAN: Well, it was much nicer than it is now they tell me. One or two guys are still over there who were around in those days, and they say it is altogether different.

JOHNSON: Doesn't have the same ambience, or feeling?

HOLEMAN: Well, they've got too many people over there. They've got not only one plane; they've got two or three planes, and everybody is out shooting the President, you know, trying to get a Pulitzer Prize in one week

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JOHNSON: Can you recall when your first big story appeared concerning the President?

HOLEMAN: No, I can't because there's only one big story that I remember the *News* ever getting from Truman, and that was by Paul Healy who was down at Deerfoot Lake when Truman said he would not give the atom bomb to the Russians. And our guy got away from the crowd and found a telephone someplace.

JOHNSON: Paul Healy?

HOLEMAN: Yes. Now you may find six other guys claiming credit for the same big scoop, but he's the guy that got a bonus for it from my paper.

JOHNSON: So that was a New York *Daily News* scoop.

HOLEMAN: A scoop in those days--fifteen minutes was big stuff.

JOHNSON: Do you recall the first news conference in the Oval office that you attended?

HOLEMAN: I can't really pick out one. It didn't make all that much of an impression.

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JOHNSON: But you started going to the Oval Office for the press conferences in 1946.

HOLEMAN: Yes, standing up. You know, we all stood up in those days.

JOHNSON: Then they switched over to the Indian Treaty Room.

HOLEMAN: That was Eisenhower. My recollection is Eisenhower.

JOHNSON: But it actually started later in the Truman period.

HOLEMAN: Maybe I'm getting the television thing. You see, they filmed Eisenhower in the Indian Treaty Room.

JOHNSON: They televised it?

HOLEMAN: Not live. They filmed it; they kinescoped it, or whatever they did. Then if Hagerty liked it he let it go, if he didn't he had the right to censor it. He never did, but...

JOHNSON: But they didn't do that with Truman; they didn't do any kinescopes?

HOLEMAN: I don't believe so. Now, again, nobody's memory is perfect, but I don't think so. I think it was Q and

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A, and you got a transcript, page at a time, fast from the White House stenographer, not Jack Romagna, but some firm that they hired, that they gave rights to these press conferences to.

JOHNSON: You knew Romagna?

HOLEMAN: Oh yes.

JOHNSON: What kind of a person was he?

HOLEMAN: Very fine guy. I played chess with him many times. He learned chess on the run. He also used to play the organ. He was a great Bach...

JOHNSON: Played Bach.

HOLEMAN: Well, I'm not a musician, but he would go to the chapel at some base or wherever we were, and play the organ. He got into a little problem when the Kennedys came in, and he disappeared. A committee of reporters waited on Salinger and said, "What have you done to my Romagna?" And he said, "Well, you don't want to know."

JOHNSON: He didn't work for Eisenhower did he, or did he?

HOLEMAN: Sure he did. He worked all through Eisenhower.

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He started with Roosevelt, then with Truman and Eisenhower.

JOHNSON: He seemed to be a pretty meticulous recorder.

HOLEMAN: He was a very competent, able guy, and a pleasant, agreeable person. But he had some other problems we didn't know about at the time.

JOHNSON: How about Ross, Charlie Ross: Do you remember him?

HOLEMAN: Yes, oh sure. We were in the Muehlebach Hotel one night; it was about three in the morning, and everybody had gone to bed. Carroll Linkins, the Western Union man, roused everybody up, called every room, got them up. "Mr. Ross says come to the Press Room right away." So we went down there and Ross had had a few of these [drinks], and he said, "There isn't any news boys; let's just have a poker game--Grand Old Game, GOG." That was seven card high-low, and Ross called it "GOG--Grand Old Game."

JOHNSON: This was at the Muehlebach, in Kansas City.

HOLEMAN: The Muehlebach, yes, that's right.

JOHNSON: About when would that have happened?

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HOLEMAN: Well, Ross was only there a few...

JOHNSON: He was there up to December '50, when he died of a heart attack.

HOLEMAN: Right, it was sometime between '48 and '50.

JOHNSON: Of course, the '48 campaign was a big event for news people.

HOLEMAN: Yes. Well, I didn't do much on that. I covered, believe it or not, Earl Warren's campaign for Vice President. It was the best campaign I ever saw. This was the last of the good trains; went all the way across the country on it. He couldn't lose. Everybody was out to see him; he was a nice fellow. So we had a wonderful time. But then Truman made a speech up in the Brooklyn Academy of Music about Friday night before election. The election was on Tuesday. So they assigned me to pick up Truman at the Brooklyn Academy of Music and go with him to St. Louis where he had a speech Saturday night.

JOHNSON: Kiel Auditorium, I suppose.

HOLEMAN: Yes. Downtown, big auditorium. That was one time I really got lost. I was afraid I was going to

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miss the goddamn train. Then I went with him on to Kansas City for the election.

JOHNSON: You say you covered Warren, until you picked up Truman the last day or two. What impressed you as to their styles, or did anything kind of strike you at the time as to whether Truman had a chance to win that election?

HOLEMAN: Nobody thought Truman had a chance. Otherwise I wouldn't have been on that train. They'd have had a real honest to god hard-working reporter, see. One of the big guys. I'll tell you what happened. We got to St. Louis. It was a Saturday, and the custom was for the White House to put out excerpts, you know, two or three new paragraphs that the President was going to use in a regular speech, so he could put a new top on it for Sunday papers. All right, this is Saturday; the subject, I forget what it was, something pretty mundane. Anyway, we get into the hall and Truman tears the damn speech up and lights into my publishers. I mean the McCormick-Patterson axis, you know.

JOHNSON: Oh, you were a McCormick paper?

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HOLEMAN: Patterson. Well, they both owned the papers together. I worked for the New York end of the axis. He denounced hell out of them, see. Not only I had to write a new story, but everybody else did. That's why I almost missed the train and got caught up in this mob, but some Secret Service guys rescued me and took me out of there. You know, they're looking for stragglers anyway. They were pretty high-class guys. They got me onto the train, and we went on to Kansas City. We were going across Missouri, and we're all sitting around and relaxing, and Tony Vacarro says, "You know, with a staff like this, Robert E. Lee couldn't carry Virginia." Well, that's what we thought of Truman's chances. He didn't think he was going to win. If you go back to a speech he made at a Masonic dinner on a Monday, again in the Muehlebach, he gave them a real off-the-cuff speech about how glad he would be to get out of that "great white jail." That's what he called it, a big white jail. He let his hair down.

So the next morning we went with him to vote, and it was a kind of drizzly day, not pouring rain, but just gloomy. And we said, "Mr. President, how do you think

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it's going to come out?" He said, "It can't be anything but victory." Then he and Vivian went off somewhere and you know all of that story. We got on the train, and he came through, woke everybody up as we were headed to St. Louis.

JOHNSON: After the election.

HOLEMAN: Yes, this was on the way home, a couple of days after the election, after everybody had settled down. We asked him, somebody asked him, "Mr. President, did you really think you were going to win this damn election?" He just grinned and he said, "Well, I'll tell you this." And in effect he said, "I thought I had a chance." He said, "I was an underdog in every race I ever ran in Missouri. They said I couldn't win, but I managed it." He talked about his "non-political trip" around the country to the West Coast.

