

Oral History Interview
with
IRVING PERLMETER

Assistant Press Secretary in the White House Office, December, 1950-January, 1953

Washington, D.C.

May 24 & 29, 1963
by Charles T. Morrissey, Harry S. Truman Library

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MORRISSEY: Would you tell me Mr. Perlmeter, when did you first join the White House staff?

PERLMETER: In December, 1950.

MORRISSEY: And what was your title?

PERLMETER: Assistant Press Secretary.

MORRISSEY: What were your duties?

PERLMETER: Joseph Short was the Press Secretary at the time and determined to have two assistants: one for foreign affairs who was Mr. Roger Tubby; and one for domestic affairs which was me. Prior to that time, and I believe since that time, the custom has generally been to have only one Assistant Press Secretary, at least with that title.

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MORRISSEY: Who else was in the office with you, Mr. Tubby and Mr. Short?

PERLMETER: Only the secretarial help.

MORRISSEY: Could you tell me in some detail, what would be your daily routine--what your duties would involve you in?

PERLMETER: Usually our first responsibility was dealing with matters relating to the press, radio, the television, magazines and other mass information media. This meant, in the first place, assisting the President in preparing for news conferences; in the second place, handling all correspondence relating to these matters; in the third place, providing assistance in related matters such as counseling on speeches, and accompanying the President on his visits away from the White House, and so forth. In a broad way, I think that describes it. Of course, this was by itself a day and night job, and seven days a week.

MORRISSEY: Could you tell me a little bit about why you think you were chosen for this post?

PERLMETER: Prior to this appointment, I had been for several

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years in charge of public relations for the Internal Revenue Service; and prior to that time, I had been a Washington correspondent of the Associated Press. At the time I was working at the Associated Press, Mr. Short was also in the same office and undoubtedly our friendship at that time was a factor, or at least he had an opportunity to form some estimate of whether I could do a job or not.

MORRISSEY: Could you fill me in with a little more biographical material: birth date, education?

PERLMETER: I was born in Omaha, Nebraska, February 8, 1909, was reared in Omaha; went to Creighton University in Omaha for two years and to the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, Nebraska for two years. At the University of Nebraska I majored in journalism and took a part-time job working for the Lincoln, Nebraska, *Star*. Shortly after leaving the university, I transferred to the Lincoln office of the Associated Press and in the fall of 1936 was transferred by the Associated Press to its Washington office. During most of the time in the Washington

office of the Associated Press, I was assigned to reporting activities of the departments and agencies, primarily related to business, financial and economic affairs, such as the Treasury and Com-

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merce Departments, the Budget Bureau, Federal Reserve and so forth.

MORRISSEY: Did you by chance attend any of Mr. Roosevelt's press conferences?

PERLMETER: I used to attend them regularly.

MORRISSEY: Where did your association with Joe Short begin?

PERLMETER: Joe was in the Washington office of the Associated Press ahead of me and Mrs. Short, by the way, who was also an Associated Press reporter, arrived in the Washington office on the same day that I did and was, of course, a friend of both of them.

MORRISSEY: Could you tell me something about Joseph Short--what kind of man he was?

PERLMETER: Well, Joe was, in the first place, an extremely competent newspaperman as attested not only by his career in the Associated Press, but later as a correspondent for the *Chicago Sun* and then for the *Baltimore Sun*. He was also very popular among the reporters and officials in Washington. His stature is indicated by the fact that he served a term as President of the National Press Club prior

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to becoming Press Secretary.

MORRISSEY: Did he ever remark on why Mr. Truman chose him to be Press Secretary for the President?

PERLMETER: I don't recall that he expressed any particular reason except that obviously they were on good personal terms prior to that time.

MORRISSEY: You mentioned a moment ago that one of your duties was helping prepare the President for a press conference. Would you tell me what this preparation would entail?

PERLMETER: Prior to each Presidential press conference, (usually held a week apart) Mr. Short, Mr. Tubby and myself would make notes of probable questions and issues, would collect as much information as we thought necessary, usually by calling the head of the agency involved or one of his responsible representatives. And then, approximately a half hour before the press conference, the President would have a conference with his press staff and some of the other members of his staff at which the questions were discussed and the President suggested the answers

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that he might give, or would just generally discuss the matter so as to be familiar with it.

MORRISSEY: Who were some of the other White House staff members who would attend these briefing sessions?

PERLMETER: Usually the other secretaries to the President would be there, which were Mr. Connelly and Mr. Hassett, until Mr. Hassett retired and was succeeded by Mrs. Short (Mr. Short having died in the meantime.) Also present customarily were Mr. Murphy, the Special Counsel, and some of the Administrative Assistants such as Mr. Nash, Mr. Stowe, Mr. Bell and Mr. Lloyd.

MORRISSEY: And these sessions, you say, would usually be about thirty minutes in length?

PERLMETER: Approximately.

MORRISSEY: And what would be the objective?

PERLMETER: The objective would be to enable the President to respond directly and accurately and knowledgeably to any question that could be anticipated.

MORRISSEY: Were there times when questions were asked that you

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didn't anticipate?

PERLMETER: Naturally, it's impossible to anticipate all the questions, but our batting average was quite high.

MORRISSEY: Do you remember any specific instances when a "curve ball" was thrown that hadn't been anticipated?

PERLMETER: Usually the only questions that you can't anticipate are those which have such a personal or local flavor that a third party is not apt to know about them. As far as general issues of national or international affairs, anyone who follows the events can pretty well predict the questions.

MORRISSEY: Would the President schedule his press conferences on a fairly routine basis or were they scheduled pretty much as news came up that would require a press conference?

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PERLMETER: Mr. Truman's conferences were held with great regularity once a week.

MORRISSEY: Sometimes in a press conference, Mr. Truman would read a prepared statement. Would that statement be prepared in this half hour session before the conference, or some days, for example before the conference?

PERLMETER: Usually such statements were prepared by one of the members of the press staff prior to the conference, usually the morning of the conference.

MORRISSEY: I see. The conferences then were usually held in the afternoon.

PERLMETER: Sometimes in the afternoon, sometimes in the morning.

MORRISSEY: Would the President himself prepare these announcements sometimes, or would he depend on the staff to do the work?

PERLMETER: The statements for the press conferences were usually prepared by the press staff.

MORRISSEY: Would the President tend to amend these or discard them?

PERLMETER: The President always reviewed everything that was written and did make corrections whenever he thought necessary.

MORRISSEY: Would you say that the President came to these pre-press conference briefing sessions already well-prepared

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with a sum of knowledge within his grasp or were there times when he definitely needed to be briefed on some developments?

