

Oral History Interview

With

FREDERICK J. BOWMAN

A sergeant in Battery D, 129th Field Artillery Regiment, commanded by Captain Harry S. Truman in World War I, 1918-19.

La Jolla, California

March 24, 1970

by J. R. Fuchs, Harry S. Truman Library

The Harry S. Truman Library

Independence, Missouri

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FUCHS: Mr. Bowman, I wonder if to start you would give a little background sketch to acquaint scholars with who Fred Bowman is. Touch on when and where you were born, your education, your career up to the time you entered the Battery?

BOWMAN: Well, I was born in Kansas City in 1895, educated there in the public schools and high school. Graduated high school, Westport High School in 1913. Out of school there, I worked a couple of years before going on to college. I had an older brother that was in electrical

engineering, and was helping him through. When he got through then I was to go on. In the meantime, I went to night school there a couple of years and took up various subjects and continued working in two or three different places. With high school I had an education in the usual subjects of English, mathematics, American history, and various business subjects, such as bookkeeping, accounting, typing, and shorthand and so on, and worked in various jobs there from the time of graduation until

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the Mexican border started in 1916.

In the meantime, immediately out of high school, there was a neighbor friend of mine who was in the old Battery B of the Missouri National Guard, and was interested in athletics, and they had had various teams down there. So, he talked me into coming down there and playing basketball on their Battery B team, and we got quite a few fellows of about the same age, Keith Dancy and Tod [Godfrey C.] Downey and Charlie [Charles B.] Allen, and several more of them all in there with the idea we'd play basketball on this team in the so-called Mercantile League. And at the time, we told them we didn't want to join the National Guard, but they said, well, we wouldn't be considered in the National Guard, that we'd just play down there and that we wouldn't be considered enlisted men. We attended no drills.

FUCHS: Now what year was this?

BOWMAN: That was starting about 1914. And we played there. Then the Mexican border ruckus started then in 1916. They called out all the National Guards to send them all down on the Mexican border, and we woke up to the fact that we were all members of Battery B. So, when we tried to explain the terms under which we went in,

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all we were going to do was to represent them playing basketball down there, they told us, "Well, your name's down here, you're joined," and so the first thing we knew we were hightailed off to the Mexican border.

FUCHS: You went to the border?

BOWMAN: Yes. So, we went to the border in June 1916, down at Laredo, Texas; and while it didn't come out at that time, we later learned that this was more or less what we thought was a premeditated move on the part of President [Woodrow] Wilson. That they figured we were going to get into World War I and they wanted to know what they had in the way of National Guard, and this was a good excuse to call all the National Guard units out up and down the Mexican border to see just what they had. General [John J.] Pershing was supposed to chase [Francisco] Villa the Mexican rebel down here, but anyone that's been on the Mexican border knows what kind of a job that would be to chase a little band full of bandits up into the mountains wasn't very much and wouldn't mean calling out the whole National Guard of the United States.

Well, while we were down on the border the question came up then of the expiration of our enlistments, and

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also we had to sign then another waiver that we would go out of the country and so on, and when it came up to sign that waiver I was one that objected to signing it. I said that we were brought in here under a misrepresentation and I wasn't going to sign any unless a war was on. I was perfectly willing to go, but I wasn't going to sign up for another term in the National Guard. And I didn't make very many friends with some of the so-called officers of the day by taking that stand, but when I took that stand about ten or twelve other fellows that came in the same way, all took the same stand. The captain we had of the Battery at that time, who since was dead, wasn't in my opinion a very ethical man, never had been.

FUCHS: Who was that?

BOWMAN: That was Elliot, Colonel [Arthur J.] Elliot, later Colonel Elliot. Well anyway, we were down on the Mexican border, and my enlistment was up in December, and we served six months and we came home. The Battery came home about six weeks after I did. Around the first of January we were home.

I was then furloughed to what was then called the National Guard Reserve and then we were called out again in August of 1917 into World War I. And then they took

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the nucleus of Battery B, which was from Kansas City, was on the Mexican border, Battery C from Independence was on the border, and Battery A from St. Louis made up the three units of the Missouri National Guard, the battalion of field artillery.

When World War I came on they took Batteries B and C and formed a regiment, the 129th Field Artillery. Battery A of St. Louis was the nucleus of the 128th Field Artillery. And that was the artillery regiments of the 35th Division, was the 128th was from St. Louis and the 129th from Kansas City, which was a 75 outfit, and then they had another outfit that they -- 155s that made the 130th that came over from the Kansas National Guard, most of them from around Lawrence and Pittsburg and down in through there.

FUCHS: When they were beefing up these units there in Kansas City, did you have occasion to see Mr. Truman by any chance?

BOWMAN: Well, I had just only met him. I knew who he was, had never had anything particularly in common. He had joined the old Battery B before that and had served his enlistment and was no longer a member. But a lot of the fellows there knew him and I had known of him, but I had met him once; but I never had anything in

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particular in common because I lived in Kansas City and he lived in Independence and I never had very much in common with them.

Well, then they took these units and formed them -- we were called back out in August I think it was, of 1917 and stayed in Kansas City for a couple, three weeks and then we were sent on to Ft. Sill, Oklahoma where the division trained.

