

Oral History Interview
with
JOHN ABBOTT

Naval officer who assisted in liaison between the liaison group in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations and the Senate Special Committee to Investigate the Defense Program (the Truman Committee), 1944-46, and a special assistant to Secretary of the Navy Forrestal, February-July 1946.

San Francisco, California
March 5 and March 17, 1970 by J. R. Fuchs, Harry S. Truman Library

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[1]

FUCHS: Mr. Abbott, to start, I wonder if you might give us a little of your background: a brief resumé of when and where you were born, your education, and how you got started in life until the time you came in touch with Mr. Truman and the Truman Committee when you were in the Navy.

ABBOTT: I was born in Flint, Michigan in 1911. I grew up in that town, graduated from high school there, and went to Marquette University in Milwaukee for college; graduated from the

[2]

Marquette School of Journalism. I followed journalism for the next several years, and came to California in 1936. I went to work for the United Press in Sacramento, the state capital, covering the legislature and the state departments there. I stayed in Sacramento, later transferring to the Associated Press, until 1940, and at that time I went to Washington and went to work for Congressman John H. Tolan of California. Mr. Tolan, shortly after I came to Washington was appointed the chairman of a select committee of the House with the responsibility of inquiring into the causes of destitute migration. This was during the era of the dust bowl and the great uprooting of people from the Southwestern United States, many thousands of whom came into California and other Western States. I stayed with that committee until 1942. During that period, also,

[3]

the Tolan committee responsibilities were changed somewhat and they were asked to inquire into what was then greater priority, since World War II had begun. That was the great movement on a nationwide basis to the war production centers, Navy and Army arsenals, shipyards, and so forth. So, again, I came back to the West Coast for a considerable period of time. The committee also made an investigation into the relocation of the Japanese people residing on the West Coast. During all of the period, 1940 to 1942, I was in frequent contact, of course, with the many members of the House and in some cases the Senate, although the committee's work, of course, related principally to the House.

In September 1942, I entered the military service and was commissioned a naval lieutenant junior grade at Washington, D.C. I was assigned shortly thereafter to training in South Boston, Chicago, and New Orleans, and eventually was

[4]

assigned to duty in the Armed Guard, a rather little known branch of the Naval service which had the duty of manning guns on merchant ships and transports. After about two years, or a little less, of sea duty, I was requested by the son of Congressman Tolan, John H. Tolan, Jr., to come to Washington for an interview for possible service at the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations. Mr. Tolan was already at work as a naval lieutenant in that office, under the direction of Captain John A. Kennedy. The mission of that office was to act as a liaison service for the Chief of Naval Operations and the various bureaus, and the Secretary of the Navy, with some of the committees of the House and the Senate who were inquiring into the several phases of the conduct of the war. The foremost assignment of that office was the relationship which the Navy and also the Army had, although that was not a direct part of our responsibility,

[5]

we were in frequent contact with the Army. The chief responsibility was to keep the lines of information and communication open to the Truman Committee as it was then known. The official name of the committee was, as I recall, the Senate War Investigating Committee.

A word of background about the Committee might be in order -- at least from my standpoint. The Committee was appointed by the United States Senate, I believe, early in 1941, possibly a little in advance of that. It was done at the urging of Senator Truman who felt that the United States was embarked upon, at that time, the greatest and the most costly effort in its history, and

Mr. Truman correctly foresaw that there would be, although I think that he did not see the full extent, he saw that this was to be an enormous effort.

Mr. Truman had told the Senate in justifying his requests that his principal objective

[6]

was to eliminate waste of money. He was likewise concerned, of course, and primarily concerned, with holding down the loss of lives, but he felt that this, was, except for within very narrow limits, not a proper function of the Senate. Mr. Truman frequently recalled, then and in later years, that his inspiration for this idea came from his own reading of history, especially the Civil War, where he had gone very deeply into the committee appointed during President Lincoln's administration called The Committee on the Conduct of the War. This committee took it upon itself to intervene directly into military operations. Mr. Truman's recollection from his reading was that President Lincoln was forced on several occasions to go before the Senate and justify, attempt to justify, his designation of generals and why he wasn't recalling this general, or why he wasn't appointing, and above all, why he wasn't winning the war. Mr. Truman

[7]

felt that the proper field for his committee if the Senate agreed, would be to work directly with the procurement divisions of the Army and Navy. His belief was, and it was later borne out by the Committee's records, that many billions of dollars could be saved by close attention to cost and to expenditures.

So much for background. I will return to my own participation. I was then, at this time, advanced to the rank of full lieutenant and assigned, along with Mr. Tolan and under Captain Kennedy's direction, to work with the Truman Committee. Our duty was to maintain a close relationship with the staff, principally the staff and the chief counsel of the Committee, and to carry the complaints received by the Committee, which were very numerous, ranging over a wide field, reports, rumors, information of all kinds coming to the Committee alleging waste all over the country. The Committee was fully

[8]

aware that under the stress of war there were undoubtedly great areas of waste. Their principal concern was to try to instill in the Army and the Navy, a sense of responsibility and a very vigorous effort to correct these errors and to establish strict policies within the various boards and bureaus who were spending the money, to arrest this waste whenever it was found and to do their best to hold down expenditures. No one on the Truman Committee nor anywhere else in the Congress was disposed to deny the Armed Services what they needed to win, but Mr. Truman thought this could be done and still save money. He gave a figure later on, I believe, of an estimated saving to the United States, of something in excess of 16 billion dollars, through the Truman Committee's work.

I think the Committee's method of operation is of some significance, because in some respects it indicated Mr. Truman's basic approach to

[9]

government. He had a profound knowledge of American history; he had a profound faith in the American people, once they were given full information, to reach sensible decisions. He felt if this idea could be put across to the Armed Services, that they were also men of good will, and the net result would be an enormous gain all around. The thing Mr. Truman kept stressing was that there had to be a complete and full cooperation between the Armed Services and his Committee. He suggested soon after the formation of the Committee to the two Secretaries -- it is to be borne in mind that at that time there was no separate division of the Air Force. It was then called the Air Corps and was a part of the Army, the Marines, of course, being a part of the Navy. He suggested to the two Secretaries that in general a procedure somewhat as follows be set up: The Committee would receive complaints, and was already receiving complaints.

[10]

They would do their own evaluation. When they came upon something which they considered of broad significance or possessing unusual merit, or calling for corrective measures, whatever the avenues might be, the Armed Services, Navy or Army, would be called in and consulted. A determination would be made as to the seriousness of the situation, and a formula agreed upon for correction. Mr. Truman, his directness, his bluntness, his plainness, came very much to the fore in this kind of exchange. He later on told me, as I know he told many other people, that he considered this to be a fair bargain and was told by the two Secretaries at that time, that they considered it to be a fair bargain, and that he expected it to be carried out. Naturally, my own role, although of very little significance, the same as with Lieutenant Tolan or Captain Kennedy, left us in the position of not being able to win on

[11]

either side. We would come back from the Truman Committee offices laden with complaints and be directed to carry those off to which ever of the offending bureaus were at fault, or thought to be at fault. So, it was our somewhat melancholy and unpleasant duty to tromp down the hall and tell some senior admiral that the Truman Committee thought that he was doing a very poor job at an ordnance plant or shipyard, or some other facility. But of course, Mr. Truman stuck with it. He exacted these conditions, he expected them to be followed out, and I can recall on one or two instances, that when the going got a little rough for the Navy, and they began to have some second thoughts about the bargain, Mr. Truman wasted no time. He sent a note to the Secretary of the Navy on one occasion, and said that -- reminded him of the agreement -- he said, I believe it was the Bureau of Ships, as it was then called, didn't want to

[12]

give the Committee the information that they felt they had a right to see; and he told the Secretary that if the records were not forthcoming by 9 o'clock the next morning, it then being, as I recall around 5 or 6 in the evening, he would send a truck and a subpoena down and get the records with any number of men necessary to carry them out. Needless to say, the Committee got the records. Mr. Truman did not do this in my opinion to show off or throw his weight around or anything else. He felt that he and his colleagues who were nine on the Committee altogether, were engaged in an effort of utmost importance to the country as a whole, and he felt that the Navy and the Army would be much better off if they cooperated. And that was his approach. It was, as I say, a part of his overall philosophy of government, that you kept your word. It was a part, as he often said, of human relationships. You made a

[13]

bargain with someone, and it was the public's business, and the people who wanted to take another look, that was too bad. It was the public that was at stake. That was the way he felt about things.