PERLMETER: It was very rare that a question was brought up that he wasn't very well aware of. Considering the vast number and complexity of the issues facing the President it was always quite amazing that he had such wide knowledge. I might say in this connection that those that worked in the White House were always aware of the fact that even after he left his office in the west wing in the evening and went to the residential part of the White House, he always took with him a portfolio, at least a foot thick, and that he spent a good deal of his evenings reading through these portfolios.

MORRISSEY: Sometimes after a press conference, the Press Secretary would submit a clarification to the press on some matter. Who would decide and how would it be decided that some statement or some aspect of the press conference needed clarification?

PERLMETER: The Press Secretary and his assistants were on the alert for slips of the tongue or ambiguities that might cause public confusion or misunderstanding and took the initiative

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in preparing what you call clarification. Of course, these were submitted to the President for his approval before they were issued.

MORRISSEY: What was the procedure to be followed on choosing to allow the President's words to be quoted on occasion?

PERLMETER: The formal press conference hardly existed before President Roosevelt, although there were rudimentary press conferences as far back as Theodore Roosevelt. However, the rules which Franklin Roosevelt established prohibited direct quotation of his press conference remarks. When Mr. Truman became President, he automatically took over Mr. Roosevelt's rules making occasional exceptions. In most instances, during Mr. Truman's Administration, the direct quotations from press conferences resulted from requests from reporters during the course of the press conferences. Such requests were acted upon on the spot by the President. There were a few occasions when a request was made after the conference.

MORRISSEY: Could you tell me something about the development of the suggestion that the President's press conferences be taped?

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PERLMETER: Very shortly after Mr. Short, Mr. Tubby and I came to the White House, it became apparent that the lag between press conferences and the transcription of stenographic notes was quite a serious hindrance to answering questions that customarily arose after a conference as to whether the President had made this or that statement or what it meant. Accordingly, I asked permission and received permission to attach a stenographic recording machine to the public address system in the press conference hall for the purpose of making a quick reference source from the conferences. This device had been used for a few weeks until an occasion arose when the radio, broadcasting companies asked permission to reproduce part of one of these recordings. This was approved by the President but it was found that the tonal quality of the plastic disk used for stenographic purposes was very poor. Accordingly, I made arrangements with the Army Signal Corps to substitute a high-quality magnetic tape recording for the other type recording, and from that time on, and as far as I know to this day, such recordings have been made, not only of press conferences, but also of all other occasions on which the President speaks in public, which would include formal addresses and also informal talks in the White House rose

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garden and elsewhere.

MORRISSEY: I assume then the President was not reluctant to have this done?

PERLMETER: He gave his permission.

MORRISSEY: Was he reluctant about having some parts of some press conferences broadcast on radio?

PERLMETER: I don't recall his expressing any reluctance. Mr. Short was of the general opinion that it was unwise to allow general broadcasting, because of the fact that since the President was answering questions of which he had no advance notice and was speaking extemporaneously, there was always the possibility that he might make a slip of the tongue on a matter of very great importance, which could have very serious consequences either nationally or internationally. Therefore, it was unwise to commit the President so irretrievably as to allow direct quotation or broadcasting of the entire press conference. I might add that in practice, in the two years that I was at the White House, I don't recall any occasions when there were any slips of this kind. Of course, any human being can make some little mistake or have a slip in memory of minor

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details, but I can't recall any serious slips.

MORRISSEY: Would you say then that Mr. Truman's memory was pretty good?

PERLMETER: I thought it was above average.

MORRISSEY: Was any consideration ever given to having reporters submit their questions beforehand so the President would have some advance notice of what might be asked?

PERLMETER: No. The submission of questions in advance limits the scope of the press conference quite seriously, and the press generally regards this as obnoxious and Mr. Truman, so far as I know, gave no thought to it.

MORRISSEY: When you were in the press office, had you made any preparations for handling the press relations of the President in case of a great national emergency such as an attack by an enemy power? Or in case of illness to Mr. Truman, were there procedures already determined of how the news would be handled?

PERLMETER: Well, there were (I assume everyone knows) plans for protecting the physical person of the President during such times, and of course those plans included the members of the White House staff. There was discussion from time

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to time of what procedures might be useful in getting some representative members of the press to the same place where the President was located so that they could inform the American people, in the first place, of the President's safety and in the second place, of his actions and decisions.

MORRISSEY: These plans never were followed?

PERLMETER: There was never any occasion to follow them.

MORRISSEY: How would your job be different if the President's press conference was in Key West instead of Washington?

PERLMETER: We held a number of press conferences in Key West and the procedures were very generally the same; the setting was different. Whereas in Washington, press conferences are held in a formal hall and everyone has a comfortable seat, in Key West, sometimes, press conferences were held in improvised quarters or even on the lawn and naturally were much more informal.

MORRISSEY: What would be the arrangements for a press conference when the President was home in Independence?

PERLMETER: Some members of the press traveled with the Pres-

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ident wherever he went and on such trips there would be frequent opportunities, probably more frequent than in Washington, for the press to see and talk with the President, sometimes in press conference fashion, sometimes just in informal conversation.

MORRISSEY: Did you have any particular problems with photographers as well as newspaper reporters? Were there special arrangements for photographers?

PERLMETER: One of my duties was to take care of a large part of the photographic arrangements. This wasn't particularly difficult because Mr. Truman was very cooperative in allowing pictures. The job consisted, to a large extent, of such arrangements as would keep the picture taking from interfering with what was going on, and generally speaking, the photographers were very cooperative.

MORRISSEY: Did you ride on the campaign train in 1952?

PERLMETER: Yes, I did..

MORRISSEY: Could you tell me something about handling the relationship between the President and the press on the campaign train?

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PERLMETER: The President had, as you may recall, a special train and the press rode in, as I recall, a couple of special cars. The press secretary's staff rode in a car next to the President's and acted as liaison between them, pretty much day and night. In addition, the President would occasionally stroll back through the press cars and greet the members of the press, most of whom were personal friends of his. The President was traveling and speaking on such a heavy schedule that there didn't seem to be much need or occasion for a press conference. The President

sometimes was giving twelve or thirteen speeches at a day--just keeping up with the speeches was a physical ordeal.

MORRISSEY: Would the reporters tend to get out behind the train and dutifully report the President's words or would they stay inside?

PERLMETER: One of the jobs of the press secretary's office was to provide the press, as nearly as possible, with advance copies of the material which the President was going to use in his speech; however, to a very large extent, the press would get out of the train and go to the rear platform to listen to him. To do otherwise would

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take the chance of missing some impromptu remark that wasn't in the prepared text.

MORRISSEY: When you were riding the campaign train in 1952, were members of the press sensitive to the fact that four years before the election had been a great surprise and many people were completely wrong about the outcome because they had misinterpreted the meaning of large and enthusiastic crowds for Truman?

PERLMETER: I'm sure that the 1948 experience inhibited some of the prophecies in '52; however, since Mr. Truman was not himself a candidate in '52, the atmosphere was quite different.