JOHNSON: The 1948 non-political trip.

HOLEMAN: The crowds impressed him. He said that people told him they were just coming out to see a President, but he thought it might be more than that. He thought

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he had a chance, but all this stuff about a certain winner, that's a lot of bull shit.

JOHNSON: On election night you were in Kansas City. Where were you staying?

HOLEMAN: We were in the Muehlebach. None of us slept a wink that night, because this thing began to turn around a little bit. And Ross--I never will forget him sitting in the coffee shop of the Muehlebach about 4 or 5 in the morning, and he said, "We don't say that we're going to win this election, but it's going to be a lot closer than anybody ever thought. And win, lose or draw, there's a lot of sonsofbitches we don't have to be nice to any more." About that time the manager of the hotel, Barney Allis comes in with telegrams. All of the big stars of the media in those days were saying they want a room, they want a room, they're moving from the Roosevelt in New York, they're coming to Kansas City, and they want to be taken care of. "Dear Barney, I need a room." "I need two rooms."

JOHNSON: To join the winner?

HOLEMAN: Yes. Barney says, "Mr. Ross, I'm getting all

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these telegrams here, people wanting to come." These were the real, real big names ;like Bert Andrews of the *Herald-Tribune*; he was one of them I remember. And there were others. Barney said, "Mr. Ross, the hotel is full, but if you want us to we'll ask somebody to leave and make room for these guys." Ross just grinned and said, "Barney, send them down to the Dixie." You know where the Dixie is? That was the sailor's delight across the street there, you see. Now, he was not going to do anything for them.

JOHNSON: That was some evening, I know that. I got in on one of those speeches. I listened to one of his speeches in September of '48 in Rock Island, Illinois. So you were among those who were surprised. Then you rode back on the train that he was on.

HOLEMAN: Yes. You know the *Chicago Tribune*, that was in the St. Louis railroad station.

JOHNSON: Yes. You remember that pretty well.

HOLEMAN: I remember it very well. The *Tribune* man on the trip was Willard Edwards who is still alive, by the way. You ought to get a hold of him. He's in Washington here.

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JOHNSON: Willard Edwards.

HOLEMAN: Willard Edwards. He had written a long horrors' dream about the end of the New Deal. Truman's defeat meant the end of 30 years of rule. Then, of course, they had to change it. So what he did was he sent them a new lead, "If he had been beaten it would have meant the end of 30 years." They left it all standing, see?

JOHNSON: How about the New York *Daily News*? Did it run a headline at that time?

HOLEMAN: No, no, we didn't. See, the *Tribune* gets a bad rap on that because they were stuck with a very slow printing process during a printer's strike. They had to cook this thing up ahead of time, like six or seven hours. They were using varitype instead of hot lead. Our paper was printing the news as it came along, so we never got trapped.

JOHNSON: So you're saying that's why the *Tribune* ran a premature headline, the varitype?

HOLEMAN: Yes. They had to prepare it a long time ahead.

JOHNSON: Because of the strike, of the typographers...

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HOLEMAN: Printers. Now the only other thing that you might get from me you might not get somebody else, has to do with a story at Key West.

JOHNSON: When did you start going to Key West?

HOLEMAN: Well, again, when nobody else was available or something, I was assigned to go to Key West. I was very impressed with this town. I was always hungry, looking to write a Sunday story to make a little extra money. And Key West was a great exotic place for a boy from Carolina you know. You know the Hemingway legend and all of that sort of stuff was still alive. We're talking about '49, '50, and '51, somewhere in there.

So, it was my first trip, and I wrote a story the *News* printed, called "Truman Discovers Singapore, U.S.A." And somewhere in the story there I noted that Tom Hegan who wrote *Mr. Roberts* was down there, that Walter Chrysler came in and out, Tennessee Williams came in and

out, Sally Rand--a lot of real good characters. They were flamboyant. But also there were quite a few homosexuals; it's not like it is now, but there were quite a few of them.

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JOHNSON: In Key West.

HOLEMAN: In Key West, yes. So, as I understand it, on Monday morning, the Admiral came by the Little White House, saying "Mr. President, is there anything I can do for you?" And as I heard later from some of the people who were working for Truman, the President said, "That little shit paper in New York had a story yesterday about Key West, and there was an implication there that there were some homosexuals preying on the sailors. Is there any truth to that?" And the Admiral said, "Well, we have more undesirables down here than we would like." Truman said, "Is there anything you can do about it?" The reply was, "Oh, yes sir, we can take care of that."

So that day, the Shore Patrol went up and down Duvall Street, where all the night clubs were, and told the owners of all the joints, "If your piano player's a queer, or your waiters, or your entertainers, you've got to get them out of here by Friday night, or we'll put the joint off limits to sailors from the submarine base." Well, of course, that was their only business. So comes Friday afternoon, fifty of them were rounded up down at the bus station, and put on a Greyhound bus, but the driver wouldn't get on, see. He wasn't going

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to get in there with that bunch of cats, all these homosexuals.

JOHNSON: Homosexuals on the bus, and the bus driver doesn't want to get on with them.

HOLEMAN: Yes, so they finally gave him a police escort, and he took them up to the Miami city line, opened the door and pushed them out. That was the end. They cleaned the whole island with one busload. Now as I understand it, they practically run the place. They got back with a vengeance.

JOHNSON: You mean they solved it for one day or one week?

HOLEMAN: Yes, or maybe a month. But now, of course, it is a different story altogether.

JOHNSON: Where did all of this information come from?

HOLEMAN: Well, I was scared to death because Key West is part of Monroe County, Florida. It's kind of a law unto itself all the time; it had been up to that time. The boss of the thing was a guy named Bernie Pappy, the political boss. Nobody up to the time I wrote my piece, in Monroe County, had ever been convicted of murder.

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People just committed suicide in the strangest ways. The Mayor of the town was an old New York cop who did not like the story I wrote, see. I had to go from Casa Marina, where I was staying, to the La Concha downtown, and then on to the submarine base, just for safekeeping, so I wouldn't run into any of these bastards. In other words, we got to be a little flurry in the Press Corps there.

JOHNSON: What year are we talking about?

HOLEMAN: I've got the clips, I think, at home, but I don't remember. I think it was '50, '51.

JOHNSON: Okay, it was after the '48 election.

HOLEMAN: Oh yes, he used to go down there every March and every November.

JOHNSON: Yes, March and November.

HOLEMAN: And then he would announce that he had cut his visit short and was rushing home to take care of business.

JOHNSON: Were you down there after that '48 election when they really lived it up?

HOLEMAN: Not immediately, no.

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JOHNSON: They had a parade and...

HOLEMAN: No, I didn't see any of that.

But as I say, what a lawless place it was. While we were down there, about the time I wrote my piece, a woman got separated from her husband. She had a job as a waitress over in a place on Boca Chica, a nearby island. Her estranged husband came in to see her. She went upstairs and got a gun and came back with the gun under a napkin, shot him six times, then went back upstairs and reloaded and came back down and shot him three more times. The jury's verdict was that the man should have had better sense than to come in there; he committed suicide.

JOHNSON: So you were reporting on the seamier side of Key West.