My own estimate is that he did indeed, and the Committee indeed, did make a very important contribution. There have been numerous works, numerous authors, many articles, writings by Mr. Truman himself and others, detailing the work of the Committee, which is now many years in the past. I believe that full credit is still lacking to this work that Mr. Truman carried out. To carry this forward, at a time when the public was demanding to win the war, was not always a popular thing to do. And yet, he persevered and through his sincerity and his fairness he carried through the work of his Committee until he left as chairman, to my recollection, without a single

[14]

dissenting report, which is a remarkable record. There were nine Senators, as I said earlier, and it was divided along the Democratic majority of five and four Republicans. Mr. Truman ran this in a wholly nonpartisan way. He had divided up the work of the Committee into subcommittees, three or four in nature, and divided them roughly according to subject, and invariably they brought in a unified and unanimous report on whatever they were doing, and that stands to the credit, not only of Mr. Truman, of course, but of all his colleagues.

So, I think this may be a little background as to the kind of man Harry Truman was, and that activity which took him out of relative obscurity as a junior Senator from Missouri to nationwide prominence. It was no small factor in the opinion of most observers in his selection ultimately as vice-presidential

[15]

candidate; but it was not a desire for publicity that motivated it. This is, I think, worth thinking about, but he did not do it. The Committee's first appropriation, as I recall, was for \$15,000. Anyone looking at today's dollar and today's sums would consider that it was a modest sum. True, but it was somewhat scaled in proportion to his approach. He was a modest man; he sincerely thought that he would not need a tremendous sum. He thought, however, that the job would get larger, but he said, "Well, if we can't do anything with \$15,000 we can't do anything with \$50,000. So let's see where we can go. There's enough trouble I know around, I'm not looking for trouble. It's coming in my office every day. Let's see where we can go with this money. If we're going to set an example of economy, the place to begin is right here in this office." Well, of course, the job was much bigger -- very

[16]

soon developed well beyond that figure. I can't remember at the moment what the appropriation totaled during the life of that committee, which as I recall, extended on into '46 and possibly a little into '47. In any event, I believe the total sum of something in excess of a half million dollars was appropriated for the work of that committee during its lifetime. Well, set against the saving of 16 billion, that's a pretty good return on your money. I think everyone connected with that, and historians since have agreed that this was a unique piece of work, a committee totally

dedicated to this objective, and on many, many occasions deliberately avoiding the opportunities for full publicity. It's a remarkable little piece of history, I think.

FUCHS: Can you cite some examples of cases where he might have tried to get a lot more limelight and resisted the temptation?

[17]

ABBOTT: The Committee did this repeatedly. One I can think of right here in this town, San Francisco, was an allegation that there was an enormous gambling operation going on at the Hunter's Point Naval Shipyard. This operation conducted in the bottoms, the lower reaches of some of the ships which were in here for repair, battle damage out of the Pacific. The carriers were particularly a good place for this kind of activity, as the Committee later discovered, because they had multi-decks and it took a long while to get down to where things were going on. But I believe at one time, the instance that I had in mind, the battleship *Pennsylvania* was in here for extensive repair and it was out at Hunter's Point over a period of weeks and months. The Committee did find very solid evidence that this gambling was going on, amidst a very small group of thousands of shipyard workers, but it was disrupting morale to a degree, not the least of which was, I suppose, the losers who didn't bring home any pay.

FUCHS: What kind of gambling was it, do you know?

ABBOTT: Just crap games, mostly crap games that could be folded up and put out of sight fast if necessary, but had this word gotten out widely I think it would have been damaging because it was something of an incongruous situation -- here was the Navy spending millions and billions of dollars for this; ships were desperately needed to return to sea duty as fast as possible. It could very easily have been a sensational story and one that, as I think back, could not have helped anything, particularly troops who were then out in the Pacific by the millions and in Europe by the millions. But the Truman Committee made its investigation, confirmed the allegations as

[19]

being substantially true, went back to the Secretary of the Navy, and to the local naval officials who, frankly, had not known of its existence. The situation was corrected. I think my recollection is accurate that there was never any public mention made of this; but it's not too usual to find politicians, war or no war, willing to pass up such an obvious publicity chance as this one. There were other examples of this kind. They were -- not so much gambling, there were always charges that there was wasted manpower, and very likely there was. It was impossible to put together a war effort of the size the United States did in 1941 and '42 without wastage. Admiral Frederick Horne, a very senior officer of the Navy who was our officer to report to, Admiral Horne, with 42 years experience in the Navy, was not a man to be easily rattled. He cooperated with the Truman Committee and directed his bureau chiefs and all others

[20]

coming under him, which was almost everybody except Admiral King, the Chief of Naval Operations, and the Secretary of the Navy himself. Admiral Horne once went before the Committee and several Senators attacked him with this wastage, particularly an overabundance of supplies then piling up at Pearl Harbor. By this time the production lines were really rolling

and we were sending out everything in huge quantities. Someone said: "Admiral, don't you know that there are billions of dollars of supplies and things, from every indication, that are not needed."

And Admiral Horne said, "Well, I don't deny for a moment that there are billions of dollars worth of materiel out on Pearl Harbor and elsewhere in the Pacific. In fact, from some of the reports I've read, I'm surprised that Oahu doesn't sink out of sight some night just from the sheer weight. But I just have to resolve

[21]

the balance in favor of giving the commanders what they say they need, and at the same time, I'm fully aware that you gentlemen are interested, as I am, in saving. So where we can cure the waste, we're doing it, but we're not going to stop short. I can't be, after this service in the Navy, I just cannot be surprised that people are over ordering. That's putting it mildly." There was no man more committed to winning that war and helping the Truman Committee.

But there are all kinds of human relationships bound up in this. It was a fascinating kind of experience for me, and I think for my two, colleagues, because you were dealing basically on the one hand, with dedicated Naval officers who were senior for the most part, no one certainly below the rank of captain, and extending on up to the Secretary and the Assistant Secretaries; and naturally, no one likes to be told in any walk of life that he isn't doing

[22]

an efficient job, and when you put wartime and the extraordinary pressures with that and come in and say, "You're not doing a good job," from the Navy's point of view, very often they were prone to somehow blame myself or Lieutenant Tolan or Captain Kennedy for bringing in the bad news. I once said to Tolan, "Well, we're something like the ancient messengers who came to the king with bad news, only in those days they chopped off the head of the messengers who brought in the bad report. So far, we've escaped that. But we'll be lucky if we don't get out to some remote island in the Pacific one of these afternoons. If we bring in any more reports that a bureau chief or someone else is doing a poor job, we might very well find ourselves far away from here." Some days that appeared to be a very desirable prospect.

On the other side of the coin, if we

[23]

returned from the Navy empty handed to the inquiring Senators we got an equally frosty reception; so it was something of a no man's land. It has some interest, I suppose, because it illustrates that human relationships are paramount at almost every facet of human activity, and, once again, Mr. Truman was well aware of that, but he didn't let that sway him from his duty. We had one or two unfortunate examples, again unpublicized. We had a senior admiral in the Navy who was assigned to the Caribbean Sea Frontier (I think it was called then), and he was a man who had spent his whole lifetime in the Navy, from his Academy days. He used the facilities of the Navy to build a very plush house for himself some distance removed from the ample quarters already provided for him, and it became the Committee's unpleasant duty to bring this to the attention of the Secretary and the man was demoted and sent off to an insignificant

post. Mr. Truman said he felt deeply sorry for this man, but he said, "I also feel sorry that this man would, in a sense, betray a trust. That's what hurts me more than seeing this man go down."