MORRISSEY: Were there any problems in handling the press relations between the Stevenson people in Springfield and the Truman campaign people in Washington?

PERLMETER: I have knowledge only of the press side, and as far as I know, the relations were quite harmonious and cooperative. Mr. Clayton Fritchey, who had been on President Truman's staff, joined Governor Stevenson's staff. Mr. Fritchey had been a newspaper man and was on close terms with our office.

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MORRISSEY: When the President was campaigning in 1952, did some member of your office precede the train by a day or two and try to establish relations with the local press that might want to come aboard the train in local coverage of the President's visit?

PERLMETER: No, in general, the advance arrangements during the '52 campaign were made by the local Democratic committee and the special arrangements for the President and his party were made by an advance section of the Secret Service. Of course, the Secret Service was not active in regard to political arrangements, but did make the arrangements as to where and when the President would stop and would prepare his time schedule and things of that sort. They would also see that appropriate arrangements were made to admit the local press and the radio people.

MORRISSEY: Did you do any briefing for the President before he'd go out on the back platform and address a group?

PERLMETER: The President had a full crew of speech writers helping him on the train; however, the press staff was asked for suggestions and did give them occasionally, and on a couple of occasions even tried our hand at writing a few

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remarks although there was really not much time for that sort of thing.

MORRISSEY: In other words, the President's words were mostly spontaneous?

PERLMETER: Realizing the President was speaking twelve to thirteen times a day on a large variety of subjects, in a number of different localities, whose special interests and characteristics had to be taken into account, obviously the President had to have a great deal of staff help and naturally the speech writers prepared a great deal of material which the President reviewed and revised.

MORRISSEY: Could you identify some of these speech writers you refer to on the '52 train?

PERLMETER: The principal ones were Mr. Murphy, who was the Special Counsel, David Bell, David Lloyd, Richard Neustadt, and Kenneth Hechler.

MORRISSEY: Did you have much to do with television while you were serving in the White House?

PERLMETER: Yes, television was, in general, handled as just another news media, just as radio and newspapers. However,

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there were special programs for television. The one most vivid in my memory, of course, is the President's tour of the reconstructed White House. As you know, the White House had fallen into very serious disrepair by 1948, and the President and his family had to move across the street to Blair House while the White House was being reconstructed, and I mean reconstructed to the bare walls. When the reconstruction was completed and the President moved back in, I had the good fortune to be able to arrange, with the President's permission, for the three major television networks to bring their cameras and their representatives into the White House, and to accompany the President

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on a tour of the reconstructed White House so that the people could see the results of the reconstruction.

MORRISSEY: Did this take a great deal of preparation?

PERLMETER: Yes it did. It took a lot of investigation of historical and other memorable items which were incorporated in memoranda for the President's use; it involved a lot of planning of a technical nature with the television networks as to how and where to place cameras, how to design a format which would be appropriate in having the correspondents accompany the President.

MORRISSEY: Who did the research on the history of the White House? Did you do that?

PERLMETER: I prepared the memoranda but I was assisted, of course, by various people including the usher staff of the White House, the Park Service and others.

MORRISSEY: What did the President do with these memoranda that you prepared?

PERLMETER: He read them some hours before the tour, familiarized himself with them, but of course, he didn't try to memorize anything; he spoke as he usually spoke, extemporaneously, introducing many things from his own memory as well as things from the memoranda.

MORRISSEY: Did he seem to enjoy the tour?

PERLMETER: I think he did very much. Mr. Truman, as I think everybody realizes, has a great interest in American history and is very proud of it, and the White House to him is an important element or reminder of our history, and he was very happy to do this.

MORRISSEY: Were there any instances where he favored or did not favor using television to present himself or his ideas

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to the nation?

PERLMETER: Of course, many of his formal addresses were televised, as well as his appearances before joint sessions of Congress, and on special occasions such as the end of World War II. Outside of such official occasions, the only other occasion of a personal nature, (at least I call it personal) was his Farewell Address. As Mr. Truman's Administration drew to a close, he tried to present a very detailed summation of his Administration in his last State of the Union Message to the Congress, the first week in January, '53. It was my feeling that the President being a very warm person with a very affectionate regard for people would want, in addition, to give a more personal farewell to the American people, and therefore with his permission, arranged for a farewell radio and television address which he gave on January 15, 1953. This was an address, which to a very large extent, he wrote out in long hand in the privacy of his study without any help from speech writers or staff. Of course, after his preliminary draft was ready, his staff went over it and assisted him in filling in little spots here and there, but basically, it was a personal message which is exactly what all of us

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hoped he would give.

MORRISSEY: Would the President's preparation for a speech that was going to be televised differ from the preparations for a speech that would not be televised?

PERLMETER: Not in any important respect. Of course, it was his custom in the privacy of his study or office, to read such an address before going on the air. He might have done it a bit more carefully if he knew he was going on the air. He made no other preparations; he didn't use makeup or anything of that sort.

MORRISSEY: Am I right to assume that one of the duties of a person like yourself in your capacity on the White House staff, would be to protect the President's privacy as well as allow the press and the public to have access to his thinking and doing?

PERLMETER: That works both ways. We certainly felt an obligation to the President to protect his privacy from unnecessary and unwarranted prying; on the other hand, we felt we had a responsibility to the people to keep them advised as to the health of the President, and of the nature of his activities without getting into matters which were very per-

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sonal, say of a family nature.

MORRISSEY: Did the President himself establish any guide lines in this regard?

PERLMETER: No particular guide lines, except that he made it quite clear that he disliked having his wife and daughter discussed unnecessarily in public.

MORRISSEY: Were you responsible for arranging radio time if the President wanted to go on radio and speak to the nation?

PERLMETER: Yes, of course, I wasn't the only one. Either Mr. Short or Mr. Tubby could or did on occasion. I think that most of the time I had something to do with it.

MORRISSEY: Could you tell me what would be considered in terms of timing of such an address? Would the day of the week make a difference and the time of the night--this sort of thing?

PERLMETER: That depended on the urgency of the message. Usually the date was determined by other circumstances, such as an international crisis, or a scheduled event in Congress, or something of that sort. As far as the exact hour of the broadcast, the networks were consulted as to the time they

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could most easily make available and it was negotiated largely on that basis. However, as I recall, with a few if any exceptions, the arrangements were very generous and very adequate. As to good times and bad times to go on the air, as you know, there are quite a few people who are not interested in politics or national or international affairs and any time the President went on the air and superseded normal entertainment programs, the White House got a great many complaints about interference with favorite programs.

MORRISSEY: So this would be a consideration in your thinking?

PERLMETER: A small consideration. Obviously there is no time that would be both suitable for the President and free of conflict with entertainment programs.