At the time they formed this regiment of the 129th Field Artillery, a good friend of mine had charge of forming the units and he came to me and told me what he was doing, that they were forming this and they were needing officers and with the experience I had had in the Mexican border and so on, would I consider going in as an officer? And I told them that would depend on who was going to head the regiment. He told me it was this Colonel Elliot -- this Captain Elliot was going to be the Lieutenant Colonel of the regiment and I said, "Well, if he goes in as Colonel I'll go along as a buck private, because my name would be mud if I was an officer under him," I wouldn't have any part of him. And that's the way it ended up, that's the way I went. But in the meantime he didn't get to be lieutenant colonel -- I mean full colonel, a man who married the Heim Brewing Company's

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daughter there, a West Point man, a man named Karl Klemm was brought in and was made colonel of the thing, and Elliot was lieutenant colonel and that was as high as Elliot should ever have gone anyway. In fact, he shouldn't have gone that high in my opinion. But anyway, that was the nucleus of the way the thing started.

Well, then we went to Fort Sill at that time and I went on over into Battery D. A friend of mine was captain of the Battery D and I went over into Battery D and was appointed instrument sergeant, which has charge of the computation of firing data and communications and so on in the Battery. And I served in there for all the time, practically, during the war. But that's when I first met -- Truman came in there and he was called back, being in the National Guard before, and was called back and was given a commission and he was assigned to Battery F and was also assigned to what we called the canteen of the regiment, but they had established that and they put him in charge of that. That's where I first met him.

FUCHS: This was at Camp Doniphan?

BOWMAN: At Camp Doniphan in Oklahoma, that's where I first knew him.

FUCHS: Did you meet him there?

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BOWMAN: Yes, I'd met him and used to see him around the canteen and got to know him and knew who he was and he knew who I was and so on. That's really the first time I knew him.

FUCHS: Do you recall any specific incidents that might have occurred down there, or conversations?

BOWMAN: Well, the only thing is that they started the thing out, of course it was a question of whether they were going to make any money out of the thing. We used to walk in there and talk about it and so on. He would always say, well, he was going to put it in shape where it would

make some money, that it was for the accommodation of the men and they didn't want to make a lot of money. They weren't going to lose any money, but they were going to run it on a sound businesslike basis and that was where Eddie [Edward] Jacobson first came into the...

FUCHS: Did you know him down there?

BOWMAN: I knew him down there, yeah.

FUCHS: You thought the canteen was well-run then?

BOWMAN: Well-run, yeah. We had a little fellow in our outfit, fellow named Frank Spina, who was born in Italy, was a barber. And Frank at that time was the, more or less, the Battery D barber. But he would set up his stand down there at the canteen sometimes and give haircuts

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there. He had a portable barber chair they'd move down there that he'd bought that he'd prop them up and whack off their hair.

FUCHS: Did you go over with the advance detail?

BOWMAN: No, I didn't go with the advance detail. I was there at Fort Sill. They picked the advance detail to go over, and I wasn't fortunate enough to get on that. A lot of the fellows from our Battery did go over. I would have liked to have gone, but I wasn't selected and I know the reason why I wasn't selected.

FUCHS: Why?

BOWMAN: Well, it was account of my friend Elliot. Because at Camp Doniphan a request came out for Officers' Candidate School and my name went in at the head of the list from Battery D to go to school and I was immediately crossed off by my friend Elliot, and that brings us up to a very interesting concern about Mr. Truman.

And they went on there, oh, about every 90 days or every three months there'd be another Officers' Candidate School. Well, Keith Dancy went to it, and graduated with high honors. So, that went on, oh, then with the Battery we went over to Europe and we'd changed battery commanders a couple of times and

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each time I changed, being the job I had as instrument sergeant, you worked right with the battery commander, giving him firing data.

While we were at Fort Sill, Oklahoma with those old three-inch guns we fired out on the range down there, the artillery range, it was my job to help compute the firing data, the distances and the elevations and all that and also the communications. So, I had worked very closely, naturally, with each of the battery commanders.

There was one man that was on the Mexican border as a battalion adjutant, a Captain John Thacher, who was a very high grade lawyer there in Kansas City, his old firm of, oh, Thacher, Rozzelle and Vineyard, I think. They were mostly corporation lawyers and trusts and legal work of that kind. Quite a man, quite a worldwide traveler, and he was brought in as battery captain there at one time. And of course, knowing him on the Mexican border as I did, I worked very closely with him and he recommended me to officer's school. Well, he almost got fired for recommending me to officer's school.

So when we get over to France and in training there at Camp Coetquidan, which was an artillery training point there, we went through the regular firing data again,

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except we changed from the old three inch guns to the French 75s. We completed that training and we moved up along, I forget where, it was along, oh, the first part of August for the Vosges Mountains. That was going to be our quiet sector, supposedly quiet sector.

Well, we got up there moving the guns into position. It was after dark and they had wrapped burlap around the wheels of the guns so they wouldn't make too much noise and all that kind of stuff, which was all a big joke. This so-called Elliot came storming out of there a couple of times bellowing out a few orders and so on. Nobody paid much attention to him, but -- and the infantry -- talked to some of the infantry later, said when they went down into position, took their position on the front line -- you see we were in two mountains, the Vosges Mountains came down kind of a V-shaped affair. The Germans on the one side and the Americans were on the other. You could shoot all day over there and never hurt anything. They could shoot all day over there and never hurt anything here. You couldn't advance anywhere, no place to go. You start going up the hill and get the hell shot out of you, go up that hill either side. Well, it was just a quiet sector to give the boys a little indoctrination in the trench warfare and so on. And all this secrecy

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about where we were coming in with the horses and all that kind of junk. And the fellows in the infantry said when they took their positions up in the front lines, the Germans hoisted a sign saying, "Welcome 35th Division."