FUCHS: Who was this? I mean, it's part of the record.

ABBOTT: I don't recall his name. I cannot think of his name at the moment. This is part of the record, but I can't think of his name at the moment. I may get it later.

FUCHS: Do you recall who was assigned to this investigation of gambling at Hunter's Point?

ABBOTT: I have the impression that the investigation was carried out at the direction of Rudolph Halley, who was then the Associate Counsel. Mr. Halley died some years ago. The staff people, the names don't come to mind. Maybe you could make a note to ask Harold Robinson

[25]

if he can recall. It could have been Walter Hehmeyer; it could have been someone on that order.

FUCHS: They sent someone out there, I imagine.

ABBOTT: Yes, they had had people. And they also had had -- you see, they got a tremendous volume of mail all the time. Once the existence of the Truman Committee became known, they just received tons of mail, some of it was malicious, some of it was inaccurate, some of it was partially correct, but here and there, there were bulls-eyes, you know, there were big mistakes made.

FUCHS: Would they send one of the liaison men of the Navy to the site of such an investigation?

ABBOTT: Not at the outset. The Committee's method was to work within, from its own resources.

FUCHS: But the Navy wouldn't send you out there?

[26]

ABBOTT: The Navy would send us if there was to be an official investigation, or in some instances, we would accompany an investigator. However, our function was confined, for the most part, to making sure that the Committee got proper cooperation. Our reason for being out here, for example -- I accompanied the Committee here on the investigation of the gambling -- my function here was to make sure that the local officials, the commandant of the 12th Naval District, and the captain of the Naval Shipyard, and other appropriate officers, would recognize who and what the people were, and so we had the problems of identification and working with our own people in the Navy to make sure the Committee got the information it was after and was not impeded in this effort.

FUCHS: I was wondering if you were involved directly in this?

[27]

ABBOTT: I came here on that occasion.

FUCHS: Now would normally, either you or Tolan, but not both of you go to a particular area?

ABBOTT: Well, for the most part, one of us would go. Occasionally, there would be a thing where the Committee would send possibly one or two -- they were understaffed, of course, by this time, because the volume of their work had grown so fast and had enlarged so much, that they had an inadequate staff. And very frankly, I think they didn't care or place too much trust in the investigations conducted by the Navy itself, human nature being what it is. Mr. Fulton, who was the Chief Counsel, once said to Captain Kennedy in a half jocular fashion, "John, every time we investigate somebody down there, it seems to me it results in a promotion." He said, "That is

[28]

when you people do the investigating, and sometimes when we do it. I don't know just how this works. I think we better go ahead and go together on some of these things so we can each arrive at our own ideas of the truth. But maybe it would be best if we didn't ask you to do it all yourself." So, they would send a man out, or a couple of men, depending on the size of the job. They didn't have too much staff. Or they would come down even to the Navy Department in Washington and the customary and approved procedure was for the Committee to send a letter stating the complaints, saying they would like to have one of their investigators come down and talk over the general situation with either the chief of the bureau or a department, or whoever it might be. It was then our job to go to the officer of that particular division, whether it was the Bureau of Aeronautics, the Bureau of Ships, or Bureau of Ordnance, tell

[29]

them what was being said, and arrange for an interview and arrange for a time, all of this with the idea of keeping some kind of system so that both the Navy and the Committee were fully informed and knew what was going on within their department. So, our job would be to meet the investigator, whether it would be Mr. Robinson or Mr. Hehmeyer or some of the other Committee personnel, and go along with them to the particular place within the Navy where trouble was, or where the trouble was alleged to be; then just see what developed after that. I may have mentioned earlier, the Committee, where it could be cleaned up, or where it could be corrected, where it was found to be valid, in almost every instance, they were perfectly agreeable to leaving things in an executive session status. If they were satisfied that the Navy knew about the mistake and were taking steps to correct it, that was the end of it. If they didn't, then

[30]

Mr. Truman's ultimate weapon, as he said, was that "We'll just have to go to full public hearing, because we'll have to take this to the people and decide whether you're right or we're right." And he did this with great restraint, as I said at the outset of the discussion. It was not what he was really interested in. He wanted to get the job done, in short. He wanted to get that money saved and he wanted that war to be shorter, and he knew that the longer it took to make something because of inefficiency or waste of money or manpower, the more you were lengthening the war. So his bedrock reason for all of this commotion was to shorten the war and to make it less costly to the American taxpayer, and thereby shorten and lessen the loss of life. But that was my

insight, and my major insight into Mr. Truman as a person. I did come to know him fairly well. I had not daily contact by any means. Most of my associations and contacts in

[31]

the ordinary course of affairs were with the counsel or with the investigating staff, with an occasional Senator presiding at an executive session; sometimes Mr. Truman would come in and customarily he presided at full sessions. Occasionally, he would take a subcommittee himself and go somewhere. But I did come to know him and respect him and get some insight into his philosophy and his remarkable grasp of not only American history but of world history, and his firm belief in the democratic system. I gained a great respect for him. I think that everyone who came into contact with him, naval officers and civilians, and others, got that same respect, perhaps not admiration, perhaps dislike in many cases, because of treading on toes, and wartime tempers; but no one doubted for a moment that he wasn't totally sincere and honest in his approach and his dedication to this objective. So I, over the years, gained more and more respect

[32]

for him. In, I believe, if my dates are right (and you can correct me), but it seems to me that we mentioned this previously, Mr. Truman left the Committee as chairman in the summer of 1945, or perhaps earlier than that...

FUCHS: In '44, after he was nominated.

ABBOTT: Forty-four, I'm sorry. Yes, it was in the summer. So he resigned as chairman and I didn't have much personal contact with him after that. I did continue my own work with the Committee. I believe Senator Mead of New York succeeded him as chairman, and the Committee's work went on much as before. In 1946 I was nearing the end of my own naval service and being a Reserve officer, wanted to get back to a civilian career, and so I was anxious to be on my way. By then it was more than four years of service and I was asked to fill a temporary spot in the office of the Secretary of the Navy,

[33]

then Mr. [James] Forrestal, who had succeeded Frank Knox, upon Mr. Knox's death, I think, in 1944, Mr. Forrestal having been the Under Secretary. That would be February, 1946 until about June, I served in that capacity, the point of this being that Mr. Truman visited the Navy Department, then as President of the United States, on two or three occasions, but I was naturally flattered that he did recognize me. I had gone up another notch by this time, and I had three stripes of commander and he said, "If you stick around long enough, you'll have that stuff up to your elbow there." I said I couldn't wait that long.

So, he was very pleasant. He came over, the Secretary asked him over to a luncheon, and by that time, the controversy over the merger of the Armed Services was in full cry. Mr. Truman never did really dislike the Navy, but he didn't know

[34]

much about it. He had been an Army man as is very well-known, and an infantry man at that, and he approached this whole question of merging, again, with an idea of economizing, and saving

money. He was not a penny pincher, but he just had a fundamental belief that you could do things in the military service an awful lot cheaper than the way it was being done, and I suppose this has gone on since time began, an argument over whether wars are waged on an efficient basis; but in any case, Mr. Truman was on the side -- or so it seemed in the Navy, at least, he was heavily on the side of the Army in the merger, particularly the Air Force, which was by then underway with a full scale effort to achieve independent status for itself, Cabinet rank. The Navy strongly suspected that the vehicle for this was to unify the Armed Services and place everything under one Secretary of Defense. There was an enormous undercurrent.