MORRISSEY: Would your office watch carefully the response to a Presidential speech in terms of the White House mail that would come in?

PERLMETER: Very definitely. The White House mail room, for reasons which the press office could never understand, used to send us all the mail that came in that said anything about somebody having heard the President on radio

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or television or seen something that he said in the newspaper. The consequence was that regardless of the subject matter of the President's speeches, the press office usually caught the brunt of answering the mail.

MORRISSEY: Would the President himself be interested in the response?

PERLMETER: Of course. The White House mail is so enormous that no one person, or for that matter, no dozen of persons could possibly answer it all by themselves. Therefore the mail was sorted out so that only those communications which might have a special personal interest to the President, either because of the identity of the sender, or because of the nature of the message, were forwarded for his personal consideration. The President depended upon his staff to take care of the rest with, of course, the lines of thanking which he had indicated.

MORRISSEY: Was there any one person in particular who would handle this chore?

PERLMETER: Mr. Truman had one secretary, at first Mr. Hassett, and towards the end, Mrs. Short, who was in general responsible for correspondence.

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MORRISSEY: Who would usually consult with the President about the response in the mail to a Presidential speech?

PERLMETER: Mostly the correspondence secretary. The clerical staff, as a matter of routine presented tally sheets to him periodically giving the volume of correspondence and an indication of the contents.

MORRISSEY: Do you recall any specific instances when the President was pleased or displeased by the response to a speech he had delivered?

PERLMETER: I don't think so in those terms. The President was a realist and he knew that some of the things which he felt he had to do as a matter of duty would not necessarily be popular. As you know, after he relieved General MacArthur of his command in Korea, there was a very heavy response in the mail and otherwise, and this response was to a very large extent, antagonistic to the President. Naturally this was not something that he could be pleased about, but it was not, on the other hand, unexpected. I recall that the morning after the MacArthur incident, the press staff brought to his attention the rather strong reactions in the press and the President's comments (I can't remember the exact words) were to the

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effect that he had anticipated that, that he had thought for a long time and very heavily on the consequences of the action and determined that it was a necessary and proper action, and that he couldn't avoid the criticism that inevitably followed.

MORRISSEY: As one who attended many press conferences of President Roosevelt and attended, of course, many press conferences of President Truman, could you comment on the differences or similarities between these two Presidents?

PERLMETER: Of course, the two personalities were completely different. Mr. Roosevelt was a man who was reared in, more or less, patrician circumstances; had a very fine education; had held various public offices and was instinctively a great showman. Mr. Truman was, in my opinion, equally brilliant, but cut of more homely cloth. Mr. Truman was a farm boy from Missouri, whose education was terminated for financial reasons without getting a college degree and whose prior experience was limited to service in the Senate and a brief time as Vice President. Although I think he was generally very popular with the press, that is the reporters, and I think he communicated quite well with them, he was naturally much more the homespun charac-

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ter than Roosevelt was.

MORRISSEY: Is there any specific way in which their handling of the press conference stands out in your memory?

PERLMETER: The general format of the press conference was about the same. I think that Mr. Roosevelt probably did much more joking and indulged in much more metaphor than Mr. Truman, but Mr. Truman was always in a good humor.

MORRISSEY: Mr. Roosevelt has a reputation to historians as being something of a phrase-maker. One thinks of the references to the "garden hose" in terms of Lend Lease.

PERLMETER: I was there.

MORRISSEY: "Dr. Win-the-War," "Dr. New Deal," that sort of thing. Would you say Mr. Truman had a similar knack for striking off these rather impressive phases?

PERLMETER: Well, he made his share of phrases, but they weren't always as successful. As you'll recall, his reference to the Alger Hiss affair as a "red herring" was something that came to haunt him because of a general misunderstanding as to the meaning of the phrase.

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MORRISSEY: Were you on the staff when that came up?

PERLMETER: No, that was before the time I came to the staff. Similarly, you may recall, there was a reference to the Marine Corps that to this day rankles that arm of the services. But these were merely, I think, evidences of the down-to-earth nature of the man and the fact that he, like most of the rest of us, preferred talking in rather plain terms.

MORRISSEY: Are there any other ways in which the (let's say) differences between FDR in a press conference and Mr. Truman in a press conference stand out in your memory?

PERLMETER: I don't think of any. Actually the similarities were much greater than the differences, and the differences were strictly differences of personality rather than of format.

MORRISSEY: What was your relationship with the publicity division of the Democratic National Committee?

PERLMETER: We were, of course, on close and friendly terms. Sometimes, the publicity director of the Democratic National Committee would visit with us and with the President.

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Sometimes he would sit in on a pre-press conference session. Sometimes there were occasions to consult back and forth on matters of mutual interest. By and large, the operations were completely independent of each other.

MORRISSEY: Would there be any arrangements, say during the '52 campaign, about releasing news concerning the President, any arrangements between your office and the publicity director of the National Committee?

PERLMETER: All news about the President was released by our office.

MORRISSEY: Did you have any difficulties in the '52 campaign about releasing news in time to meet different deadlines in different parts of the country?

PERLMETER: This is one of the great bugaboos of any press secretary. I think, generally speaking we were able to get material to people that needed it well in advance, but it was always a struggle. I should add that providing advance copies of messages and speeches is not an unmixed blessing. Generally speaking, it's thought to be advisable because it enables the reporters to write

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their articles more thoroughly and more carefully, and as a result bring benefit to the speaker. On the other hand, since inevitably some of the recipients of such advance copies are bound to be hostile to the President, the interval between receiving the advance copy and the actual delivery of the message provides an opportunity for opponents to round up counter arguments which in the case of hostile editors may be used to offset or even overcome the President's remarks. I think that the balance usually is still in favor of providing advance copies, but it's not an unmixed blessing.

MORRISSEY: Could you give an example of this last point?

PERLMETER: Well, Mr. Truman was, of course, leader of the Democratic party and very often advance copies of his messages to Congress particularly, were seen by spokesmen for the Republican party in advance and their comments and counter arguments frequently were given a great deal of prominence in newspapers that were not friendly to the President, and maybe even in many other newspapers. Just as a technical matter, if there were no advance copies, there would be a natural time lag before the counter arguments would appear. I'm not saying that there shouldn't

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be comments and protests from those who don't agree with the President. This is perfectly natural, but it gets down to a question of timing.

MORRISSEY: How much in advance would these advance copies be released?

PERLMETER: Usually 24 to 48 hours.

MORRISSEY: Did you take any steps to try to control this premature circulation of what the President was going to say, for example, in a Congressional speech?

PERLMETER: We constantly emphasized that it was against the rules to show advance copies to anyone other than the press itself, but there was no way of really policing it.

MORRISSEY: Did the press corps itself try to control this internally, as a matter of honor?