HOLEMAN: That's right.

JOHNSON: And that tended to get you into a little trouble, or potential trouble.

HOLEMAN: Well, potential, but nothing ever happened to me.

JOHNSON: Your piece did appear in the New York *Daily News*.

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HOLEMAN: That's right. It was a two-page story, "Truman Discovers Singapore, U.S.A." which isn't a bad title, by the way.

JOHNSON: We probably don't have that in our White House scrapbook. I don't recall coming across it.

HOLEMAN: No, you wouldn't have that. But it was great, we had a wonderful time.

JOHNSON: Did you ever talk personally, converse personally, with President Truman?

HOLEMAN: Only in Kansas City on things like Christmas or Thanksgiving, when he would come over. The time I remember my own man-to-man talk with him was when he was standing around and he said the hardest decision he ever had to make was dropping the atomic bomb.

JOHNSON: He said that?

HOLEMAN: Well, at one time.

JOHNSON: Where was this?

HOLEMAN: This was in the Muehlebach.

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He made a practice of coming over to see the reporters who had to be away from their families on Christmas. We made a practice of giving him a little present of some kind.

JOHNSON: This would be like the day after Christmas?

HOLEMAN: Yes, or the day before. I said, "Well, Mr. Truman, I tell you as one guy who was weighed and measured, I appreciate it. I want to thank you. You probably saved my life, because when we got to Japan we saw all the caves where there would have been guns." Have you ever been to Japan? Well, you know these little islands that you see in gold fish bowls, the coral, little concrete-like things--that's the way the coast line of Japan is. It's not sloping with sand like Florida beaches; it's a sheer drop in many places. They had those caves all hollowed out, and there would have been gun emplacements in there; that would have been one bloody sonofabitch.

JOHNSON: Most often he said his hardest decision was to intervene in Korea.

HOLEMAN: That was after this, you see. That was before we

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had gotten into Korea. I went to Korea as a correspondent, by the way. I saw the tanks with "Truman's Police Force" and all of that sort of stuff on them.

JOHNSON: Written on the tanks.

HOLEMAN: Yes. The American soldier is an irreverent bastard; he doesn't care.

JOHNSON: Well, that's an interesting episode that you related. Any others now you can recall involving the President?

HOLEMAN: There's one other one that you might check on--about Truman and the Ku Klux Klan. Roy Roberts who was a big, heavy-set editor and trustee, and so on, for the employee-owned *Kansas City Star* back in those days told us one time how close Truman came to getting into the Ku Klux Klan. I am sure you've picked it up at some other point. He said that Truman was recruited early after World War I, when he and Eddie Jacobson were in the haberdashery business. Somebody said, "Harry, if you're going to get into politics you've got to join the Klan." "How much is it?" It was five or ten bucks and he gave them the money. Then the guy said, "When

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you get in the Klan, Harry, you can't do any favors for any Catholics or Jews." Harry is supposed to have said, according to Roy, that you know Battery D was mostly Catholic boys and his partner was a Jew, and he was going to do whatever he could for them. And the fellow said, "Well, here's your money back."

Well, Roberts said they spent three months trying to prove that Harry was in there, like Hugo Black, you know. That was what they finally; decided had happened; that's the only other thing.

JOHNSON: He didn't mention him going out to the meeting and dressing them down, the members.

HOLEMAN: No. He just said, "We tried to find out whether Harry was ever in the Klan, and we decided that he came very goddamn close and this is what happened." But he did not get in.

JOHNSON: Of course, Roberts and Truman were not friends.

HOLEMAN: No, Roberts was a Republican. Truman was not friends with a hell of a lot of people, you know.

JOHNSON: Well, he claimed to like working news people...

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HOLEMAN: He did, but he hated publishers.

JOHNSON: ...but hated publishers, and some of the editors he didn't like.

HOLEMAN: But he was a good guy to cover. On the trip to Rio he was very...

JOHNSON: Okay, you're talking about '47...

HOLEMAN: September.

JOHNSON: ...when the Rio Pact was signed in Rio de Janeiro. You flew down with other correspondents to cover that?

HOLEMAN: Yes.

JOHNSON: You came back on the U.S.S. *Missouri* with the President?

HOLEMAN: Yes.

JOHNSON: Did all the newsmen come back on the *Missouri*?

HOLEMAN: Yes, including the woman. Remember May Craig? There was a big flap about putting a woman on a battleship? They worked that all out.

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JOHNSON: She was the first woman to...

HOLEMAN: They set aside a head for her, and gave her some Admiral's stateroom.

JOHNSON: I can see why she would have taken advantage of that offer.

HOLEMAN: Truman was coming back from Quitandina. Quitandina was the little town where the actual signing took place; it was way up in the mountains. It was one of the wildest damn rides you ever had in your life. And Truman's car went over the side; well, obviously it didn't go off the mountain, but one wheel was hanging over the abyss, see. So the photographers jumped out, and started taking pictures. The Secret Service man, Rowley, said, "No pictures. No pictures." There was a guy named Harry Walsh, who was the first man I know of to cover a White House trip for television. He was using film, hand carried, and a movie camera. So he has his film.

JOHNSON: Cranking away?

HOLEMAN: Cranking away. All the still photographers agreed

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to stop. They would not use the pictures, but Harry keeps his going. So the Secret Service grabs his camera. Ross is still the Secretary, but Joe Short, who was then there for the *Baltimore Sun*, had the good sense to advise Ross not to be in a position of censoring here. But the only picture that was actually made was Harry Walsh's picture. So I made a deal with him. Through New York, we bought a frame of the pictures, and had it enlarged and took it over to IT&T and we transmitted it. Then we told the guys it's time to close up and go home. So he shut the place down. We walked out, and here came all the other photographers with their holders. We got the only picture in New York. It was on page one of the *New York News*. Harry Walsh was working as a photographer for NBC television. The reporter's name was Bjorn Bjornson, and he was a go-along guy. He didn't want any trouble. He denounced the whole operation; he wouldn't have anything to do with it. But by this time the damn thing's on the street in New York, and we don't care. what happens now.

JOHNSON: Enterprising journalism.

HOLEMAN: That's right.

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JOHNSON: Did you take photographs, or did you just...

HOLEMAN: No.

JOHNSON: Who was the photographer?

HOLEMAN: We did not have a photographer on the trip. We never had a photographer on the trips. Only when he hit New York would they put a photographer in the motorcade, you know.

JOHNSON: So you covered crossing the equator. There was some kind of ceremony there on the *Missouri*.

HOLEMAN: Oh yes, they beat everybody's ass, Clark Clifford included. I mean they had them all, yes.

JOHNSON: They really gave them a workover.

HOLEMAN: Yes, including me. You see, although I had been to Australia, I didn't have any proof of it. I was a polliwog as far as they were concerned and not a shellback. We had a full dress ceremony. Now, they didn't give it to Harry or to Bess or Margaret, but they gave it to everybody else.

JOHNSON: Did you ever interview Margaret or Bess?

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HOLEMAN: No, she was a young girl at the time. Clark Clifford's main job was to play volleyball with her; that's how far back I go.

JOHNSON: That had to be some trip; something you certainly wouldn't forget, coming back on the *Missouri*.