FUCHS: I'll be darned.

BOWMAN: So, there was where we were at the little old town of Kruth, down there in Alsace, and we were out working around there, and that was when we went to locate the gun positions up in the Vosges Mountains. Captain Truman was then put in charge of the Battery at Coetquidan, and Captain Thacher was moved over as adjutant. And the story was at that time that my friend Colonel Elliot was going to send Captain Thacher home as inefficient; but they found out that Captain Thacher was a Princeton graduate and a good friend of President Wilson, and that somebody in the State Department was his cousin or something like that, a very influential man. So, they found out, well they had better hadn't send Mr. Thacher home, or they would get in trouble. So they moved him over as battalion adjutant and he remained there until after the war.

When Truman came in our Battery was under arrest in quarters at Coetquidan. They'd got paid and had been

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out a couple of nights before and raising a little devil down there, and Pete [Harry B.] Allen, who was captain of F Battery, came over there one night trying to hush them up and keep them quiet and they just formed a big circle around Pete Allen and said, "Hurray for Pistol Pete!" And the next thing we knew we were under arrest in quarters.

Well, Frank Spina the battalion barber came to me, oh, about four or five days ahead of time and said he was going to have a birthday that weekend and he'd like to give a party for some of his friends there and he made arrangements down on what we called the Pike. I don't know who it was run by, a Frenchman, somebody, Italians, to have dinner and some wine and would I go? I said, "Sure I'll go." And so he got, oh, a half a dozen of us fellows there and, so, the Battery was under arrest in quarters the day we were to go down there, the night we were to go down. And so Frank came to me and said, "What am I going to do, we are under arrest in quarters?"

And I said, "Oh, hell, I'll go if you want to risk it."

So, he told the rest of them I was willing to go, then they all -- so then we went. So the Battery saw six

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sergeants walk out of there and they said, "Well, if they're going to go so are we going to go."

So, out they went again for another night after being -- the next morning Captain Truman was assigned over to Battery D, but he got ahold of a bunch of drunks who were all under arrest in quarters. Well, that was his initiation to Battery D.

He had been told by the colonels and some of them about what a wild bunch of guys they were, but they were not. They were ninety percent high school graduates and just a well-educated and a well -- bunch of fellows that could be led but couldn't be driven. And there was enough Irish in them that -- about ninety-nine percent Irish -- that you just couldn't browbeat them or anything of that kind. You'd have a fight on your hands, that's what you'd have. And that's what took some of these higher-ups a long time to realize, that Battery D was a very unusual outfit.

Well, anyway, so we go up on this gun position to locate the guns up there and had to each ride a horse up there and I went along as instrument sergeant, and he took a fellow named Bob [Milton R.] Evans from Louisville, who then was, oh, he weighed about 115 pounds; and he took Al [Albert A.] Ridge, a kid from Kansas City

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who was later a Federal Judge there. There was Ridge and Evans and Truman and I were the four that went up on this advance group to locate our gun position, they were going to move the Battery in the next couple of days. We picked up a Frenchman up there someplace along the line that joined us. So we were up and located the gun positions and then got -- it was in the, oh,

about 5 o'clock I guess it was, so we said, well, we'd sit down and have something to eat. We had brought our hard rations of canned beans, and corned beef, and hardtack, and some canned Pet milk. I don't remember what they had to drink, whether we had any coffee. I don't think we did. And while we were up there locating these gun positions, Evans and Ridge went around and found some wild red raspberries growing up there in the Vosges Mountains. So, they picked a whole mess kit full of these wild red raspberries. So, here we came back, had these cold beans, and this corned beef (or monkey meat as we called it), hardtack, and these wild red raspberries, and this Frenchman had brought along a bottle of champagne. So we cracked the bottle of champagne and there we sat up there in the mountains up there, and that was our dinner that evening.

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During that night we pitched our pup tents and Evans, being a little guy, so let's put him in the pup tent with me, put our tents together. He was just down below Truman there. During the night it got pretty cold and I put Evans kind of up on the hill slope and I put him up high, and during the night he kept rolling down on top of me and I'd kick him in the hind end and I'd say, "Get up the hill you little so and so." And Truman got a big kick out of that, said we kept him awake all night, that's all he heard all night long. Even after he was in the White House as President, I walked in there one day with Evans and he looked up and he said, "Get up the hill you little..." He had never forgotten it.

Well anyway, getting back down to the Battery. So then he called me in there and he said -- I guess the day before there was a notice on the bulletin board that any boy that had graduated from high school that was eighteen or over would be considered as a candidate for West Point, if he was interested. And we were standing there and I had a kid in my section named John Uncles, who handled one of the instruments there in the battery commander's detail, and John was standing there and I said, "Well, John, why don't you put in for that thing?"

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And he said, "Ah, I don't want to be in the Army." He had just graduated from De LaSalle High School there in Kansas City.

And I said, "Well, John, you're probably going to go on to college if we ever get through from this thing," and I said, "up there you can get a good education at Government expense."

And he said, "Well, I might be interested."

And I said, "Well, all right." So, I went in to Truman and I said, "Captain, I think I've got a candidate for West Point."

And I said, "John Uncles."

And he said, "Well, wonderful!"

Well, he put him in and Johnny went back there. He ended up as a three star general in the Army, graduate of West Point, taught there, and has since passed away, I think here about a year ago.



Well, then a couple of days later, I was there again getting the mail and so on, and the Captain said, "Come in here, I want to see you."