PERLMETER: I don't think the press corps generally felt any responsibility for this.

MORRISSEY: What were your relations with Government information officers elsewhere in the Government when you were in the White House?

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PERLMETER: The press secretary's office, of course, was looked on by the other information offices for leadership on a great many things and Mr. Short tried to hold conferences with the other information people from time to time. When we in the press office received questions for which we needed information from one of the departments or agencies, we would usually call the information people--sometimes we called the head of the agency directly. On some special occasions, we had special conferences of the information people. I recall at one time the Air Force proposed an executive order which would have had the effect of closing down all television stations, and putting all radio stations on the Conelrad system in the event of enemy attack. This involved rather delicate relations with the broadcasting industry and for purposes of getting an expression of opinion from the industry, I had the privilege of arranging a conference, not only with the broadcasting industry, but with the leading information officers of the other departments.

MORRISSEY: Did you have any special difficulties on the release of information concerning the national security--any security classified information?

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PERLMETER: We had no problems about specific cases. We were constantly involved in discussions as to what the rules were and should be. During a good part of the two years that I was at the White House, there was a running dialogue with the Defense Department and the State Department as to the general rules for classifying Government information. Mr. Short, Mr. Tubby, and I, probably naturally in view of our backgrounds, were in favor of less rigid rules than the technicians of the Defense and State Departments thought necessary. In the last analysis, the President, after discussing the matter with the National Security Council, approved the rules very much as the military and State and F.B.I. people had proposed. The President came in for a great deal of criticism about the rigidity of those regulations. The press office could only counsel otherwise; it, of course, had no authority in the matter. The President was inclined to regard defense considerations as being overriding, which isn't unnatural. As long as the people responsible for national defense thought these regulations necessary, he was inclined to go along with them.

MORRISSEY: Was there any fear by members of the press corps about overzealous Government employees classifying materials

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which, in their opinion, should be released as news?

PERLMETER: Well, such fears are indigenous to the press, having a press background myself, I am inclined in the same direction.

MORRISSEY: But the President was not prevailed upon to adopt these more liberal...?

PERLMETER: The President gave full hearing to the other side and he had Mr. Short appear before the full National Security Council to present the press viewpoint. General Marshall, at that time, had become Secretary of State, and with the prestige of such important service in both departments, counseled for the stronger regulations. The President, to a large extent, followed his advice in this matter.

MORRISSEY: If a Cabinet member was going to hold a press conference, would he tend to check first with the White House press secretary to see that his (that is the Cabinet member's), conference didn't conflict in timing or in the release of important items of news with what the White House was thinking of doing?

PERLMETER: It wasn't necessary for them to check because the

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President's press conferences were always very widely advertised and as a matter of prudence, no other Government official could expect much of an audience if he held his conference at a conflicting time.

MORRISSEY: There were steps taken, in other words, to assure that several items of big news wouldn't flood the newspaper reading public on one day or to the contrary that a day or two or three might go by in which no major news was released from the White House.

PERLMETER: I don't recall anything deliberate of this sort, no.

MORRISSEY: Do you recall how the President would handle his press conference on the budget?

PERLMETER: Yes, a few days before the Budget Message was delivered to Congress, the President would hold what he called a "press briefing." This was an off-the-record press conference--off-the-record for the time being only. The press was told that they couldn't use the contents until the time and day that the Budget Message itself was released, which was usually about forty-eight hours later. The President would usually be accompanied by the Secretary of the Treasury and the Director of the Budget, and a few

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staff people. The President used to spend a great deal of time in examining the budget on a line by line basis and was able, ordinarily, to answer very detailed questions about his budget. I recall, on a few occasions down at Key West, seeing him very early in the morning working on

the line by line pages of the budget. The President used to remark on what a chore it was, but how important he felt it was that he do so.

MORRISSEY: Would there be a more lengthy briefing session before the press conference on the budget?

PERLMETER: Well, it was a different type of briefing in that most of the briefing was done not by the White House press staff--although we participated in it--but most of the prepared material came from the Bureau of the Budget. You see, the Bureau works on the Budget Message for some months before the delivery and is intimately familiar with every detail of it. It would have been, we felt, unwise, and unworkable for the press staff at the very last minute to skim over the thing and try to pick things out.

MORRISSEY: Would members of the press in search of news go directly to White House staff members; I mean, other people in addition to yourself, Mr. Tubby and Mr. Short; or were the

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procedures quite well established that they should come for news through your office?

PERLMETER: There were no restrictions on their going to other members of the White House staff. Of course, the other members of the White House staff were sometimes reluctant to be interviewed, because all of us were naturally in possession of a great deal of confidential information and all had to be careful that we didn't violate any confidences that were imposed upon us. Of course, the press staff had another obligation to communicate with the press and we tried to do both of them as best we could.

MORRISSEY: Did members of the press have any little tricks they would use to try to squeeze news out of the White House?

PERLMETER: I don't recall anything that you could call tricks. Of course, since the dozen or so reporters who are constantly around the White House saw the President on a great many informal occasions, they all tried to develop informal relations with the President and very often succeeded. One of the issues that I think every President faces is the question of whether he ought to give private interviews to a particular individual. This is always very controversial

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because the other members of the press who don't get such a special interview, always feel discriminated against. The President, after all, belongs to all the people and all the people are entitled to know what's going on and why. On the other hand, it's a newspaper tradition that those reporters who have the brains and the initiative to get news that other people don't have--to get scoops--are entitled to the fruits of such scoops. Mr. Truman's attitude was that, generally speaking, he would not give private interviews, making exceptions only for special occasions which had some special extenuating circumstances.

MORRISSEY: Do you remember any particular difficulties regarding the special interviews that were sometimes granted?

PERLMETER: Well, I recall that he gave a couple of special interviews to Arthur Krock of the *New York Times* which is very interesting in view of the fact that Mr. Krock seems to be somewhat critical of President Kennedy for giving similar interviews to other reporters. Outside of the closing weeks of his Administration, the President gave very few of these exclusive interviews. In the closing weeks of his Administration, he gave a substantial number of private interviews, but these were interviews not for the purpose

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of giving news about public affairs; these were merely personal interviews to describe the mood of a retiring President, and were very poignant and very effective. No one, as far as I know, resented the fact that he gave these special interviews.

MORRISSEY: Would Mr. Truman try to deal directly with the editors of the newspapers as well as their representatives--the reporters in Washington?

PERLMETER: Generally speaking, not.

MORRISSEY: Would he pay attention to what the reporters were saying? Would he read them?

PERLMETER: Oh, definitely. The President customarily awoke between 5 and 6 o'clock in the morning and before breakfast would go through four or five of the principal newspapers in quite considerable detail.

MORRISSEY: How about the news magazines?

PERLMETER: He was generally familiar with them, but I think he got most of his news from the daily newspapers.