HOLEMAN: One of the things we'll never forget is the damn parade before we left, the Independence Day parade. It went on all day long. I mean six or seven hours. We began finally just to suspect they were running it around the block, you know, bringing it back: This was the Brazilian Independence Day. They had all of these Portuguese uniforms, and the lancers. Horsemen would go, and they would bring in modern stuff, and then we'd get the horsemen again, see.

JOHNSON: How about Mexico? Did you go on that trip in '47?

HOLEMAN: I didn't go.

JOHNSON: You didn't go on that trip.

HOLEMAN: No. I went to Mexico with Jack Kennedy.

JOHNSON: How about the 1950 campaign trip that Truman took

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up to Montana?

HOLEMAN: I didn't make it.

JOHNSON: In the '52 campaign, what did you do?

HOLEMAN: Well, I was covering Eisenhower from the time he was up at Colombia--before he got the nomination--when he was still president of the University of Colombia. Then we went to Denver, and they said get Henry Cabot Lodge and this good Senator who just died, [Frank] Carlson of Kansas.

JOHNSON: Oh, Frank Carlson.

HOLEMAN: Yes. Herb Brownell and Dewy and his crowd were working on getting the nomination for Ike. I covered Ike from Denver on the train into Chicago, until he got the nomination, and then went with him back to Denver. When the campaign began I was assigned to Nixon. We still had a campaign train, most of the way, about the first month of the campaign, and then they started mixing airplanes into it. I was with Nixon on election night in '52.

JOHNSON: You didn't cover any of Adlai Stevenson's?

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HOLEMAN: Yes, I had a little of that too. I covered Adlai from the Democratic Convention down to Springfield. We stayed down there about a month. There was a wonderful restaurant called the Supper Club on the outside of Springfield, that we made kind of headquarters. That was a wonderful place, I'll tell you.

JOHNSON: Of course, Truman campaigned for Stevenson. Did you cover any of his speeches in that '52 campaign?

HOLEMAN: No. The only Truman story I know about the convention--you know this is subject to all kinds of checks and balances--but you remember Adlai couldn't make up his mind whether he wanted to run or not. He wasn't sure about this and that. Barkley made a big keynote speech, and set the house on fire, calling off every goddamn bread line that had ever been a line, and then there would be another parade and then one more. But his was a stemwinding speech, and the story went that Truman had Charlie Sawyer, who was then his Commerce Secretary, call out to the Blackstone, where Barkley was, and tell him that if he wanted the nomination, the President would support him. The answer came back from Barkley that, "Tradition has it

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that the candidate does not appear on the floor until after the nomination." In other words, he had gone in, he had made a speech and he was not sure that it would be proper for him now to become a candidate. Word went back to Sawyer, and at Sawyer's elbow there was supposedly a little guy named Ludwig Caminita; he's the guy that told me the story. He's now dead. You see, all of my people are dead. Well, he said that Sawyer relays this message, "I'm not sure I should be a candidate," to Truman. Barkley asked for thirty minutes to think it over, you see. Truman sent word immediately back that if you don't know right now you want to be President of the United States, you're not the man for the job and I'll support Adlai. So he flew out and endorsed Adlai the next day.

JOHNSON: I thought that Truman, even in '48, thought that Barkley was a little old.

HOLEMAN: Well, I don't know. As I say, all I'm telling you is what I was told by Ludwig Caminita. He was a little curly-haired guy. His real job was working for ARAMCO, Arabian-American Oil Company.

JOHNSON: And he was with Sawyer that night.

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HOLEMAN: That's right. And that's the story he told. Now whether it's true or not, I don't know. You know for all of these things there's got to be some corroboration somewhere.

JOHNSON: Okay. In 1950, of course, you're covering the White House and the Korean war breaks out.

HOLEMAN: Yes, that's right.

JOHNSON: They flew back on a Sunday afternoon from Independence.

HOLEMAN: Well, they did, but I wasn't with them. I was here. The war had broken out on the 25th of June, Sunday, and by the 29th it looked like the North Koreans were going to win. So my paper decided to send me out there to do a series of stories on the Red conquest of Korea.

JOHNSON: Out where?

HOLEMAN: Out to the Far East. I'm going to start in Japan and then I'm going to go down to Hong Kong and Singapore, and Malaysia, all around. Homer Bigart of the *Herald-Tribune* staff was assigned to cover the war. The two of us left here, I think, on the first of July.

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JOHNSON: Homer Bigart.

HOLEMAN: Homer Bigart, a great war correspondent, from World War II. We were on the same plane, Northwest Airlines, out of here. We landed in Tokyo the next day, of course. These were all prop planes. We flew to Edmonton, Alberta, to Anchorage, Alaska, to Attu and on down. We landed in Korea on the second or third of July; I guess it was the second. Soon, the troops were engaged, and we were behind them in a town called Osan.

JOHNSON: Osan, and this was about the second or third of July.

HOLEMAN: Yes. It could have been the fourth, because MacArthur wanted to have the first engagement on the fourth. It could have been the fifth, but it was right in that period.

JOHNSON: He actually wanted to time this for the 4th of July?

HOLEMAN: He had a sense of drama; I wouldn't put it past him, let's put it that way. I'm not a great admirer of MacArthur's, you understand. He had a firm conviction that the minute anybody heard MacArthur was in Korea

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they'd all turn tail and run, see. They ran all right, but they ran right at us. I was in the big retreat.

JOHNSON: Was it the 24th Division?

HOLEMAN: The 34th Regiment; I had the whole bit. They ran every night. It was the 34th and 21st and there was another one, I forget. And there was a black regiment, the 24th.

JOHNSON: General Dean was commander...

HOLEMAN: Yes, I saw him. He was complaining about the media; you see, they always bitch about reporters.

JOHNSON: General Dean was complaining?

HOLEMAN: Yes. He said, "All these stories about people running, these stories being written by people who don't know what war's all about. My troops are not running." And then he went to find them, and got caught, you see.

JOHNSON: Advancing toward the rear.

HOLEMAN: That's right. His driver wouldn't even follow

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directions. He turned off and got caught. Those were pretty hectic times.

JOHNSON: So you were there, for how long, in Korea?

HOLEMAN: Four months. I was on the plane coming home when the pilot announced somewhere along the route about the attack on Truman.

JOHNSON: Oh, November 1.

HOLEMAN: Yes.

JOHNSON: So you were in Korea when he had his meeting with MacArthur at Wake Island, in October.

HOLEMAN: Yes. I was not at Wake Island. Jerry Greene from my paper was at Wake Island. Jerry in those days was a drinking man, as we say. He was the guy who discovered vodka; you know, they can't smell it on your breath. As the story goes, as they were leaving for Wake Island on a Pan Am charter, all the whiskey was gone, except Jerry's. See, Jerry had stocked a little here and a little there. So one of these people who had called Jerry a terrible drunk went up and asked him if he could spare a little. Jerry reached in here and he pulled out a pint,

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and another one over here, and another pint here and there, and he said, "I'm sorry, I've hardly got enough for myself."