I went in there and he said, "We've got an order from the regimental headquarters sending someone back to officer's

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school at Saumur, France," and he said, "I'm recommending you for that job."

I said, "Well now listen, Captain, I appreciate the honor very much, but recommending me, you're just going to get in bad with Colonel Elliot. I've been up before, and I've been more or less blackballed you might say, and that's perfectly all right with me. It don't mean enough to me. The war isn't going to last forever and I'd just as soon just not do it."

"Well," he said, "you're entitled to it. You should have had it a long time ago, and," he said, "just personal reasons why you haven't had it, isn't because you're not efficient in the job. You're entitled to -- Battery D's entitled to it," and he said, "you're -- I'm going to put your name in."

And I said, "Well, I'll just be turned down."

"Well," he said, "if it is I'm going to go to General [L. G.] Berry," who was our brigade commander of field artillery, "and take it up with General Berry."

I said, "Well now Captain, listen, you're just going to get yourself in bad with Colonel Klemm and Colonel Elliot just as sure as you do that," and I said, "it isn't worth it, and I'd appreciate it personally,

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don't want to see you in the position because it doesn't mean that much to me."

He said, "It don't make any difference, you're entitled to it. A man from my battery's going to go and you're going to be the man that's going to go."

Now, the average fellow when knowing that the odds were against him of being something happen to him from -- through the Army's usual schedule, a lot of them would have backed off, but not him. He knew that I was entitled to it. I should have had it sometime ago and by golly, as far as he was concerned I was going to get the appointment come hell or high water.

Well, that, I say it right there, demonstrated in my opinion the position he has taken in the later years on the different things that he felt were fair and just and he didn't care who bothered about them, if it was right, he was going to push it through and everything else. And I think that was one of the main characteristics of the man that I've known for so many years.

Well, I went back there and it was -- a lot of the stuff was on -- I had at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma and it was at Saumur, France, which is only about thirty miles down the Loire River there from Angers where we were first billeted. In

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the school they had us divided up into squads of about twenty to a squad. In my squad was a couple of guys from the Quartermaster Corps and somewhere else that didn't know hardly which end of a French 75 was to be shot. So, we got in there and they had us broken down in sections and we had an instructor for each. And my instructor was Charles Evans Hughes, Jr., the son of the old Supreme Court Judge who is a fellow I think from Brown University. We figured him as a kind of a sissy sort of a guy, but turned out to be a pretty decent sort of a fellow.

We went along there and I teamed up with a fellow by the name of Herb VanSmith from Independence, Battery E was next to us and Herb and I were both instrument sergeants. When they'd pair you up and we'd go out on these field maneuvers to locate gun positions and Herb and I would pair up, we'd have our board set up and our firing data computed in about ten minutes before some of these poor guys even had their board up. As I say, it was a course that we had had, a lot of it that I had had before. It was nothing unusual.

So then we got along and every week you'd have an examination. Well, with my knowledge of shorthand -- it

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was a lecture course, all week long, had books and a lecture course -- I took practically all this stuff down verbatim in shorthand, and every day would make up my notebook. At the end of the week you were supposed to turn in the notebook and you would have an examination, and I was complimented several times about the completeness of my notebook and so on. So then -- it was about a six or eight weeks course, I guess it was -- and about four weeks, one of these fellows came around and said, "How," -- a fellow that had been there before -- said, "How are you coming?"

I said, "I guess we're making pretty good."

He said, "Well now listen, let me tip you off. Don't be too blank blank smart around here, you'll never get out of here. You'll be stuck as an instructor."

I said, "To hell with that. I don't want to stay here as an instructor." So right away I wasn't too bright. Well, to make a long -- I ended up with a graduation of 88.7 percent of a general average over all the subjects, which they said was about the fourth or fifth best grade that had been made there in the school. And I suppose if I had worked at it I probably could have got better than that. But I didn't want to be stuck there.

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Well, fortunately, the armistice came on just about a week before I was to graduate so that ended that.

But anyway, then the question came up, they said, "you can get your commission, you can go with the Army of Occupation if you want it."

And I said, "Well, why would I spend several hundred dollars to buy a uniform and go up there a second lieutenant and all the jobs I'd get would be looking at somebody's latrine or something like that, being a newcomer and the lowest officer on the pole." I said, "I'll just go on home and go back to my outfit as it is, I'll go on home."

So. I was then sent back to the Battery and the Battery at that time was up in the Verdun section, a little old town of la Beholle just out of Verdun. So, I went back and reported to Captain Truman and he was, naturally, very glad to see me and I asked him what I could do and he said, "Well, the boy in the office there," a kid named Leo Keenan, was kind of a clerk, wasn't feeling too well and had been a little behind, and he said, "Maybe you can help Leo on some of his records." So, I spent about two weeks in there getting a lot of Leo's Battery records up to date and things of that kind for him.

We were moving around then, and then came up the

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athletic program and I am a pretty fair basketball player and football player, and they were forming these divisional teams, and the regiment was sending a team down to Nancy, Nancy and Toul the headquarters for the football, the basketball, the wrestlers and the boxers and so on. So, I went down there and passed up going up the Army of Occupation. And we were about ready to come home then, we played basketball, our basketball team went as far as -- we won five -- and there again was staying on and moving and playing maybe the finals in Paris or going home. Battery D was then at Brest and I said, "Oh, let's go back, go back home. I don't care much about -- I can play basketball at home." That was my attitude on that.