MORRISSEY: Did he pay much attention to columnists?

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PERLMETER: Well, he read them.

MORRISSEY: Do you know of any he admired?

PERLMETER: Oh, I'm sure he did admire some of them. He had his disagreements with some of them such as Drew Pearson, although I understand that the two men are on quite friendly terms now. I don't think Mr. Truman had any general feelings for or against columnists except that they were just another breed of newspaper people.

MORRISSEY: Would you care to make a statement advising the future historian about how much weight he should give to the words of someone like Drew Pearson?

PERLMETER: No. I wouldn't want to do that.

MORRISSEY: While you were in the White House, Senator McCarthy on the Hill was certainly making headlines. In fact, headline hunting seemed to be very much in season during the last couple of years of the Truman Administration. Was there any effort on the part of the White House to combat this headline hunting by Congressional committees and some senators who were making statements about the national security and the loyalty of Government employees and so forth?

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PERLMETER: There's nothing that the White House can do about things like that. The prerogatives of the Congress are such that there's just literally nothing that the White House can do about matters like that.

MORRISSEY: Do you recall anything about the charges of disloyalty that were cast upon David Lloyd?

PERLMETER: I just have a general recollection that there were some loose comments about him. Those of us who knew him at the White House never had any doubts about his loyalty.

MORRISSEY: The reason I ask, I was wondering if the President displayed any response that would stick out in your memory about not only the charges against David Lloyd, but similar charges against another staff member, Philleo Nash?

PERLMETER: Well, I know that he had great confidence in both of them. That's all I can recall.

MORRISSEY: Do you recall anything about the President's feeling concerning the attacks on the Secretary of State, Mr. Acheson?

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PERLMETER: Of course, he was a great admirer of Mr. Acheson and defended him on many occasions. I just don't recall any specific incidents.

MORRISSEY: Anything about the press treatment of General Vaughan or Donald Dawson?

PERLMETER: The President, of course, felt both of them had been treated very unfairly. There wasn't anything that any of us could do about it except--of course, there was general discussion of how, where, and when they could defend themselves either at Congressional hearings or in the newspapers or on radio and so forth.

MORRISSEY: Were you in the White House when John Hersey wrote the articles that appeared in the *New Yorker*?

PERLMETER: Yes, I was.

MORRISSEY: Could you tell me something about the arrangements that were made for Mr. Hersey?

PERLMETER: I wasn't in very close contact with that. I know that he spent two or three weeks around the White House, was permitted to attend staff meetings, to accompany the President on his walks and otherwise to get a very

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close intimate look at how the White House operated.

MORRISSEY: Do you know who took the initiative for this arrangement?

PERLMETER: No. I don't.

MORRISSEY: Do you recall the President ever commenting about what we might call the "one party press?"

PERLMETER: He commented frequently about that. The President felt that the owners of newspapers, as distinguished from the reporters, were almost universally Republican in sentiment. In the 1948 campaign, nearly all of them opposed his election. In the 1952 election, approximately the same number favored the Republican candidate.

MORRISSEY: Was there any problem with news leaking out of the White House?

PERLMETER: There were one or two occasions when the President and the press office were a little concerned about matters that leaked out, but they weren't of any serious nature and such occasions were quite rare.

MORRISSEY: Do you recall these one or two occasions you refer

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to?

PERLMETER: One I particularly recall had to do with the events of the President's meeting with General MacArthur on Wake Island during the Korean War. That event happened, of course, before I came to the White House. There was an article which appeared in one of the newspapers afterwards that raised a few eyebrows.

MORRISSEY: Do you recall anything about the release of the transcript of the conversations between the President and the General on Wake Island?

PERLMETER: My memory is a little fuzzy on the point, but I think the story I have in mind bore on that and I think there was some material released after the leak in order to clarify it--what happened.

MORRISSEY: Would the President use his press conferences at all for the purposes of elevating "trial balloons?"

PERLMETER: I don't recall any occasion in which the President deliberately tested a proposal in that fashion. The President felt that the reactions that he got from the things he said at press conferences were instructive to him and I have no doubt that these reactions to some

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extent affected his thinking and actions.

MORRISSEY: How would one control visitors coming out of the President's office from talking to representatives of the press rather indiscreetly? Was this a problem? Were there efforts to control it?

PERLMETER: This was, and I suppose still is, a problem. The general rule, both then and now, as I understand it, is that visitors who leave the White House are free to discuss what they told the President, but are expected to treat what he said as confidential unless they have made some specific arrangements to the contrary.

MORRISSEY: Would the President use a press conference sometimes to "light a fire" under Congress?

PERLMETER: Well, as you know, there were times, especially in 1948 when the Republicans were in control of Congress, when the President paid his respects to Congress from time to time. During the two years that I was at the White House there weren't, generally speaking, occasions for this sort of thing.

MORRISSEY: Was there ever any talk about the idea of debates between Presidential candidates in an election year, such

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as we had in 1960?

PERLMETER: I hate to say that it was never discussed, but I have no recollection of it being discussed. I don't recall that such debates for the Presidency or for any other major office took place on radio or television for a good many years before 1958. Of course all of us know that the device is at least as old as the Lincoln-Douglas debates, but I don't recall any occasion in modern

times when candidates for major office conducted such debates until the Nixon-Kennedy debates.

MORRISSEY: Was there any effort in a press conference to get a point across to a select audience, say for example, a regional audience if there was some point about water resources or power development in the West or to a minority group in terms of, let's say, the Negro newspapers or farm groups--something like that?

PERLMETER: Well, as we said, the President sometimes opened his press conference with some statement of his own without waiting for questions. Sometimes these were intended for special purposes. I don't recall that they were slanted for the purposes that you mention but they were a device for getting out special messages of various kinds.

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MORRISSEY: Was there anybody on the White House staff who was responsible for the clearance of speeches by other high Government officials, such as Cabinet members or clearance of speeches or releases, let's say, by General MacArthur from his headquarters?

PERLMETER: During the Korean War, the President issued an order that no Government official could give a public address on certain sensitive matters without clearance. There were strict clearance procedures set up in both the Defense and State Departments and in most cases the clearance was sufficient; however, on many special points, the Departments consulted the White House and very often the press office was the place to receive such calls and try to provide the answers either out of its own knowledge of the situation or after consultation with the President.

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The second interview with Irving Perlmeter in Washington, D.C., May 29, 1963.
By Charles T. Morrissey.

MORRISSEY: To what extent were you involved in the speech writing procedures?