[35]

The Navy Department was seething in those days, as the Air Corps began its great propaganda, as the Navy called it. The battle really was between the naval aviators, the Naval Air Force, or the naval arm, and the Army Air Corps, which wanted two things. They wanted equal status because they had always considered themselves the country cousins of military aviation in the United States. The Navy had always had the glamour because of the carriers and, according to the Navy, great superiority of their flyers, and better training and so on. So this competition went up and down the board with respect to ships, more carriers, planes, etc. Mr. Forrestal, I've always thought, carried out his duty. He was deeply dedicated to the Navy. He felt that it would be a good idea to have Mr. Truman over for a luncheon and a little closer contact with the Navy. And Mr. Truman, I believe he had gone over (you can

[36]

probably correct me), but it's my impression that he used the cruiser *Augusta* to go to Potsdam, and made that crossing there and back, and I'm not sure that, at least outwardly, it did very much for the Navy's cause. I think everything went well, and he was well treated, but it seemed to the Navy that he spent all of his time in the chow line with the enlisted men and he wasn't getting the benefit of the arguments that the Navy should stay the way it was, above all, not going for this unification plan.

So, as I say, I had two or three encounters with him. I was not in the line of fire in any way. But I believe I irritated some of the senior officers present at that luncheon because Mr. Truman did recognize me, as I said, and stopped the reception line to talk for two or three minutes, not because of anything I had to say, but he wanted to recall some of the incidents of the Truman Committee. He said to me, "Are

[37]

you still around here?" And he mentioned the incident about the braid.

And I said, "Yes, Mr. President."

He said, "Don't stay too long or they'll own you."

Of course, this didn't help my immediate surroundings very much. I got a few glares and then he went on to reminisce about two or three of the things that I had been active on that he remembered from the Truman Committee days.

FUCHS: Do you recall any of those?

ABBOTT: Well, he recalled the Commander Corrigan case that we discussed.

FUCHS: What was that?

ABBOTT: The Bureau of Ordnance. Commander Corrigan had been in and out of the Navy. This is interesting, and I'll digress for a moment because

[38]

this is the opposite side of the coin where Mr. Truman felt that he had reached the end of his patience and that the Navy wasn't cooperating, so he did go to publicity. Commander Corrigan had been in the Naval Academy, I believe sometime in the twenties, and like a number of officers of his class around that time, there was very little opportunity for promotion. So he left the Navy, and eventually formed a consulting management service called Corrigan, Osborn and Wells in New York City. Shortly after the outbreak of World War II, or some time at least in that period, Commander Corrigan was recalled to active duty and assigned to the Naval Bureau of Ordnance, where his principal responsibility was to expedite production. He, according to the Truman Committee later on of course was assigned to check on factories where the production was lagging. Then somehow the discussion would get around to how matters could

[39]

be improved. So, the Committee alleged that frequently whoever owned the factory would say, "Do you have any suggestions?" And it would turn out that he did have a suggestion, that they should get a management consultant in there with some repute and some ability and see if things could be straightened out. Obviously the owners would be anxious to get any recommendations that he had, and in some instances it turned out that Corrigan, Osborn and Wells were considered to be a pretty good idea for them. So Commander Corrigan ran afoul of, I believe, James Rand, Jr. of Remington Rand, which was then manufacturing, had converted long since to war production like everybody else, and I believe was manufacturing the Norden bomb sight. They were behind in their production and this was a key item both for the Army and Navy. Well, apparently this same maneuver was repeated, but Mr. Rand became outraged and went directly to

[40]

the Truman Committee about it. He said that he had a very serious complaint to make. So the Committee went into this with some thoroughness because of the pressure and the outcry. Mr. Rand had considerable political weight and he went to the President about it and he went everywhere else. The Truman Committee did go into this with some weight, and they made a major case out of it. They sent several people down and Commander Corrigan, and the members of his firm, and a great many other people got involved before it was all through. The Committee went to one of these executive sessions, and this was one of the places where the Navy thought maybe they hadn't made such a good bargain after all. The facts were against them as it turned out, and they didn't really want to come forward with this. So, Truman demanded that they do so, and he said, "If you don't, if you don't do something about Corrigan

[41]

and everything else that's wrong with this, then we are going to go to a public hearing." He said, "This is a disgrace. It's one of the worst cases I've seen, the Committee has seen." He had assigned this case, as they called them, to Senator Harley Kilgore of West Virginia, and two other Senators, I believe, Senator Hatch of New Mexico, and also Senator Ferguson, Republican, of Michigan. The three Senators decided that they were not getting the full cooperation. Truman appealed once more for cooperation as he saw it, and he didn't get it, so he announced that the following morning at 9 o'clock there would be a public hearing in the Senate caucus room. This attracted the attention of the press. My own part in that morning was to appear and advise my superiors in the Navy Department instantly of any developments. So I was given a place near the Committee table, with Senator Kilgore in the presiding chair and things were

[42]

just underway when Senator Truman walked in and took a place at the end of the table.

Commander Corrigan was just beginning his testimony. Truman had reviewed the record, as I later found out, in some detail the night before with Hugh Fulton, the Chief Counsel, and was well posted on developments up to that minute and had made up his mind, as it turned out, because he, within my hearing, leaned over to Senator Kilgore and said, "Harley, this son-of-a-bitch is as crooked as a dog's hind leg and I'm going to move to court martial him." Whereupon he stood up and did just that, and stalked from the hearing room. Well, I can tell you, the bells rang, and the consternation was pretty high there for a while. I'm certain that it was not done for a grandstand play, but Truman had just had enough. He said later on that he had been thinking about this and he felt the Navy had, in a way, deteriorated the relationship. He felt that he wasn't getting

[43]

the cooperation, and so for several reasons he said, "I thought I would just make an example of this case. It was important enough any way, as far as I was concerned, but I thought it wouldn't do any harm to shake everybody up while I was doing that." Well, he really shook everybody up. That took about two days worth of meetings at the Navy Department at the highest level to get everything down to cases. I can't remember now what did happen to Commander Corrigan, but I'm altogether certain that it wasn't one of those instances where a promotion came out of it. I think Commander Corrigan left the service at that point. What else happened, I can't remember. There were many angry threats of suits by Rand, and other complications, but the fact was that the factory was behind in production, that's what led to the whole trouble in the first place. They were at fault, and so I suppose this weakened their case. It became,

[44]

one of these exercises in human relations, because Mr. Rand was so outraged. Being in trouble on production was bad enough, it was costing money and lots of trouble and all the rest of it, but he later said he didn't mind all of that so much, but he hated to be sandbagged.

FUCHS: Were these appeals to the Navy to lend more cooperation made through you or publicly to the...

ABBOTT: Well, no, Mr. Truman never did -- he started off, he kept coming back to this, and for the most part it ran along rather well. We had hundreds of cases, really. They ranged from large to small, but they were just in every aspect, and many of them had not tremendous significance. Some, as I've just related, had larger significance, but for the most part, the system worked quite well. Mr. Truman didn't resort to appeal. There were many

[45]

informed discussions between Captain Kennedy, and Hugh Fulton the Committee Counsel, as to whether this or that merited further investigation, whether it was worthwhile for either party to pursue this while a lot of larger things were going on, and so on, but this was more in the area of negotiation as to which thing -- we weren't anxious, of course, as Captain Kennedy said, "We're not here to see how much business we can do in this office. We'll be considered a success if we don't do any business." But he said, "We want to do the job that we're given, where it's important." But to answer your question directly, Mr. Truman always kept in mind what he called the basic agreement, the bargain, as he called it. He said, "I made a bargain at the very outset. We won't publicize if you fellows do your job and clean up. If you don't, we will publicize, because that's the only weapon we've got against you. You've

[46]

got everything else on your side. People want to win the war and we're going to get in your way." He said, "I don't want to do that. I don't want to do that for a lot of reasons, but I do want to have your assurance that we cooperate." From that point on, he never went back. This was the principle that Chief Counsel Fulton worked on. That was his instruction. And there were letters, I believe, to this effect.