But when they got to Wake Island, the wire services were told they had to pool. Do you know what a pool is; where you appoint one guy? "Oh," they said, "we won't do that, not under any circumstances." "Well, you've got to." So they're looking around for somebody who is a good

newspaperman that will do it fast and get it right. They picked old Jerry. Jerry was the pool man on Wake Island. I mean they sobered him up and got him all straightened out. Then nobody knew that Tony Leviero was hidden behind the curtain at the same time, the *New York Times* guy. You know how that came out later. But Jerry was the pool man at Wake Island, a fellow from my paper. I had nothing to do with it. They never would have picked me for it, I'm sure.

JOHNSON: Well, he got to sit in on some of the meetings then between the two?

HOLEMAN: No, no, he didn't sit. He was the guy who got the news, was given the news by them.

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JOHNSON: Okay.

HOLEMAN: He had to write it up and get it copied and put it on the bulletin board.

JOHNSON: So you didn't end up going to Hong Kong and all these other places to write about how we lost Asia, or whatever.

HOLEMAN: No. But, before I left Washington, my cable editor and the guy who I was going to work for out there, said, "By all means, Frank, remember to take your tuxedo because these people, especially the British, are very stuffy in their parties. They dress for dinner." So believe it or not, I am the only sonofabitch you know that took a tuxedo to the Korean war.

JOHNSON: You had your tuxedo in Korea when you were there retreating?

HOLEMAN: Yes, in my suitcase, yes.

JOHNSON: In your suitcase.

HOLEMAN: Well, actually I left it in Japan, but I'm the only one that took it out there expecting to wear it.

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We were in civies see, and still walking around like you and me. Finally, a lieutenant said, "Hey Slim, if I were you I'd get some fatigues, because these boys are shooting at anything that's not in green." So Bigart and I went over to an Army supply warehouse and got ourselves outfitted in at least one pair of fatigues.

JOHNSON: Were you with regimental headquarters?

HOLEMAN: Well, we went everywhere. We were with the Eighth Army; you had to go where the story was. And when it began to get about this time of day, you get your ass in a jeep and head back, you see.

JOHNSON: How about the landing of the First Cavalry? Were you there at Pohang?

HOLEMAN: I was not at Pohang, but I was at Yongdong where they went into action. They are the people who saved the Eighth Army. They stopped retreating. Remember I'm a GI in World War II, and I have no use whatever for military people, especially West Pointers, because they were all chicken shit. If you heard that you had a West pointer assigned to your company, that meant that you had to get up, you had to go to reveille, you had to

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stand retreat, all of that stuff. We didn't like them. But in Korea, the 24th Division was staffed by people who had been sergeants during World War II. I mean they counted socks at Ft. Riley, and then they got promoted to lieutenant, and they were leading companies, and they were in business for themselves. When the first shot was fired, they were over on the hill. "I'll be right back, fellows." But these damn West Pointers, and I saw them, they wouldn't retreat; they would stay there until they got orders.

JOHNSON: Duty, honor, country?

HOLEMAN: Well, whatever it is, my regard for them went up about 1,000 percent, I'll tell you. Half of them over there were killed. A large percentage of the class of '49 was wiped out in Korea. Bradley, who was Chief of Staff, put out an order that the class of '50 was going to go to Europe. We were not going to kill them all off when they're second lieutenants. After I came back here, I was telling this to a guy down in the Press Club here; he was an old general from World War I, named Reilly. I was telling him how I changed my opinion of

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these bastards, and he said, "Well, would you like to go to West Point and tell them?" And I went up there and I made a little talk.

JOHNSON: Oh, you did?

HOLEMAN: Yes, the debate council or something like that.

JOHNSON: How about your opinion of MacArthur?

HOLEMAN: Well, that never changed. You see, I had a very good general that I worked for, that we were attached to. His name was O. W. Griswold, and he got his third star in Manila.

JOHNSON: Are you talking about Korea?

HOLEMAN: No, World War II. We had to stop the war one day in Manila to let MacArthur in, see. We lined the troops up on each side of the highway. They did the same damn thing in

Korea, when he went to Seoul. I was there for the presentation of the capital back to its people. But he was a dramatic bastard.

JOHNSON: After Inchon.

HOLEMAN: Yes.

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JOHNSON: The Inchon landing. Were you up there in Inchon?

HOLEMAN: No, I was in the breakout from Taegu. We went up that way.

JOHNSON: How far north did you go then eventually?

HOLEMAN: I went to Pyongyang.

JOHNSON: Oh, the capital of North Korea.

HOLEMAN: Oh yes. I was in Kim Il-Sung's office. I had a flag that came off the wall.

JOHNSON: Is that right. What did you do with it?

HOLEMAN: I gave it to my editor when I got back, the guy that hired me at the *New York News*.

JOHNSON: Well, maybe he will give it to the Truman Library. You might suggest that.

HOLEMAN: I don't know; he's dead too.

JOHNSON: So you were flying back when the assassination attempt was made.

HOLEMAN: Right.

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JOHNSON: And then the Chinese intervened. Was that a big surprise to you?

HOLEMAN: Well, it was a surprise in the sense that I wanted to get the hell out. They were picking up these Chinese POWs. And the word, the official line from the Eighth Army, was that these were local Chinese; they were not Chinese Chinese, see.

JOHNSON: Local Chinese?

HOLEMAN: Yes, but I heard Eisenhower say later that MacArthur was never outnumbered in Korea. There were never more Chinese than there were Americans there. He was just outmaneuvered.

JOHNSON: What did you think of the firing when it came?

HOLEMAN: Well, I thought Truman was right. MacArthur's a great soldier; don't get me wrong. But he was vain, a fop, and nothing like as good a soldier as I was working for.

JOHNSON: Did you think that the President's power, his role as commander and chief, was at risk?

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HOLEMAN Oh yes, no question.

JOHNSON: That this was necessary to preserve the civilian control of the military?

HOLEMAN: Yes, you can only have one President; you can't have somebody running around telling the President to go shit in his hat, especially if he's in the Army.

JOHNSON: You think that MacArthur was insubordinate?

HOLEMAN: Oh yes, no question about that. I don't think he would deny that. It's just that he didn't expect this little bastard to do it to him.

JOHNSON: Well, your impressions of Truman--were you surprised that Truman did that, that he had the guts to do it?

HOLEMAN: Well, I'll tell you. We covered the mine seizures and all of that stuff. And they were threatening to arrest John L. [Lewis.] all the time for the violations of the Taft-Hartley Act and all this and that. I remember one time when Lewis talked to us, he said, he didn't like Taft, but he said, "I have respect for him as a man of conviction, and he votes his conviction, and he always does it, and you know that he is doing it because

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it's what he believes." He said, "But that Harry Truman, he's mean as cat shit." So there was nobody who had any doubt that Harry had guts to do that.

JOHNSON: In other words, if you could stand up to John L. Lewis, you could stand up to MacArthur.

HOLEMAN: To anybody. He could take care of anything.

JOHNSON: What was your paper's position in regard to Truman's encounters with Lewis and seizing railroads and so on?

HOLEMAN: Well, I don't know about those. I know that my paper was always a great supporter of MacArthur. When MacArthur went to Australia, they sold MacArthur buttons for a nickel and people came in by the thousands and bought them and wore them all around New York City. They were great admirers, but on the other hand, the publisher was a great friend of John L. Lewis from the union days, you know.