PERLMETER: Except on special occasions, I was not directly involved in the original preparation of speeches. There was, as you know, a special staff, under the supervision of Mr. Murphy, which was assigned to this task. Generally speaking, the role of the press office, including myself, in connection with speeches, was to sit in on conferences which the President held with his staff after the preparation of the first draft of the speech. At such conferences,

usually held in the Cabinet Room, everyone was given an opportunity to speak up and make suggestions both about the substance of the draft and also about wording, arrangement and other characteristics. Of course, ultimately, the function of the press office was to have the advance text of the speech duplicated and distributed to the press and other necessary persons. On some special occasions, the press office was asked for suggestions or even for some written material before the preparation of the first draft.

MORRISSEY: Do you have any specific recollections of any

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specific speech writing sessions?

PERLMETER: Well, I remember a number of the conference-type sessions, particularly those involving the steel strike, the disarmament proposals, and other general speeches in the foreign and military affairs departments. During the time late in 1952 when we accompanied the President on his campaign trip, the President was speaking as many as twelve or thirteen times a day and even his very excellent speech writing staff could hardly keep up with him and still provide fresh material and fresh approaches at such frequent intervals, and on such occasions, all of us took a hand and I know I tried a couple myself. I don't recall which particular locations, but they were in the Far West.

MORRISSEY: Do you recall anything specific about these speeches on medical care or disarmament or the steel seizure that stands out in your memory?

PERLMETER: I don't recall specific details. I remember coming away from these conferences with a general feeling that the President had a much deeper and intimate knowledge of the subject than one could normally expect of a President considering how busy he is and how

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many different subjects he has to cover. Of course, these conferences were always subsequent to some time during which the President and his speech staff had had preliminary conferences, so he had been briefed to some extent. Also it should be noted that aside from the White House staff, the various departments and other agencies often contributed. For instance, in the case of the health speech, the Federal Security Agency, which was the predecessor of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, contributed a lot of material and suggestions which was revised and adapted by the White House speech staff. When we were dealing with foreign affairs, invariable one or more experts from the State Department would be present.

MORRISSEY: In a speech writing session for a speech on some aspect of international affairs, for example the disarmament speech that you referred to, would special care be given to the fact that this speech would be heard or read by many people outside the United States and it would have international repercussions?

PERLMETER: Oh yes, this was frequently discussed. The discussions, I would say, to a very large extent would pertain

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to what understanding and what reaction could be expected in various segments, both at home and abroad. The President, after all, didn't speak because he enjoyed speaking, because I don't think he did enjoy it. He spoke for a purpose; to get some idea across; to get some result to occur and the impact of the speech, whether it would be understood, how it would be understood and by whom it would be understood, were always central in the discussions.

MORRISSEY: Was there any particular person who was relied upon to offer judgment about the wording of a speech which had an international impact to it? Was there any expert, in other words, who was selected for this type of chore?

PERLMETER: There were various people. The individual that I recall being present most often on such occasion was Marshall Shulman.

MORRISSEY: In a speech like the one on medical care, to what extent would the President direct this words at the critics of medical care and to what extent, say, to possible votes for his program or against his program on Capitol Hill?

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PERLMETER: Well, as far as the speech itself is concerned, it was always directed toward getting a positive acceptance by the audience. The President, naturally, had very strong feelings about the opponents of policies in which he believed and was free to express these in private conversation. But he did not regard these feelings as being appropriate for incorporation in his speeches.

MORRISSEY: Do you recall anything particular about the President's speech on the steel seizure in 1952?

PERLMETER: No. I recall attending the conference. I don't recall any specific details.

MORRISSEY: Do you recall anything about his attitude to the rebuttal offered by Clarence Randall?

PERLMETER: No. I don't.

MORRISSEY: Did the President remark in your presence on the uses of publicity and the press treatment of the positions maintained by labor and management during the steel seizure issue?

PERLMETER: Only that the President had a feeling that there was a rather general lack of understanding of the pur-

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poses of the seizure and particularly the effects of the strike on military production. There were many classified facts about serious deficiencies in military production. The President felt, and the rest of the White House staff did too, that neither the steel companies nor the general public understood the impact the steel strike was having on very important and very urgent military production.

MORRISSEY: Do you remember anything about the President's attitude towards the tidelands oil controversy?

PERLMETER: Only that it was something that he mentioned frequently.

MORRISSEY: Do you recall anything about the dismissal of General MacArthur?

PERLMETER: Yes, that's very vivid. Due to an illness in the family, I wasn't at the White House the day preceding the dismissal of General MacArthur. Oh, roughly, at 6 p.m. of that day, I called Mr. Short to see if I was needed for any purpose and he told me that there was something very important going on and he couldn't discuss it over the telephone, but suggested that I go home and get

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some rest because he thought that he and Mr. Tubby might be up all night and that some member of the office ought to be in fresh condition the next morning. When I arrived the next morning, I had, of course, heard over the radio about the dismissal of General MacArthur and was told briefly what had happened by Mr. Short and Mr. Tubby. Mr. Tubby, in fact, spent the entire night at the White House sleeping on one of the couches in the lobby of the West Wing. As a matter of fact, he mentioned this fact to the President the next day and the President expressed surprise that Mr. Tubby didn't come over and borrow a bed over in the Blair House where the Presidential family was. He was so sincere about it and it was such an unlikely thing for anybody to do that everybody thought it was quite a joke. But that's beside the fact. Rather early that morning, the President had a staff conference at which the public reaction to the MacArthur incident was discussed. Mr. Short in particular summarized the press reaction that was available up to that time, and of course the reaction was quite hostile to the President. The reaction of the President was that he had anticipated this. He didn't desire it. He felt that the action in the MacArthur case was necessary for the purposes of

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upholding civilian control of the United States Armed Forces and that it was his duty to take the action whether or not it was popular and that he knew it would not be popular. The press office, of course, was quite busy all day long answering various questions from the press and also making preparations for the President's broadcast in which he explained his position to the public.

MORRISSEY: Do you recall who worked on that broadcast?

PERLMETER: The regular speech staff. Incidentally, I might mention that the President told us that he slept very soundly after the announcement of the MacArthur incident which took place, as I recall it, at about 1 a.m. One of the personal aspects of the President which was always very surprising was the evenness of his temperament. This was in great contrast to the things which you read in the newspaper which seemed to indicate that he was a man of rather violent extremes, which just simply wasn't the fact. Right in the midst of the MacArthur business, as in other crises, at least as I was able to observe, he was always calm and as far as we could tell, never missed a moment's sleep. We used to kid around about this and

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the President would always pass it off on the basis that as long as he felt he was doing the right thing, he saw no reason why he shouldn't sleep soundly. In other words, the thought that he gave us was that his personal reaction to these crises was based not on the immediate reaction of the public but whether the action was in accordance with his conscience and duty.

MORRISSEY: Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., on the basis of his experience as a White House staff member during the Kennedy Administration, commented in a paper last December that in view of his experience--recent experiences--he felt as an historian he could no longer put great weight on the interpretations in the press of what goes on and how decisions are made in the White House. Do you have any comment on this viewpoint?