So, when Senator Truman found, at a given point, that it wasn't working he didn't go back and say in effect, "Well, you fellows have forgotten your bargain." He simply said, "Now, I'm going to get those records the way we agreed, or you're going to be in the paper tomorrow, along with us." Of course, he knew full well that the Secretaries were just as aware as he was that this agreement existed.

At one point, and I don't have the details

[47]

on this, but at one point he got almost as mad as he did on the Corrigan case, when I believe Mr. Forrestal was away, I've forgotten who the Under Secretary was at the moment (there were frequent shifts), but the Under Secretary decided he needed the benefit of a review by the Attorney General as to whether he could or could not give out a certain set of documents. They were documents only in the sense that they were records of, I believe, ship repair production, they were not documents in the sense we ordinarily talk about in the Government. In other words, it was information that had previously been considered fully available to the Committee. The instance didn't differ at all from hundreds of previous things. So Mr. Fulton got enraged with that little incident and took it to Mr. Truman, and that produced another bit of fireworks and that was the only point that I can recall that Mr. Truman did regroup the three policymakers. I say,

[48]

three in this case because he did summon the three of them to the Capitol: The Secretary of War, the Secretary of the Navy, and the Attorney General, and said, "Now, do I have an agreement or not? What's different about this case? You tell me. If it's different, you can convince us." He had all the Senators he could find on the Committee, I think, there on the floor. It was late afternoon, and I think, one or two members couldn't come over.

FUCHS: This was an executive session of the Committee?

ABBOTT: Yes, just off the Senate Chamber.

FUCHS: Were you present then?

ABBOTT: I was outside. The Counsel later -- I've forgotten whether it was the Counsel or whether Rudy Halley was there, but Fulton later told me that was exactly what the Senator said. He didn't make a big thing about it. He just said,

[49]

"You tell me, if we're wrong. We're not here to injure the war effort. We've been all through this a number of times, and now we have the chief lawyer of the country here. If there's anything different about this agreement, if there's anything that these papers represent that we shouldn't have, you tell me about it." Well, it took just about ten minutes to get it all back on the track and everybody agreed it had been somebody else's mistake, but not anybody else's mistake in the room, and everybody saved face and away they went. Mr. Truman had a great sense of timing. He had a built-in idea of when it was proper to move and move in a dramatic way.

But that's, I believe, in essence, the outline of the experience with the Truman Committee that I had, and I don't know anything of great significance that I might add. There could be another incident or two that might come

[50]

to mind. But I was interested chiefly in trying to show just what kind of approach Mr. Truman had to government, his philosophy, how the Committee started, what his motivation was, and how his lines of conduct were with his Senate colleagues. The proof of his approach was the effectiveness of his work and the general esteem with which he was regarded, after the Committee's first report any appropriations he asked for -- he could have asked for much more money, and gotten anything he wanted. There may have been votes against him, I don't remember. I think these things are done more or less on a voice vote anyway...

FUCHS: Pardon me?

ABBOTT: The appropriations -- I think it was purely a pro forma thing after that. If he wanted additional money, he got additional money, and

[51]

there was no delay. But again, he didn't abuse the situation at all. He asked for what he thought he needed. He could easily have doubled what he asked for without the slightest question

because he was making -- he got this point across to the country that he was doing a worthwhile job. I thought it was good.

FUCHS: Well, I think I can ask you some things that might jog your memory, and I think, at least, that the students would be interested in. Just so people can get a little better picture of the physical arrangements, where were your offices?

ABBOTT: We had an office in what was then some of the temporary buildings, which were left over from World War I. They ran along 18th Street -- 18th and -- I've forgotten, it could be M, something in that order. I think most people who have been

[52]
to Washington know the location I'm speaking of.

We had a rather amusing office situation insofar as the Army was concerned. The Committee had appointed as its opposite number for the Navy, a Brigadier General from World War I by the name of Frank E. Lowe of Maine, who, I believe, died within the last year or so. He was a crusty old Yankee and he and I became good friends. He had an office directly across the alleyway in another building, and he had a similar function except that he was officially attached to the Committee.

FUCHS: Oh, he was?

ABBOTT: Yes. He was called the "Committee Executive." He thought up that title himself. No one ever knew whether he was executive secretary or -- but he had been a friend -- he was a World War I man and he understood Mr. Truman,

[53]
he was National Guard and he was a lot of things that Truman admired, although I don't believe he was Truman's choice particularly.

FUCHS: He was the Army liaison, but he was...

ABBOTT: He was semi-Army liaison, because the Army in turn appointed a colonel who was an opposite number to my superior, Captain Kennedy, but at our peril did we go directly to the Army liaison. There were several Army people -- I believe, and there was a civilian lawyer who had the rank of colonel, who carried out the same approximate functions as Captain Kennedy.

FUCHS: What was his name?

ABBOTT: If you make a note to ask Mr. Tolan, I think he will have the name -- Colonel Miles Knowles, I think it was, and he was an attorney. He and Captain Kennedy dealt on a basis of, where there was some mutual interest, I don't

[54]

think of a specific example, but occasionally the Truman Committee would, or one of its subcommittees, would decide to make field investigations involving Senators, and if they did that then we were called upon to arrange the itinerary and cooperate with the Army in seeing who was to furnish the travel. These arrangements were carried off under strict protocol laid down by General Lowe, that Tolan or myself were to present ourselves in his office and he would take it up with the Committee. So we had a great deal of ceremonial connected with a trip out to, as I say, maybe two or three states; in what order the places would be visited and how everything was to be carried out; General Lowe was a man who worked by the book and he wanted to know when he got into a city like St. Louis exactly what time the plane would get there, all of which was reasonable enough, and whether there would be Army or Navy cars there, where the

[55]

Committee was to spend the night. No detail was forgotten. All of this was cleared in due course by General Lowe with the Committee Counsel and we were then instructed to carry out our part of the assignment, which could be any number of things.

FUCHS: This thing was sort of a matter of levity to you and Tolan, is that right?

ABBOTT: Well, we were somewhat amused by it, and it's a good thing we were amused, because if we had been angry there was nothing in the world we could do about it. He was a brigadier general and we were two-striped lieutenants, so we weren't going to get very far by being argumentative with him. But we got on well with him and he cooperated in turn. He was a very kindly man. His assignment always was something of a mystery to the press and particularly to Army and Navy officers. Our

[56]

assignment occasionally was to try to explain to our superiors who General Lowe was, because we would carry in a memorandum that "This would be done according to 0800, and we will leave Anacostia Naval Airport, and we will arrive at Lambert Field, St. Louis," and so forth, and precisely everything carried out according to the exact schedule. This would be signed by Brigadier General Frank E. Lowe, Executive. People would say, "Executive of what? Who in hell is Lowe?" So, we would try to explain.

On one occasion I was up at a Committee hearing and Harry Vaughan was present, who I believe was then a colonel, and of course, he was a close friend of Senator Truman. Colonel Vaughan, in a rather offhand way, was assigned to assist General Lowe. Colonel Vaughan had a very good sense of humor and a press man came by our table and said, "Say, who is that fellow who sits up there with the Senators all the time?"

[57]

That was General Lowe. He took a place with the Committee. He sat in no lowly section at all. He took a seat alongside then Senator Ralph Brewster of Maine, who was a particular friend of his and General Lowe came from Maine. I think he had a National Guard company. But at any rate, he customarily sat beside Senator Brewster or Senator Kilgore, who was also a good friend of his. So the press was somewhat mystified to see General Lowe, who at all times was attired in

the Sam Brown belt of World War I with the cross straps, and he had a very stern and forbidding presence, iron gray hair. He had a look of a general all about him. On this occasion one of the newspapermen came over to where Colonel Vaughan and I were sitting, and he said, "Say, who is that old SOB up there that sits alongside as though he were a member of the Committee?"

So, Vaughan said, "That's General Lowe."

[58]

The guy said, "I can see he's a general, but what does he do anyway?"

And Vaughan without blinking an eyelash said, "He doesn't do anything and I help him."