JOHNSON: Your publisher?

HOLEMAN: Yes. Joe Patterson. He died in '46, but the family kept the paper going in the same vein.

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JOHNSON: Well, the Pattersons married into the McCormicks, or vice versa.

HOLEMAN: Yes, they were cousins.

JOHNSON: They toed the same line so to speak.

HOLEMAN: They were independent. They were independent in those days. There was a New York line and there was a Chicago line. Our paper was run by three trustees, and their paper was run by five trustees.

JOHNSON: Chicago, the *Tribune*.

HOLEMAN: Of course, the *Tribune*, the colonel was still alive for several years after that. But New York was always independent; they always had their own policy. Well, they were conservative, but not...

JOHNSON: They didn't always agree with McCormick, or did they?

HOLEMAN: No, that's right.

JOHNSON: Oh, they didn't?

HOLEMAN: No. But usually they did.

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JOHNSON: They hardly ever agreed with Truman.

HOLEMAN: Well, that's right.

JOHNSON: How about the firing?

HOLEMAN: I don't know what their position was. They probably said hang him or shoot him, or get rid of him, impeach him, or something or the other. I don't remember.

JOHNSON: Well, did that make your job a little harder getting access to the President, or didn't he care?

HOLEMAN: No, no, no. He never took it out on reporters. He understood the difference between the publisher and the reporters, no question of that. After we got back from Rio, for instance, he had us all for dinner in the White House. He took us down in the family theater and watched "The Road to Rio" with Bob Hope.

JOHNSON: "The Road to Rio" after the trip to Rio.

HOLEMAN: Right.

JOHNSON: And you were there. How many would have been invited to that sort of thing?

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HOLEMAN: Everybody on the trip.

JOHNSON: How many do you think we're talking about?

HOLEMAN: We're talking about news people now, about a dozen.

JOHNSON: Just a dozen news people? And you were one of them.

HOLEMAN: Right. But see, it was a very expensive trip. My paper had a policy to follow the President everywhere.

JOHNSON: If it wasn't you, who was it that...

HOLEMAN: Well, it could have been Jerry Greene, it could have been Ted Lewis, Paul Healy, Ruth Montgomery; it could have been anybody.

JOHNSON: On the firing of MacArthur, did you cover the hearings and the aftermath of that?

HOLEMAN: No, I didn't.

JOHNSON: Did you interview any of the principles involved?

HOLEMAN: No, I didn't that I can recall. I was in bed with malaria when MacArthur came back. I was in the hospital

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with malaria that I had caught in Korea. It had a delayed reaction of six months afterwards. That's the way that particular malaria works.

JOHNSON: In '51, the Korean war, of course, is the big issue. Ridgway took MacArthur's place. Did you know Ridgway?

HOLEMAN: No. I covered Walker, you know and he didn't like us either, because he was losing.

JOHNSON: "Bulldog?"

HOLEMAN: Yes, because he was losing the war. They were up at Yongdong, the place where the First Cav was and he gave them a big speech, "Stand or die." We could hardly hear it because of all the tanks going by in the other direction. They were already headed home.

JOHNSON: They called him "Bulldog" because he just didn't want to give ground, I suppose.

HOLEMAN: Well, that was left over from World War II, see. There were a lot of guys out there in World War II that found themselves in a strange and difficult world. Hobart Gay, who was commanding general of the First Cav,

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had been chief of staff to Patton in Europe. Keyes Beech, who had covered them in Europe said, "my God, isn't it pitiful; you think of Hobart Gay, who used to have thirty divisions under him, fanning out from the North Sea to the Adriatic, now standing on a dusty road in Kumchon wondering what the hell had happened to Charlie Company." That's the kind of war it had gotten down to.

JOHNSON: This is interesting. Now anything between '51 and '53 when Truman leaves, that kind of stands out in your memory?

HOLEMAN: I can't pick it out. I just remember the Armory speech when he again tore up the speech and said, "I'm not going to run again."

JOHNSON: Oh, you were there at the Jefferson-Jackson Day dinner.

HOLEMAN: In the Armory, yes.

JOHNSON: And what was your feeling or reaction, surprised or not?

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HOLEMAN: It's a big story, you know. All you want to do is get it in the paper. I knew it was a big story, and I had to get it on the phone as quick as I could.

JOHNSON: There had already been a primary in New Hampshire, I believe, and Kefauver had gotten more votes. Truman did not like Kefauver.

HOLEMAN: The one that Truman really despised was Fulbright. Fulbright is still around you know.

JOHNSON: Is Truman the one that originated that term, "Half-bright."

HOLEMAN: Well, I don't know whether Truman did, but he called him an "overeducated jackass." That's what he called him at one stage of the game because he wanted a European system in which if you lose a vote in the House you get a new President.

JOHNSON: That's a confidence vote.

HOLEMAN: Yes.

JOHNSON: Did you cover Fulbright, or did you ever write any stories about their relationship?

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HOLEMAN: Well, it's possible, but I don't remember. I covered a lot of the scandals at the end.

JOHNSON: How about Harry Vaughan, were you acquainted with him?

HOLEMAN: Oh yes, the mink coats and deepfreezes and all that; I had to cover that.

JOHNSON: Did the editors say to play these up?

HOLEMAN: Well, they played them for what they were worth. Our paper was not like the *Tribune*; we didn't have policy stories. You wrote stories on whatever news there was. We were competing with the *New York Times* as far as news is concerned.

JOHNSON: But the *Daily News* was more...

HOLEMAN: It was a tabloid.

JOHNSON: A tabloid with garish headlines and so on?

HOLEMAN: Yes, but you couldn't write stuff that wasn't so, because they would see it in the other papers. You had to stick to the facts; you just had to make it

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more palatable, more, more easily understandable, more interesting.

JOHNSON: You might not place it in the same spot.

HOLEMAN: But what was on the front page of the *Times* was going to be up front in the *News*, you can bet on that.

JOHNSON: What was the circulation?

HOLEMAN: Well, it was over two million.

JOHNSON: Was it the largest circulation paper in the country?

HOLEMAN: It was at that time.

JOHNSON: So you had some influence.

HOLEMAN: No, no influence.

JOHNSON: But no influence.

HOLEMAN: No, nobody liked the *News* except the goddamn readers. Politicians didn't pay any attention to it.

JOHNSON: But Charlie Ross treated you fairly?

HOLEMAN: Just like any other reporter, yes.

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JOHNSON: Then Joe Short took his place.

HOLEMAN: Yes.

JOHNSON: And you knew Joe pretty well?

HOLEMAN: He was a good friend of mine, yes. Joe was the guy that when we were down at Key West he would always go to the bus station and get a bowl of corn flakes and milk. He had an ulcer, and he carried all kinds of pills around. He was a good guy.

I'll tell you how I knew that Truman liked Joe. It was on the morning after election, before Dewey had conceded, Truman came in from Excelsior Springs into the Muehlebach and he was walking about that high off the floor. He was the happiest man I ever saw in my life. He went upstairs and he called for the boys from Battery D, and they trooped in. Then, after Dewey conceded, he called for the reporters. We all pounded in there, and he looked around the whole room and he said, "Where's Joe?" Well, Joe had been called home to Baltimore to write the

story, you know, the main election story on page one. So I knew then that he was a good friend. And Short used to play poker with him back in the old days.