Well, that briefly was the war situation. Then we came home from war and being always interested in athletics, there was a little firm starting there in Kansas City called Lowe and Campbell Athletic Goods Company that were looking for someone, and I played on their basketball team. They had a basketball team and I played on their basketball team again. We later went on and won the AAU championship in 1922, and I continued with them in charge of their accounting and credit work and, oh, just everything around the place.

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In 1930 they were merged with the Wilson Sporting Goods Company of Chicago and another company back in Boston, Massachusetts; and I stayed in Kansas City a couple more years and then moved on to Chicago, was made vice president in charge of auditing and accounting there, and then moved over to vice president in charge of manufacturing. The president died in 1950 and I was appointed president and served there for ten years up until the time of my retirement.

FUCHS: Then you were president of Wilson?

BOWMAN: Yeah. I ended up as president of Wilson.

In the meantime, of course, all the time when I remember when Mr. Truman was first running for the Senate in Kansas City, Tom [Thomas E.] Murphy, who was one of the fellows in that battery, called me up one day and said, "We're trying to raise a little money here to do some advertising for the Captain." We always called him Captain Harry at that time. "Captain Harry is going to run for the Senate."

And I said, "Sure." Of course all of us were working making -- I don't know, thirty-five or forty dollars a week which was not very much -- but we scouted around and raised a little money, to take care of some postage and some

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mailing things for him and so on, and that was the time he ran for the Senate.

FUCHS: That was the first time.

BOWMAN: The first time, I think in 1934 if I remember. In the meantime, he had been judge of the county court there two or three years, four or five years before, maybe ten years before that in various county jobs around there. I don't remember just what they were. But I used to see him once in awhile there, and of course, he opened his store up there on Twelfth Street right after we got home, he and Eddie Jacobson. The depression moved along a few years later there and like every other small business they had a difficult time and they couldn't make it. That's all there was to it.

FUCHS: Do you remember anything specific about the store, anything that happened there?

BOWMAN: No, nothing specific. We used to go up there once in awhile. We all worked there and we all used to go up there once in awhile at noontime; we'd walk around and go up there to Twelfth and Baltimore, that's right across from the Muehlebach Hotel. We used to walk up around there and sometimes you'd see some of the fellows in there that would just come in to say hello and so on, but wasn't much around there. Well, I say it was just one of those things,

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that very few people live through the depression anyway without losing something, and they were just fortunate that they were new in getting started and just hadn't had an opportunity at that time to build up anything. And a lot of the fellows that could have bought something would say, "Well, I need a couple of shirts, but I think I'll wear these awhile longer," because they just didn't have the money to buy any. That was the result of it.

FUCHS: What did you think when he first went into politics in 1922, ran for the Eastern Judge of Jackson County, do you recall that?

BOWMAN: Well, of course, it wasn't, it was more or less -- it wasn't a judicial setup at all, it was an administrative. They had charge of all the county roads and the county farm, and the county, whatever it was there, the different county prospects was really what it was. It was always a kind of a battle there between the two factions of the Democratic Party there in Kansas City, the goats and the rabbits, were always fighting about this or that, and one would have one,

and one would have the other. Then the eastern part of the county would be taken into consideration as well. But I did know this, that anything he got

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into would be run right or it wouldn't be run. I knew that from the experience that I had. He was very thorough in what he did, and very honest in anything that he did. All of this stuff that they pulled out there later in the campaign about him and so on was just proved to be a bunch of propaganda, was all that it was; because he was one fellow in politics that -- there just wasn't any crooked stuff going on at the time he built the courthouse building there and so on. When he was on the roads, he was a great stickler for roads in the early days. He was one of the early men that felt the necessity of getting good roads. He spent a lot of time there in the early days working with the -- I forget what it was, some road association or something like that. It was...

FUCHS: The National Trails...

BOWMAN: Yeah.

FUCHS: ...Association.

BOWMAN: On good roads and so on.

FUCHS: Several organizations. Did you spend most of your time while they were in action in officer's school, or did you serve...

BOWMAN: Yeah, I was not -- it was back -- see they went into

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action, I left them about the, oh, the third week in August, almost about the first of September, I guess it was, when I left. And then of course they moved from where they were here in reserve at St. Mihiel, and that was about the 12th of September, and then they moved up to the Argonne about the latter part of September and I missed that action with them. I was in Saumur at that time and I didn't get out of Saumur until after the Armistice.

FUCHS: Well, this succession of captains that they had, was this your impression that they left for various reasons, but the main reason was not because of the incorrigibility of the Battery, their inability to handle them. That's the general story.

BOWMAN: Well, yes, we had some, we had -- the first captain who organized it, there's a long story about him, and we had two or three after that, but...

FUCHS: Who was that?

BOWMAN: I always felt -- the first man who organized, a fellow named Charlie Allen, since dead, been dead a long time. And we had one captain named Captain [Rollin] Ritter, who I thought was a marvelous man; but I don't know whether it was -- knowing Elliot and the fellows above,

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I could understand how that they would have the needle in this guy all the time down there. Just on account of the Battery, and not knowing the Battery, the only thing the Battery was, it -- I say the Battery was -- in other words we could get a basketball team or a football team out of the Battery to play any regiment. We didn't have any -- any teams that came out of there -- the only thing that came out of the 129th Field Artillery, it wasn't a 129th Field Artillery, it was a Battery D team, or boxers or wrestlers or anything else, we had them out of there. And as I say, the majority of the kids were, until we started filling up with some draftees, draft boys, there before we went over, were all high school graduates and many of them were college men; and were just the type that just could, as I said, they could be led, but they couldn't be driven.