That was the only answer that Vaughan would give him. But I said afterwards to Vaughan that he wasn't very fair to Frank Lowe, because Lowe spent hours arranging these trips and other things, and I thought he did a pretty good day's work. He said, "I've known Frank longer than you have and I'm going to let my answer stand."

FUCHS: Did Captain Kennedy, who, I believe, had the liaison placed in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, have his office there in the same building?

ABBOTT: Just across the alleyway. We had a small, two-room office, and we were known as the "Clearance Section." You'll have to go back to

[59]

Government gobbledygook for a definition of clearance. But the idea was fairly plain after you had it explained. It was literally a clearing place. If a complaint came in, as I said before, the channels began with Captain Kennedy. A letter would come down from the Committee, alleging deficiencies, then an investigator would come down, whatever happened, Captain Kennedy or Tolan or myself would then take it from there. We would convey the visitor or the information or whatever to the appropriate officer, literally convey it by carrying it over and explaining what was afoot and bringing the investigator over and introducing him, if necessary. Then if there was written material, or information of any kind to be coming back from the Navy Department it was our job to have that come back to the Clearance Office. That's what my old friend, Harold Robinson, the Chief Investigator for the

[60]

Committee, still taxes me now and again by saying, "Well, I remember that double shuffle you had. An awful lot of stuff got lost. We always wanted to take it right out of the office that very afternoon, get our copies made and whatever we wanted." And he said, "There we would be in the Office of the Chief of the Bureau of Naval Ordnance, for example. Well, he was a senior admiral and he was pretty high up and he could have given us the stuff that afternoon, but there we had to go back through John Kennedy." He said, "About that time, John Kennedy would find business in Chicago or someplace like that." So, occasionally from the Committee's viewpoint we weren't always as speedy in the cooperation. We pleaded fatigue or complications of one kind or another, and in all truth there was. We had no authority of our own to release

[61]

anything. It would come back -- again using the Chief of the Bureau of Naval Ordnance as an example -- the response, the answers, or the declines to answer, or whatever it might be, would come back. An answer in short would come back from the Bureau of Naval Ordnance to any allegation, and that would be physically delivered to Captain Kennedy. Captain Kennedy had a further step to take. He had to get his clearance either from Admiral Horne, representing the Chief of Naval Operations, or in some cases, the Secretary of the Navy himself, acting most of the time through one of his deputies. After that was done, it was our job to carry that to the Committee, and then stand back and see whether we had done our job, or whether they had something else they wanted, or whatever the consequences might be. But it was an attempt, and again this was Senator Truman's basic idea. He said, "I

[62]

know you don't want our people running all over the Departments, and we'll have trouble getting in. There will be all kinds of confusion. Some of our people will get thrown out and we won't get what we want and we'll waste your time." So he said, "I don't care how you do it, but set up somebody that we can call. I don't care who he is, just so you get some action for us."

And that was where that office was born. I think I may have mentioned at one point, during your visit out here, that Captain Kennedy's arrival on the scene was prompted by a frantic call from the then Secretary, Frank Knox, who, I believe, had come to that office directly from the Chicago *Daily News*, where I think he was the publisher at that time. Knox had known Kennedy off and on. Kennedy had been in the newspaper business as a reporter and editor and had been a number of years in Washington

[63]

and had also known Knox in Chicago., Kennedy later told me that he had just been commissioned in the Navy himself to do something or other in West Virginia, when he got a call to come to Washington and the substance of the conversation was that Secretary Knox said, "John, you'd better come up here. I don't know what you're doing, but I'll get you released. There's a fellow named Truman raising hell all over this place. I've got to get it under some kind of management. They want a man that is known. Senator Truman said he wants somebody that wasn't a nobody. He didn't care who it was, but just so long as, he said to Knox, 'Frank, just whoever it is, I just want that man to know that when the Truman Committee calls that we expect cooperation. From there on, you handle it anyway you want. I want just one place where I have to go. That's a big order, but you do it. It will help both of us if you'll do that.'"

[64]

So this little operation went on in that fashion. Just the three of us. Occasionally we would have to get into consultation. In the meantime, other work went on. Of course, the Truman Committee was by no means the only activity. There were still the standing committees of the House Committee on Naval Affairs and the Armed Services Committee of the House, and I think there were similar committees in the Senate in those days.

FUCHS: Liaison with them was channeled through...

ABBOTT: That was channeled through the office of the Judge Advocate General; so we would have morning meetings, and then I think here and there the Bureaus had their people, "On the Hill," as they called it. So there was all kinds of stuff going on that...

FUCHS: Did you act as liaison to these other committees?

[65]

ABBOTT: No, they had their own people. The Judge Advocate General had his officers dealing with day to day operations, anything having to do with the war, personnel, a dozen different things, and frequently they would overlap.

FUCHS: That's where you came in?

ABBOTT: That's where we came in, so to overcome that they had a morning meeting, and Admiral Gatch -- I think I mentioned Admiral Tom [Thomas Leigh] Gatch, who had come back from -- who had been, in a way, invalidated home early in the war. He had the battleship *South Dakota* and he was wounded. He had had legal training, had a law degree from, I believe George Washington in Washington, D.C., but he hadn't ever followed it. At any rate, he was appointed Judge Advocate General. He conceived the idea of a daily meeting to try to find out what was going on.

[66]

FUCHS: Where were these held?

ABBOTT: In his offices, in the Office of the Judge Advocate General. One of us from the Clearance Office was required to attend the morning meeting at 8 o'clock in Admiral Gatch's office, where each division would be reporting. You see, in turn, we had a liaison officer for ourselves in each division, for example in the Bureau of Aeronautics. If something came up affecting the Bureau of Aeronautics, then Tolan or I would call a Lieutenant Edward Fillion, who was an attorney from Indianapolis. He was responsible for getting us through the labyrinth of the Bureau of Aeronautics. Occasionally, infrequently, we'd have something from the -- I've forgotten the exact title -- it would be the Surgeon General, I guess, Admiral McIntyre. That was easy because he had an office directly next to us. He was very informal, very nice, and anything we had

[67]

with him, that called only for going next door. He had no great bureaucracy of his own. But in the procurement bureaus, the big boys were Ships, Air, and Ordnance. You see, they were accounting for almost 95 percent of the -- most of the complaints on the Truman Committee. The Committee didn't do too much with personnel. They kept out of personnel. We would have an occasional foul up, and once in a while, some Senator would call and ask John Kennedy informally to go into some question of a kid who hadn't gotten his leave, or something like this. We had an officer in the Bureau of Personnel to whom we could turn, but this was not a major part of our business, and the Truman Committee, except when they felt something unusual was involved, kept out of personnel on the same general theory that they didn't want to be in the actual conduct of the war. Their chief interest was, again, saving money. When Secretary

[68]

Forrestal came in -- he had come out of a Wall Street background -- he brought in dozens and dozens of people out of Wall Street, for the most part, excellent corporation lawyers, and all of them, almost without exception, with no idea in the world of how either the Navy worked or even less, if possible, how the Congress worked. I think maybe this is where we got most of our resentment, because these men were accustomed to and in some cases, had final say on the review of contracts. They would be approved in the Bureau, but they would come up for final clearance; both by statute and for reasons of prudence, Secretary Forrestal wanted someone to look at the legal documents before he put his name on them. He had final responsibility. So he had a whole battery to run of very formidable corporate people who were outraged. I think their outrage against the Truman Committee was much greater than the

[69]

line officers, all of whom had had some congressional exposure at some time or other. At least, they knew a Congressman had appointed them in their early days to go to the Naval Academy. But the people in the legal branch, in the Secretary's immediate office, many times were very hard nuts to crack. It was an elaborate arrangement. It really was. The Truman Committee had the same system set up in the, what was then called the War Department but it worked as well, I suppose as anything else. It worked a lot better than what had been going on before. That was what Secretary Knox said. "Well, it's not perfect,, but it's an awful lot better. I've got time to do what I'm supposed to do down here now, anyway, and I didn't have that before."