PERLMETER: I don't think anyone can generalize about that. It is true that the press cannot possibly know all the details of how policies are arrived at and cannot know the motivation of all the characters involved, and furthermore, in the case of very important issues, especially in the military and diplomatic fields, so much of the information

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is classified that the newspapers can't possibly have the whole story. I would hope that Mr. Schlesinger is not implying that the newspapers deliberately distort the facts of such cases. While you can find individual instances of almost any kind of behavior, at least my experience was that to the extent that information was available, the facts were generally reported with reasonably high degree of accuracy. The problem is that the press cannot possibly have access to all the facts. This is something that newspapermen generally worry about and should worry about, because in our democratic traditions, the public, with the press helping the public, should have access to as much information as possible. However, since the time of George Washington, Presidents and Presidents' helpers had to withhold some things which affected national security. In the long run you just have to balance national security and your ideals of free democracy.

MORRISSEY: Throughout the latter part of Mr. Truman's tenure, until late March of 1952, there was much speculation about whether he would run again as a candidate for the Presidency in 1952. Do you recall much about this speculation or about Mr. Truman's thinking on the subject?

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PERLMETER: I remember a little. Several months before he announced that he would not run again, the President, during a visit to Key West, gave some broad hints to his staff of his position but bound them to secrecy. From time to time after that, there would be references to the Key West discussions and to other events since then. There came a time when he was to address a political dinner at the Armory and was to deliver a fairly routine political speech. I recall that the speech was scheduled on a Saturday and Saturday was only a half workday at the White House. Before leaving for the day, Mr. Short went over to the residential part of the White House to speak to the President, and came back with a little slip of paper about three inches wide and about three inches long on which the President had in his own handwriting written a paragraph which he later inserted in his speech that night, announcing that he would not run again. This slip of paper was written by him without notice or consultation as far as we could tell.

MORRISSEY: So you were informed at least that the great surprise was coming before it came.

PERLMETER: A few hours before. Of course, we had had the

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hints down in Key West.

MORRISSEY: Some people have claimed that the Administration might have done better to inform the American public about the issues involved regarding China and Korea. Do you think that the Administration could have done differently in terms of explaining why Chiang Kai-shek, for example had to flee to Formosa in 1949, or why American troops were involved in Korea after June of 1950?

PERLMETER: These events were prior to the time when I worked at the White House and they were at a time when my interest was only very general. I don't think I could contribute much to that subject.

MORRISSEY: What occupied your time during the transition between November '52 and January, '53?

PERLMETER: To a large extent, it consisted of helping a large number of writers who wanted to get from the President before he left the White House, moods, thoughts, reactions, based on the fact that since the President was leaving the White House, he might be in a more philosophical mood and might feel freer to speak. As near as I can recall, the President granted every request for such an

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interview that was put to him and he gave a great number of them. Up until about a day or two before the inauguration of President Eisenhower, (I think we discussed before his Farewell

Speech) there was, of course, a lot of discussion about packing and shipping of records and the President made arrangements for a personal office in Kansas City where he could have his records and his secretary and see visitors and do other things.

MORRISSEY: Was there any policy regarding the disposition of papers or the publication of reminiscences by White House staff members?

PERLMETER: From almost the first day that I went to work at the White House, I was given to understand that the keeping of personal diaries on matters beyond the individual's personal cognizance was not welcome. I seem to recall that the remark was attributed to someone--I think it was Dean Acheson who was then Secretary of State, or perhaps Under Secretary of State--that the trouble with keeping a diary was that one was influenced to try to act in a manner which would look good in the diary whether or not it was a good position from the standpoint of logic and morals. As the Truman Adminis-

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tration drew to a close, the President indicated to his staff that while he realized it was quite natural for some of them to want to write about the period, that he also was planning to do some writing and in order to prevent interference with his own publication, he hoped that such matters would not be published without consulting him. I know that there were some personal arrangements between the President and certain members of his staff. I'm not sure what those arrangements were.

MORRISSEY: Were you specifically concerned with the interviews held by William Hillman with the President?

PERLMETER: Well, I knew Mr. Hillman very well and talked to him on a great many occasions. I remember the time when Mr. Hillman was preparing the book, *Mr. President*. I don't think I recall the particular interviews you have in mind.

MORRISSEY: Did you have much to do with James Hagerty during the transition?

PERLMETER: Well, a little bit. After Mr. Eisenhower was elected Mr. Hagerty was invited to the White House to see what arrangements would be necessary for purposes of his

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principal. Mr. Hagerty had been an old friend of Mr. Short's in the days when they both were newspaper reporters, and relations were quite cordial. Both at first and later after Mr. Short's death, there was a very friendly exchange of views as to what procedures had been followed in handling press matters and suggestions were offered back and forth. I had a couple of personal conversations with Mr. Hagerty regarding my intention to return to the Internal Revenue Service from which I had been loaned in the first place. Mr. Hagerty not only assured me that the administration of which he was a part would not object, but spoke of the matter to Mr. Humphrey who was to be Secretary of the Treasury who concurred in that thought.

MORRISSEY: As one who came into the White House staff in December, 1950, you must have had certain expectation of what your job would entail. Likewise, you must have had certain surprises after you were in the job for a while. In what way were you surprised by what your job entailed, particularly measured against the expectations you had before you went in?

PERLMETER: Well, as far as the actual press work is concerned,

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I was of course not really surprised by anything, because having been a working newspaper man in Washington for several years and having been a press information officer for a Government agency for several years, I was fairly well familiar with procedures and attitudes. The big surprise to me was Mr. Truman. Both, when I was working as a newspaperman and later when working at a Government agency, I became accustomed to the average types of supervisors and managers and had expected to find the President fairly aloof and demanding. Of course, Mr. Truman was neither one of these. I think I can honestly say that there was never anyone that I felt more at ease with than the President, or who was more generous in his dealings. I know that the day he left the White House there were many people on the White House staff who were literally in tears--the relationship was that warm.

MORRISSEY: Could you tell me briefly Mr. Perlmeter, what you've done since January of 1953?

PERLMETER: I stayed at the White House right up until the hour that Mr. Eisenhower was inaugurated, and left immediately, and reported for duty the very next day at the Internal Revenues Service, and have been there ever since. I am

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now in a position called Planning Officer in the Plans and Policy Division.

MORRISSEY: Do you have any more comments you'd like to make in regard to anything we've talked about today and last Friday?

PERLMETER: None occur to me at the moment. The experiences at a place like the White House are so varied, so moving, that they fill a large part of your mind and you're reminded at various times of details that you thought you'd forgotten, but it's kind of hard to pick them up all at one time. I don't think of anything.

MORRISSEY: Let me thank you very much for all your time and kindness.

PERLMETER: Thank you.

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