FUCHS: Yes. Did you come back on the *Zeppelin* with the Battery?

BOWMAN: Yeah.

FUCHS: Do you recall anything about that that might be interesting?

BOWMAN: Well, that was a rough trip, it's the only thing that I can think of about that. I know going over, we went over on the good ship *Saxonia*. And there again, we got off at

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Tilbury Docks outside of London there, and as we got off they gave us a ration of tea. Well, you can imagine the Irish and tea, what the Irish thought of tea and thought of England anyway. And, "Oh, hooey with this stuff." Well, the English like to died -- they just threw the tea overboard. Well, they should never have given it to that bunch of Irishmen, they should have known better than to give them tea, English tea, you know what would happen to it.

Going over there the air was so bad down in the bottom there, a lot of the fellows were taking their blankets and just going up on deck and sleeping on deck. Orders came out (to show how orders can be misinterpreted), about 3 o'clock one morning we got orders, "Everybody get up and get up on deck." So, a lot of grousing around, and, "What in the hell is going on?" And we got up on deck and found out that what the order was, to get the men that were on deck, get them up at 4:30 in the morning so they could clean the decks and so on. That was what the order was, but the way the order was interpreted, "Get everybody on deck at 4:30." Well, the whole goddamn outfit was on -- you can imagine what happened then.

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FUCHS: When you got back in Kansas City, I've heard a story that Colonel [Karl D.] Klemm was in civilian clothes and didn't come back...

BOWMAN: Yeah, he didn't come back.

FUCHS: What about this?

BOWMAN: Well, I think they got rid of him. They finally got rid of him. The history of him was, as I recall, he was a West Point graduate, but was way down in his class. He never commanded -- he was a second lieutenant and resigned from his Army commission. Practically had no experience at all except the fact that he was a graduate of West Point. And he was brought in there for political reasons. He had married the Heim girl whose father owned the Heim Brewery in Kansas City at that time, and the old Electric Park that used to be way out northeast, then was later way out there about 48th and Gillham Road; and quite a man around town, he'd married her. Klemm later killed himself. He made a deal for this Fokker, the airplane builder, that he was going to get in the airplane business and he practically promised him that he'd deliver old man Heim's money, you see, to back Fokker. That was the story that went around, and it didn't go through, and he shot himself.

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Elliot was a big hog. He ate himself to death and died of something after a Christmas dinner somewhere.

FUCHS: Was he a Kansas City man?

BOWMAN: Yeah, had a good job with the Farm and Home Loan Savings Association, one of the leading men in this at one time.

FUCHS: Mr. Truman was married in June after he came back. Did you go to the wedding?

BOWMAN: No, I didn't go to his wedding.

FUCHS: Were the Battery members invited?

BOWMAN: I don't think that too many of them went out. I think Ted [Theodore] Marks, who later passed on, was his best man.

FUCHS: Yes.

BOWMAN: Ted was a tailor there. I think it was just a small wedding at -- the Battery didn't go to it. I don't think we knew much about it. At the time we were all busy trying to make a living and we did get together, try to get together with a little dinner party every year and...

FUCHS: Battery reunions?

BOWMAN: Yeah, Battery reunion. They wrecked the Elk's Club one time, I think that cost him a couple hundred

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dollars for plates and so on that somebody...

FUCHS: Do you recall anything specific about Mr. Truman in connection with any of these dinners or the American Legion?

BOWMAN: Well, he was very active in the American Legion back in the early days. I think he was one of the early men in it. But I say in those days, right after the war, coming home, I know in my particular case, I was busy, had just got married and was working day and night. We didn't have forty hour weeks in those days or double pay for overtime and a few more things, and we were all just busy trying to get started. We didn't just have the time to put in on a lot of things of that kind.

FUCHS: Did you go to the inaugural in 1948?

BOWMAN: Yes, we were there in 1944, too, when he was Vice President.

FUCHS: Oh, did you?

BOWMAN: We were with him -- in fact, during the war when he was on the Senate committee I saw quite a bit of him.

FUCHS: Oh, did you?

BOWMAN: ...there during the war. I spent about a week

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out of the month in Washington working with the Army and the Navy on things they were buying, and after they later set them up -- the various governmental agencies on materials and so on -- we would get a Government contract with a triple A rating or whatever it was, and that was only a hunting license to go find your material. Then we'd have to go around to all of those material places and say, "Here we've got a contract with the Air Corps or the Navy and we need this, or that," and so on. At that time he was having his Senate investigating committee, and I used to make it a point to get over to his office, oh, about every time I was down, get over there around 4:30 in the afternoon when he was practically through for the day and have a chance to sit down and talk with him about various things that was going on and so on. One time I was down there and he asked if I was doing anything the next morning and I told him nothing special. And he said, well, a group of the committee were going up to the Aberdeen Proving Grounds up there, and they were going to show them various types of arms that they had, from the little carbine rifle on up. And they were going to do some skip bombing of these planes coming in, and so on and so forth, and if I would like to go I would be welcome. Well, I

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enjoyed it, enjoyed it very much. And there was the Senators there, the Senator [Harley] Kilgore from West Virginia was there, and some of the other Senators, [Owen] Brewster, and some of the other members of his committee was there; a very, very interesting trip.

FUCHS: You don't recall anything specific about that, you know, Mr. Truman, any anecdotes or anything in connection with the committee, other than that you went up there?