I was very pleased and almost touched at one point when I was leaving. There was an admiral who served as a kind of an assistant

[70]

to Admiral Horne, whom I mentioned earlier, by the name of Admiral Robinson; he was head of the Office of Materiel in the Secretary's office. Again, he had final review on a lot of things that were going on in the bureaus. At that time the Navy operated under the bureau system. You see, they all had their old line relationships going back over the non-war years. Each of these bureaus being quite decentralized had developed their own independent line, long since, of communication. In general, they got along well with their overseeing committees in the Congress. For example, the Bureau of Supplies and Accounts had its own liaison man of long standing, and naturally, the chief of the Bureau of Supplies and Accounts was on very good terms, for the most part, particularly with the Congressman Carl Vinson who was the autocratic chairman of his day of the old Naval Affairs Committee; so that this system was kind of superimposed on the Navy bureaucracy. I think many times Senator Truman,

[71]

although as I say he didn't know the naval system, knew that it probably worked about the way the Army did, and he knew perfectly well that three former civilians like ourselves weren't going to get too far without a good hard shove against this old line thinking and old line action. There was nothing particularly wrong with it; it simply didn't work fast enough in a wartime activity. The Truman Committee itself, you see, was a special committee. It operated outside the system, although Truman worked very well with the chairmen of the respective committees. At the same

time they were doing something that fell somewhere in between the standard committee method of operation.

So we had these little near encounters and overlaps and resistances to overcome. As I say, I think Senator Truman was well aware of this, and that's why he insisted, not to make our job easier, but

[72]

he knew that it could get done only if there was pressure at the highest level. It was not easy even for the Secretary to go against some of these things; again, recognizing that it was all being done in a wartime atmosphere. That's very hard to go against. To go down and say, "Take a couple of days, or three days, and put your men to work and don't do anything else." And as I started to say a moment ago, old Admiral Robinson inscribed a picture for me when I was leaving. He had a job somewhat complementary to Admiral Horne, and I think what he wrote across his picture was "To Lieutenant Abbott, who gave me time to help win the war." By that, he meant that I had, back in the recesses somewhere, taken a good deal of this kind of detail off his shoulders so that he could turn to his immediate responsibilities. I always thought it was

[73]

quite a compliment. He didn't mean anything derogatory to the Truman Committee. It was just that that wasn't what he was there for. Everyday he took away from -- and had to conduct an investigation, or go into something that happened last week, in his view, was looking backwards. So that just by the sheer gravity of the situation he wasn't going to be very happy, nor was any chief of bureau going to be very happy, if we walked in and said, "Here's a five-page complaint of what's going on out at your shell plant in Louisiana," or someplace like this, "you're not getting your shells out." But in some cases, and in many instances, the Navy, although I suppose that it would never be universally acknowledged, was grateful for the intervention of the Truman Committee, because it gave them an outside pusher, so to speak, that they could go through the bureau and expedite it and get faster action

[74]

out of their own people, rather than an internal push where the person under pressure could say, "I'll get to that as soon as I can, Chief." The "soon as I can" might mean a month or so, but if the Chief of Naval Operations would call out to a commandant of the Thirteenth Naval Frontier or District, or whoever it might be, and say, "George, two or three Senators from the Truman Committee are going to be out there next week. They've got some complaints about the way your shipyard is being run, and we're sending a dispatch out to you and you'd better get ready because they're going to be out to see you next week." This made a great difference, and in some cases I think privately the Secretary, or whoever was in charge was not a bit unhappy that he had that method of getting at the trouble. That meant quite a lot. Again, I don't believe you'll see that written down very many places.

[75]

FUCHS: No.

ABBOTT: They don't like to give outside credit, and I wouldn't blame anybody for feeling that way, especially under wartime pressure.

Well, I guess we better knock it off. If this is at all helpful, I'll be glad to go on one more time with you, or whatever...

[76]

Second Oral History Interview with John W. Abbott, San Francisco, California, March 17, 1970. By J. R. Fuchs, Harry S. Truman Library.

FUCHS: Did you have something more that you wanted to take up directly, or are you finished on what you were talking about when we closed last time?

ABBOTT: Well, I believe that in general I've covered the area that we set out to talk about. As I recall, it was Mr. Truman's approach to the investigations that he had originally set out to do, and offhand I don't think of any other incidents. They would in general, be more of the same. They would point toward the same objectives and the same philosophy that Mr. Truman had in setting up that Committee and carrying out the work.

FUCHS: I was wondering, in the previous interview you said that these responses would come back to Captain Kennedy when there was an inquiry

[77]

from the Committee, say from the Bureau of Ships, and then would you normally carry this over in the form of a document to the Truman Committee or just by word of mouth, or how were the communications handled?

ABBOTT: Well, the general procedure was for a detailed complaint, if that is the proper word, to come down from the Truman Committee Counsel to Captain Kennedy, and it was specified that the complaint officer cite, if possible, the particular bureau or division within the Navy Department where the trouble lay, according to the complaint. So, in any case, whatever the details were, if they were sufficient for the Navy to pinpoint it, it was up to Captain Kennedy to start the procedure by carrying that off to the appropriate bureau, the Bureau of Ships in this case. Then that letter or complaint would be sent off to the Bureau of Ships accompanied by a covering letter from

[78]

Captain Kennedy stating that he had received the enclosed complaint and calling attention of the admiral in charge, asking his review and comments and customarily calling for a meeting to follow up on the details. Within a few days the Chief of the Bureau of Ships, as he was then called, the senior Rear Admiral in rank, would usually get in touch with Captain Kennedy and say, "I have your communication which you forwarded from the Truman Committee, and I wish you'd come over and we'll talk about it." In that case, as in most cases, the Chief of Bureau would have a number of officers and civilians gather in his office to discuss the details of the complaint as forwarded by the Committee. If it was of a sufficiently material nature, then there

would be a determination made to get all the facts available, and if it was somewhat in the nature of a routine investigation, meaning that there would be just

[79]

a question of getting the facts and sending them back up to the Committee, that was usually what we tried to do. If that satisfied the Committee and there was a mutual agreement that that was about all there was to it, that would normally be the end of it. However, there were numerous instances where the Committee felt that they had not received full information, or in some cases, this would be perhaps most cases, it might call for inquiry by the Bureau of Ships outside. They would have to go to the Naval Shipyard, or some other installation either inside the continental United States or outside, and obtain further particulars, and so in a sense the negotiations would proceed. Ultimately it was a question of satisfying the Committee that they were getting all the information that they needed. That became a matter of, as I say, of personal negotiation on many points. Captain Kennedy, his office

[80]

became a focal point in acting, to some degree as a buffer and as an intermediary between the regularly constituted bureaus and boards of the Navy and the Truman Committee. Out of all of this, our objective of course, in the Navy Department, was to maintain as good relations as possible with the Truman Committee. The Truman Committee's objective, on the other hand, was to make sure that they had received the full facts and to carry on from there. So it became an exercise in diplomacy and negotiation and a few other things. Boiled down it was a question of good faith, I think, on both sides.

FUCHS: Did you think Captain Kennedy was an exceptionally good choice for this position? Or did you sometimes think they could have done better?

ABBOTT: My opinion is that Captain Kennedy was

[81]

admirably suited for this job. It took a man of varied background and Captain Kennedy certainly had this. He had a background as a newspaperman, a businessman, and other attributes. He was not, in any sense, beholden to the Navy Department. He had no interest in pursuing a naval career, he had not done so previously, and had no intention of doing so in the future. He had considerable private means, and altogether he was a man who stood apart in the best sense, both from the Truman Committee and the congressional side and the Navy Department. He was just about an ideal choice, for the reasons I've indicated. It would be very, very hard to find anyone who could have been better suited to the job. It was just a tailor made job. I suspect that that is why the late Frank Knox reached through his own background and picked John Kennedy, because of the reasons I've indicated. It was terribly

[82]

difficult to find a man who could come in and take this job, which, at the very least, was a thankless job, nothing that you were going to get very far with on either side. I think I indicated in our earlier interview it was very hard to win. If you expected to go very far in the Navy, you certainly weren't on the path for promotion, because by the nature of things, you couldn't sugar

coat anything. You had to go and tell your Navy superiors that in almost every case they were not doing the job they were supposed to be doing; and on the other side, you had to go back up to the Committee and tell the Committee that the Navy was doing its very best to carry out their request and to correct any deficiencies.