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JOHNSON: On the campaign trains?

HOLEMAN: Yes, and was a member of the Hard Rock Club. Do you remember that?

JOHNSON: They called it the Hard Rock Club?

HOLEMAN: Yes, they had a little pick that they wore in their lapels. Anyway, Joe told me one time that he lost money playing poker with Truman in one of those games, and he put it in his expense account, something like "\$22.00 lost playing poker to President Truman." And the auditor, of course, hit the roof. "We're not going to pay for any poker losses in this paper as long as I'm auditor." "Well, all right, if you don't want me to play poker with the President of the United States, then I'll quit." Well, that's different, see, so they let it go on through.

JOHNSON: So there was a group of reporters that played poker with the President. They called themselves the Hard Rock Club, and they were...

HOLEMAN: They were veterans of his campaign for Vice President.

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JOHNSON: Okay, besides Joe Short can you remember any of the names?

HOLEMAN: Well, that's the only one that I can swear was a member.

JOHNSON: And that's what got Joe Short in good graces with the President so to speak. That got them well acquainted with each other. So he is then appointed to take Ross' place, in early '51, and then he dies on the job, right?

HOLEMAN: Yes.

JOHNSON: Now Joe Short is the one that had the corn flakes and the milk, had the ulcer.

HOLEMAN: Yes, I don't think ulcers kill you. He must have had something else.

JOHNSON: Was he the stereotype of a newsman who...

HOLEMAN: Yes, very hard-working, hard-driving.

JOHNSON: He smoked and drank...

HOLEMAN: And played poker. He had all of the virtues.

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His wife is still alive, Beth.

JOHNSON: That's what I hear. She took his place for a while.

HOLEMAN: Yes, and then they had a guy named Roger Tubby.

JOHNSON: Did you know Roger Tubby?

HOLEMAN: Yes, sure, I knew them all.

JOHNSON: Well, what kind of a person was he?

HOLEMAN: Very nice. He was kind of a State Department type. I think he came from State; they moved him over. He could get along with reporters and so on.

JOHNSON: He came from what paper?

HOLEMAN: Somewhere in New England; I don't know where.

JOHNSON: Was he more of a subdued type, not so flamboyant?

HOLEMAN: Yes, he was a career type. Well, Joe was not flamboyant in the sense that Pierre Salinger was, but he was a good, capable hard-working guy.

JOHNSON: He had good relations with the press?

HOLEMAN: Yes.

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JOHNSON: How about Tubby's relations?

HOLEMAN: The same.

JOHNSON: These were good appointments.

HOLEMAN: That's right, in my opinion.

JOHNSON: How about Bill Hassett?

HOLEMAN: Oh, he was a great guy. You know, his job was to write the proclamations on Mothers Day and Christmas and all of that.

JOHNSON: He was there from the early days.

HOLEMAN: Yes. He was a nice guy. He was a holdover from Roosevelt I think.

JOHNSON: So you thought pretty highly of Bill Hassett.

HOLEMAN: Yes, but he didn't have anything to do with the hot and screaming news; he handled the soft stuff.

JOHNSON: How about Eben Ayers?

HOLEMAN: Yes, he was around, but he again was a number five man on a two-man staff; I mean he was way down in the woodwork.

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JOHNSON: You didn't go to Eben Ayers much then for news?

HOLEMAN: Nobody did.

JOHNSON: He was more behind the scenes.

HOLEMAN: He kept things going. You've got to have guys like that, but he was not a front man by any means. He always had to go ask somebody, you know; he could never give you an answer. But he was a good man.

JOHNSON: What about Truman's relations with the press as compared with later Presidents--Eisenhower, Kennedy, Nixon, Johnson?

HOLEMAN: I left in the early Johnson period. I left in '65. I was with him on election night in Austin, and only had a year of walking around the yard and going to Austin. Truman's relations with reporters were much better than Eisenhower's. You've got to remember now that all reporters basically, or 90 percent of them, are Democrats like me. They are inclined to give their guy a break. But 90 percent of the publishers are Republicans, so it all evens out in one way or another. But traveling with a Democrat is more fun. Now Eisenhower,

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I think Eisenhower was a better President myself, looking back at it now.

JOHNSON: Better than Truman?

HOLEMAN: Better than Harry, yes.

JOHNSON: You think that?

HOLEMAN: Yes.

JOHNSON: Why do you think that, in a nutshell.

HOLEMAN: Well, in a nutshell, he did a lot of things on his own that worked and people have forgotten, and he never gets credit for. He stopped the Korean war.

JOHNSON: Yes, but what did you think when he made that pledge during the campaign? Do you think that was really honest or more of a political ploy?

HOLEMAN: Well, it was a political ploy, but they did it. They followed through on it, and they got rid of the war.

JOHNSON: Stalin died in March of '53, which kind of helped finally get the truce, I suppose.

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HOLEMAN: Well, what got the truce was--I mean we could go on about this--but what got the truce in my opinion is that Eisenhower and Dulles got the 16 nations that were involved to agree that if the Chinese didn't stop they were going to use the bomb. And this is what got their attention. The reason that the Chinese came in in the first place, I think, is because of this bastard [Harold "Kim"] Philby, out here in the British Embassy, because they knew that we would not attack them with the bomb. Truman had decided that we were not going to attack them because they were afraid that that would get us into a war with Russia. Acheson had bought the British line, and the British knew it, and Philby had told the Russians, and they told their friends, and so the Chinese...

JOHNSON: But the Chinese had sent warnings that they were going to intervene if the South Koreans and the Americans continued to advance toward the Yalu. But MacArthur didn't take that seriously, and supposedly told Truman at Wake Island that they wouldn't dare come in in force, that the Air Force would massacre them.

HOLEMAN: Did you see a story the other day here in the paper

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about Bascom Timmons dying, a 94-year old man.

JOHNSON: Yes, in fact I cut it out.

HOLEMAN: Well, okay, there was a connection between Timmons and MacArthur. Timmons had known MacArthur's father, Arthur MacArthur. But anyway, we're at the 38th parallel, and MacArthur comes over and lands and Mr. Timmons is on his plane, in civilian clothes.

JOHNSON: On MacArthur's plane?

HOLEMAN: Yes. And I knew him. I said, "What in the world are you doing here?" "Well," he said, "I knew his father, and I know him," and so forth, "and he invited me over as his guest." I said, "Look, I'm very concerned here. Are we going to cross the parallel, are we going over the 38th parallel?" And he said, "Well, I don't know, but I think so." I said, "Well, why do you think so?" He said, "Because I've been talking to the man." I said, "Well, what makes you think that?" He said, "Well, if we don't, it will be the first time in the history of warfare,"--this sounds like MacArthur you know, he's always got to be kind of cataclysmic--"that

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an aggressor has been allowed to retire beyond his own borders unmolested."

JOHNSON: Except perhaps for Germany in World War I; they were allowed to.

HOLEMAN: Okay, I'm just telling you, this is what Mr. Timmons told me. I said, "Suppose the Chinese come in." He said, "Oh, he's not worried about that." "Why?" "Oh, it would be like Indians coming down an ambush trail; we would be on both sides and we'll knock them off." You know what happened. I believed that's what MacArthur thought. He wasn't worried about them coming in.