BOWMAN: No, except that I do know that all you had to do if you were going around for material or anything of that kind, was say, "Well -- you get pushed around by somebody -- well, I guess maybe Truman's committee had ought to look into this," or something. Boy, they'd start moving when you mentioned that. They would say, "Well, now, let's see what we can do," and so on and so forth. He did an outstanding job. I had all of his reports of the committee, oh there must have been -- book form, must have been forty of them, I guess. When the war was over I gave them to the school library there in Skokie, Illinois.

FUCHS: Did he send those to you?

BOWMAN: Yeah, I was put on the mailing list and sent out to me. They were well worth keeping for someone to sit back and

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read in years later, but I had no place for them and no particular need for them, so I gave them to the school.

But all through that I don't think there was ever a decision made that wasn't unanimous. I don't think there was a minority report of any of his reports. I think his committee was a hundred percent on everything. And I think when he first brought up the subject in the Senate knowing what had happened in World War I about the waste and everything, and I think he told me at that time that they allowed him \$15,000; and he said, "\$15,000 wouldn't even hire one man to investigate anything." Then after they got into the thing, and saw the magnitude of it, why then of course, they raised the appropriation. But the initial thing they gave them \$15,000 and hoping, "Well, this thing will die on the vine and that will be the last we'll hear of that." Well, he made it what it was. He worked very hard at it. Well, he, of course, he got down to that office of his about seven in the morning. He'd have a day's work done by the time that half the Senators got out of bed.

FUCHS: Have you any recollections of Spencer Salisbury?

BOWMAN: Oh, "Snake Eye?"

Well, Salisbury was a -- I guess he was from Independence. I had known him at Independence when we used to go

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out there. He was captain of the battery, Battery E, which was right next door to us all the time, and we called them "Salisbury's guerrillas," and a few things of that kind that -- but Truman seemed to get along with him pretty well. He wasn't very well thought of, he was kind of on the crass side you might say. At least that was the opinion of a lot of fellows. And then later on they got messed up in some building and loan thing, I think, or something like that, and I think Truman went in on him, and I think he gave Truman the pitch there. I think Truman lost some money, it cost him something in going into that building and loan thing with Salisbury.

FUCHS: Yeah.

BOWMAN: But Salisbury had the reputation around here of being kind of a fast operator, that was his reputation in Independence.

FUCHS: You don't know anything more specific why he and Mr. Truman had a falling out later on other than...

BOWMAN: Well, that's-- I never could understand in many respects why Truman ever went in with him in the first place, because he knew him I think from his -- around Independence there and the reputation he had and everything. But Salisbury was -- well, he could be a very likeable sort of a fellow, but

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there was just some particular quirk about him. He always seemed to want to get that additional edge there, and if there was any chance to take it, he would move right in on it and I could understand that. It just got so the way he was operating wasn't the way Truman operated; and Salisbury wasn't going to change, so Truman just got out.

FUCHS: Do you recall when this loving cup was given to Mr. Truman after he returned?

BOWMAN: Yes, if I remember, I think that was given -- you see we were discharged at Ft. Riley, and I think that was after we got home. I think they took a nickel out of the roll of dice on the dice game, I think it was. And that's how they bought it.

FUCHS: Is that right?

BOWMAN: If you want to shoot a dollar, you put a dollar five down there, and the nickel went into the pot, as I remember it now, I'm a little hazy on it.

I wasn't a crap shooter, but I'm pretty sure that was what it was.

But there's one interesting thing (you've probably heard this), and we were -- just happened to think about it. We had a little kid by the name of Johnny (John J.] Higinbotham, had to stand on his tiptoes to get in, he's

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only about that high. And we were over at Commercy, France, and there was going to be a review there by the Prince of Wales that came in there with General Pershing and everybody -- and oh, we had what they called dub enamel. It was a kind of wax that you put on your shoes and then you'd brush it and shine it. And we worked and everything had to be spic and span, and clean; and we got out there and, oh, it just poured rain, and this field where they were was sopping wet. So, you sit out there in water for about a couple of hours and finally (they were slow in coming along), and finally they did come along and they opened ranks for them, for the Prince to come down there and it was just as he got by us, this little Higinbotham in the back end says, "Captain, ask that little sonofabitch when he's going to free Ireland."

FUCHS: That was good. Have you any more like that?

BOWMAN: You could hear that all over. Here was General Pershing, and here was the major general of the division, and the colonel of the regiment, and finally poor old Captain Truman along with them, when this guy blurted that out.

Well, that was typical of Battery D.

FUCHS: Do you have anything else that you think might be worth putting in here?

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BOWMAN: Well, I can't right at the present time. As I say, those things come to you -- and it was a long time ago, and you need something to kind of -- one leads into another.

FUCHS: What I tried to do was just mention things that might jog our memory.

BOWMAN: Pete Allen, I don't know whether you have much about Captain Allen, of Battery F or not, but he was the one, as I say, when the Battery was under arrest there in Coetquidan, commanded, "You men get back to quarters." Well, they just formed a big circle around Pete and said, "Hurray for Pistol Pete:" He was -- well, there were four or five Allen brothers in Independence, Phog Allen, Dr. Phog Allen...

FUCHS: Yes.

BOWMAN: Basketball coach of the University of Kansas, director of athletics there for years, was his brother. Pete was a great big guy, but we never figured Pete was too smart as far as firing data and so on was concerned. We always kind of accused Truman of more or less kind of looking out for him, and helping him with his firing problems and a few more things. But Truman would never admit it. Although, you know, in a way you could tell by his saying that he knew what we were talking about. We always figured

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that Truman not only had to take care of the firing of Battery D, but also he helped out in Battery F, although their gun position would be entirely different, naturally.

FUCHS: I understand that you were in Chicago around the time that the 1944 Democratic convention was being held. Do you recall anything about that event?

BOWMAN: Well, the one particular thing that comes to mind, was early in the week of the convention, I think it was Monday night, Ed McKim who was in the Battery, who was with the Mutual Insurance Company of Omaha, was in town along with John Snyder who later was Secretary of the Treasury. Truman had some rooms at the old Stevens Hotel with Fred Canfil, who was later the marshal in Kansas City. We were in this room at about 11 o'clock at night, when Roy Roberts, who was the managing editor of the Kansas City *Star* stopped in and told Truman that the *Star* had about fifteen men covering the convention and the consensus seemed to be that Truman was going to be the candidate for Vice President whether he wanted it or not.

And that there wasn't anything that Truman could do about it. Truman commented that he didn't like to see the thing take that turn, that he had already made this statement before the Missouri delegation that he was not a

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candidate. John Nangle of St. Louis was chairman of the Missouri delegation. After discussing it, Truman said, "Well, I guess probably we'll have to get up something for the Missouri delegation as they're meeting tomorrow." But he says, "You guys go ahead and get your ideas together because I'm going over to the Morrison Hotel where Margaret and Mrs. Truman are staying."

So, John Snyder and Ed McKim and I got together and wrote out a statement which we were going to give to the President, which he was to present it to the Missouri delegation at their meeting the next day to the effect that he didn't want to run, but if he was drafted that he probably would have to serve. As far as I recall, that was done because the Missouri delegation met the next morning and it came out that they were pushing the candidacy of Truman for Vice President.

Then another, later on in the week, he had invited Mrs. Bowman and I to attend the convention on Thursday night, which he thought was going to be the nomination. And he told us to come down to his quarters at the Morrison Hotel around about 6 o'clock, we'd get a bite to eat and then go over there for the evening session. We got down there and called the room and no answer. And we thought maybe

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they might be upstairs and were not answering the phone. And so we went up, but the door was locked. Mrs. Bowman stayed there and I started to walk down the hall to get the elevator to go down to leave instructions downstairs and the elevator opened and here Mr. Truman got off the elevator and told us that he had just been to a meeting at the Blackstone Hotel and they had talked with President [Franklin] Roosevelt; and Truman repeated his feelings on it, and Roosevelt had made the statement that if he wanted to bust up the Democratic Party, all right go ahead, but he felt that he should be the candidate. And Truman commented to us, he said, "Well, you know, sometimes you get into politics, you do some things that you don't like to do."

Then the question came up about, where are we going to go out for dinner, and he suggested that John Snyder and Ed McKim, who was up there in the room with us, and Margaret was there with some girlfriend, that we take Mrs. Truman and Margaret and all of us go out for dinner; but he would not go because every newsman in the country would be on him for a statement, and he had nothing to say at this time. So, we went on over to the Blackstone and had dinner and he had his dinner in his room at the Morrison.

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The next day was Friday, was when I think he got the nomination as Vice President.

FUCHS: That's very interesting.

Do you recall anything else about that period, seeing Mr. Truman in Chicago?

BOWMAN: No, except when he would come in I'd usually get a note from him that he would be in. We'd go down and meet him and have dinner with him or something of that kind. He usually was very busy and, of course, being as prominent as he was (the mayor of Chicago at that time was Mayor [Edward J.] Kelly), by the time that he would come out there, why, the Mayor always had a special police escort that met the train and he was more or less taken care of. He had two policemen there on the police force named Eddie Egan and John (well, his name slips me for a minute), that were two of the escorts and everywhere that Truman would go you would find those two fellows with him. Even when the inauguration -- he brought them down to Washington for the inauguration and they were milling around in the crowds along with the Secret Service men.

FUCHS: What did Fred Canfil seem to be doing there?

BOWMAN: Oh, I didn't know too much about Fred. Fred just seemed to be kind of running the room that they had down

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there and a few of the people would drop in, and that seemed to be about all. I didn't know Fred. I had just met him up there at the time, but he was -- either was then or was later the marshal at Kansas City, United States Marshal at Kansas City. I don't know what he would do other than his just regular duties as United States marshal.

FUCHS: Did you run into Tom Evans there at the convention?

BOWMAN: Yeah, I used to see Tom around quite a bit, he was very active.

FUCHS: Who all was with Mr. Truman when he got off of the elevator when he returned from the Blackstone?

BOWMAN: He was by himself.

FUCHS: He was all by himself?

BOWMAN: Yes.

FUCHS: Did he say anything about whom he favored for the...

BOWMAN: Well, he had said earlier, he had said earlier when we were talking at the time that Roy Roberts came in, he said, "Well, before leaving Washington I had promised Jim Byrnes I would support Jim Byrnes as Vice President." And he said, "I still feel that I should support Jim Byrnes. I made the promise to Jim Byrnes." But, of course, Jim Byrnes didn't get it.

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And then later Byrnes was on, I think ended up as Secretary of State at one time.

FUCHS: Yes.

You don't recall anything that occurred at the inauguration in January 1949, that might be of interest -- in regards to the Battery or...

BOWMAN: Well, the Battery, of course, he had a breakfast for the Battery and his parting words as we left about -- the breakfast started at 7 and was over about 9, his parting words were, "Well, I've got a very busy morning and I hope you fellows will stay sober at least until I'm inaugurated into office, then I don't care what you do."

FUCHS: Well, thank you very much, sir.

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