JOHNSON: He thought of them as Indians; they would be ambushed by the American Cavalry.

HOLEMAN: That's right.

JOHNSON: Except that there were about a billion Chinese.

HOLEMAN: Yes. But there weren't all that many come in. This is what Eisenhower used to say. There were never more Chinese in Korea than there were Americans.

JOHNSON: But weren't our lines stretched thin?

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HOLEMAN: No, they weren't stretched thin. They were strong, on each side, but we didn't have anybody in the middle. It wasn't a case like it was in the beginning, where one division covered 200 miles. We had I Corps on the left, the X Corps on the right, and nobody in between, so that...

JOHNSON: And then, of course, we had a mixture of South Koreans and Americans which...

HOLEMAN: The ROKS, yes.

JOHNSON: Yes, which made it kind of uneven or irregular, I suppose.

HOLEMAN: Yes, and they all were communicating with Tokyo; they weren't talking with each other. And there's a hell of a distance between Korea and Tokyo; it's like covering something down in Miami from Washington. Anyway, I don't know how we got off on that, but...

JOHNSON: Well, the Korean war is an important issue, of course, in the Truman period. There's no question about it, because he called that his most difficult decision.

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HOLEMAN: Okay, then it was, but he didn't finish it. This is what I say. Now people forget the things that Eisenhower did. Eisenhower landed 15,000 troops in Lebanon. Do you remember that?

JOHNSON: Yes.

HOLEMAN: And this old goose [current President] sends 250 and gets 240 of them killed, and then brings the rest of them back. Eisenhower stopped the arms race with Russia, with Khrushchev; got him over here and said, "If you want a war, you can have it. If you don't, let's cut this goddamn stuff out," and they bought it. And they retrenched for the first time, with Lyndon Johnson screaming for more Marines all the time.

JOHNSON: Yes. Of course, he got caught with the U-2 incident.

HOLEMAN: He did, yes, no question about that.

JOHNSON: Did you cover the Kennedy campaign in '60?

HOLEMAN: Yes. We used to swap around; there were some with Kennedy, some with Nixon. I had both of them.

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JOHNSON: Of course, Truman finally got invited back to the White House on the inauguration night. Did you see Truman, or get to talk to him at all when he came back for that inauguration and visit to the White House in 1961?

HOLEMAN: No. My job at the end of Eisenhower's administration was to follow him back to Gettysburg. I went up there on the lonesome trail, nobody but us, I'll tell you.

JOHNSON: At least Truman had a pretty triumphal return to Independence.

HOLEMAN: Oh yes, everybody liked Truman. He looks better as time goes by. But he actually went out of here on a rail.

JOHNSON: Sure, 22 percent approval rating in '52.

HOLEMAN: Well, you've got to remember; Matt Connelly went to jail. Dan Bolich, the head of the Alcohol Tax unit went to jail; [Joseph] Nunan, Lamar Caudle...

JOHNSON: That Bureau of Internal Revenue scandal, would you say that was the worst one?

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HOLEMAN: Well, there was plenty to go around. I think the tax thing was probably worst. Also, do you remember the blowup when they all went out and found that the ballots were gone, at the Kansas City Courthouse? Do you remember that?

JOHNSON: In today's perspective they may not loom so large as they did then.

HOLEMAN: Well, that's right.

JOHNSON: In '52, Truman was under attack for Korea, communism, and corruption, those three things. But the newsmen still liked him. The public may have been down on him, but the newsmen weren't.

HOLEMAN: That's right. He was a good guy, I'll tell you. I enjoyed covering him. Eisenhower considered newspaper people kind of a necessary nuisance. He had learned to use the press, which is something not many military people know. I mean, the man that's in the field. See, like you don't know today who the hell was running Grenada. I mean there was no Halsey, there was none of the big names from World War II--Eisenhower, Patton, Bradley. They were famous people, and they knew how to

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get along with reporters, but once Ike got into the White House, he considered us about like MPs, somebody you have to have around your headquarters, but not too important.

I was with him when he had his heart attack out in Denver. That morning he got up at the ranch, Aksel Nielsen's ranch. We got a phone call from the Secret Service, "Be at the gate in 20 minutes." That's the kind of notice he used to give, you see. Just one comparison now, and I won't hold you.

I was with Ike down at Augusta, early on, around election, maybe Christmas after the election. Anyway it was raining like hell, and the Secret Service was grouching. I was talking to one of the guys, "What's wrong?" He said, "Well, we asked the President if we could put a post on the back porch of Mamie's cabin and he said, 'Nothin' doing'." And he said, "Now, Truman, we were out in Kansas City one Christmas, and there was one of these tremendous snow storms, the first big Christmas trip, and we asked Truman, 'Can we put a post on the back porch of the house on Delaware Street?' And he said, "You mean you've got guys standing out there in the woods, under those trees? Bring them all in here."

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JOHNSON: You mean you got to go into the house itself?

HOLEMAN: Well, no, they wouldn't do that, but that was the difference in their attitudes. Truman didn't want to put anybody to all of this inconvenience and trouble. They put a man on the back porch, and they rotated them so that every two or three hours, whatever, they changed, so somebody could get dry.

JOHNSON: So you could use the back porch of the house there.

HOLEMAN: Yes, but not Mamie's cabin.

JOHNSON: You'll have to come out and go through the house. You know it's open to the public now, run by the Park Service.

HOLEMAN: Well, look for some things that should be in the Library, or around the place, the museum or something, that were given to him by reporters at Christmas. I can remember two, one was a pedometer. You remember we used to walk...

JOHNSON: Oh, a Jack Armstrong type of pedometer, or hikometer or whatever they called it, that fit on the belt?

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HOLEMAN: Yes. The Independence Early Rising and Walking Society gave him that. Merriman Smith, who was our reporter for the UP, United Press, used to cook these things up.

The other one was an old-fashioned pitcher and bowl, like you used to find in hotels in the early days where you...

JOHNSON: Porcelain, sort of porcelain?

HOLEMAN: Porcelain, yes; pinkish, kind of, roses or something like that all around it, and we gave him that one Christmas. Another one was a drawing of the Westport Landing.

JOHNSON: Oh Westport Landing.

HOLEMAN: You know, the old original...

JOHNSON: Yes, sure. We may have these artifacts in our museum.

HOLEMAN: I hope you do.

JOHNSON: But those three things you can remember. Who handled these?

HOLEMAN: Merriman Smith. He did a lot of this stuff. You

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have seen the famous picture of Ike in his robe after his heart attack, and embroidered on the pocket is "Much Better, Thanks." We gave him that. Smith had that thing embroidered.

JOHNSON: Smith was the one that decided what the gift would be? And then he would collect the money from you guys to pay for it?

HOLEMAN: Yes. And on the trip on the *Missouri* while we were coming back, he got T-shirts all made up for the "Truman Athletic Club," or "Truman AC". We all went one day and met the President in our "Truman AC" T-shirts.

JOHNSON: I don't think we've got one of those. If you come up with one, turn it over to us.

Well, I appreciate your time, and the stories.

HOLEMAN: Thank you.

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