FUCHS: Were you pleased when you were selected, I guess it was more like a general's request, an order really, to assume this position, or

[83]

would you rather have been elsewhere?

ABBOTT: Well, I found it a tremendously interesting assignment. There were times when I wished that I had been back out on the armed guard at sea, but on the other hand, I think I gained a tremendous insight into the operation of Government, and an experience that certainly was a rare one. So, on balance, I would say that I enjoyed it. It was a big responsibility, but you did have the satisfaction of knowing that if you carried it off well, you were helping, and maybe helping on a larger scale than if you were off in some far corner of the Pacific or Atlantic Ocean sliding along on a Liberty ship at six knots an hour towards some rather remote objective. This is not to say that the people doing that job were not doing equally well and not carrying their fair share. I saw both sides of it and I would certainly

[84]

not weigh one job above the other; but in answer to your question, I certainly enjoyed it; I had the feeling at times that I would rather be elsewhere, but I think that's a universal human experience. All jobs look fine at one point or other and at other points, they look as though you made the wrong choice, but in this case I was rather happy at times -- to know that I hadn't sought the job, and had been ordered to do it, and it was totally different from my first half of my Navy experience, so I'm very happy now that I did it. For one thing, the association with Mr. Truman was an experience that I think alone would have been well worthwhile.

FUCHS: Do you recall your first meeting with him?

ABBOTT: I do, and it was not a very spectacular thing. I was introduced as the newest liaison

[85]

officer with the Truman Committee, and Mr. Truman was making one of his periodic visits to the Committee offices, as distinct from his own senatorial office, and I was there in company with Captain Kennedy who was introducing me to the members of the staff. He was very cordial, shook hands, and he said (I don't know if I'm quoting him exactly or not), but the essence of it was, "Well, I hope you won't let those fellows with the braid overawe you; you've got a job to do here. We expect you to do your job up here as well as down there, and how you do that is your business, but we want facts." That was typical, again, of Mr. Truman. He didn't waste any words, and he paid enough attention to me to know that -- for me to know, I thought, that he would know me the next time he saw me and that was that. He moved on down the aisle. He didn't forget. My contacts were not too frequent, but he was short and to the point

[86]
and cordial.

FUCHS: In your opinion, who had access to the Senator and to the other Committee members on the Truman Committee staff? Was there anyone who stood out in your opinion?

ABBOTT: Well, as I recall it (I wasn't too well acquainted with the inner circle), obviously the Chief Counsel, Mr. Fulton, was very influential, and certainly had the closest access. Equally obviously, his Senate colleagues had access to Mr. Truman. I think all of them depended heavily on Mr. Fulton. They relied on him and they trusted him, and they respected his ability as a lawyer. Mr. Fulton, I think carried out the precepts of Senator Truman that he was to go down the middle and play no politics and do nothing else but carry out his job as Counsel. I believe Mr. Fulton did that. So, I would say that if you were to

[87]
rate them, Chief Counsel Hugh Fulton was at all times able to go to Mr. Truman directly on matters that affected the operation of the Committee, and equally so, if not more, the members of the Committee would have instant access to him. Beyond this there was a staff command. I don't think that it was too rigid. As I recall the first Assistant Counsel, I think, was Rudolph Halley, whom I mentioned earlier, had almost equal access, because as the Committee's responsibilities and assignments grew, it became much more than a one-man job, so that Mr. Fulton might be absent on many occasions, and it fell to Mr. Halley to go to the Senator or go to the various subcommittee chairmen. I think I also said earlier that there was a very unusual delegation of authority by Senator Truman. He divided the Committee into subcommittees, and these subcommittees had very wide latitude. So,

[88]
Mr. Fulton for example, might assign, I'm sure after some consultation with the chairman, maybe three or four or more topics, subjects, to subcommittee chairmen; in that case, a whole range of investigation would go on beyond the day-to-day consultation with either the Chairman of the Committee, Mr. Truman, or the Chief Counsel, Mr. Fulton, or Mr. Halley, for example, and carry on for weeks and weeks with a particular subject, but it all tied together. There was a good sense of organization about it. At some point before any strings were let go, before any final decisions were made, the Committee had a habit of reviewing its field of operation as to what was important and what was not important and establish priorities, and it all got pulled together.

FUCHS: Have you any knowledge of who handled the speechwriting chores? I assume there was a certain amount of speechmaking by Mr. Truman

[89]
and other Senators on the Committee?

ABBOTT: I don't have any detailed knowledge. My guess would be that that was Mr. Fulton's chore, in the first instance, in the early days of the Committee at least, and of course, he would depend on information furnished him by the staff investigators for the facts. I would think my recollection is accurate that he would then present a draft of remarks for Mr. Truman, but this

would be entirely factual. In the early days of the Committee in, I believe, late 1941, they concentrated, as I may have mentioned earlier, on the investigation of Army camp construction, the extravagances in expenditures there. But in that case, this procedure would be followed: There would be facts fed upward to the Committee Counsel, who would in turn present an outline of the facts at hand, and then I think Mr. Truman took it over from that point.

[90]

What he did with it I don't know. It was within his own office organization. An awful lot of it as it came out in the paper was just plain Harry Truman. He had his own way of taking all of this and putting his own stamp on it, as he did throughout his political career, as far as I've been able to follow it. He would make his own emphasis, the facts would be there, and the facts were the facts, as developed by the Committee. And they had a remarkable record for accuracy. They were very careful about it. I don't know of too many instances, none that I can think of at the moment, where they were seriously wrong with the facts. There might be a dispute as to this or that, but they were awfully careful to be accurate. They didn't really seek out publicity just to be making speeches.

FUCHS: This applied to speeches and news releases, what about reports. How were they written?

[91]

ABBOTT: I think in general the same procedure was followed. It seems to me that the Truman Committee -- just trying to make sure of my recollection now -- I remember when I reported for duty in 1944, the Committee by this time was well along in its work and I have a recollection that shortly after I got there, there was a report that had been sent to the Navy Department. It was a Truman Committee (I suppose you'd call it), progress report, and it was a review of, let's say as a guess, of the previous twelve months of activity. They sent the proofs down to the Navy Department -- of course they sent the proofs to other agencies involved, mostly the Army, I would guess, but I think we had the whole report before us. Our interest, of course, was what was in it that pertained to the Navy. But we did have access to the proofs of that report, which I cite as another instance that the Committee

[92]

was scrupulously fair, and we had an opportunity to argue about, not only the facts, but the interpretation; and I thought this, again, was a remarkable instance of fairness. We didn't always win. As I remember we didn't win two or three things there, but that was one of the first things that I had thrown at me by Captain Kennedy, who had been an old newspaperman. He said, "Well, I hear you've had some experience in newspaper work. Why don't you see what you can do with these proofs here."

And I said, "Well, Captain, am I supposed to make the Navy look good?"

And he said, "No, just look at it and see what you can do with it."

By that he meant, if you could improve the language -- he in no way suggested or intended

[93]

that I was to do anything other than take a look. He said, "First, I want to have this checked for accuracy. You've been around here for a few months, and any cases that you've had anything to do with, I want you to review your files, and if there's the slightest inaccuracy, I want you to make a note in the margin. Anything else that you think will be helpful. I don't know whether we can prevail with the Committee, and I'm not concerned. My job and your job is to put our best foot forward with the Committee." He gave the same instruction to Lieutenant Tolan, and gave the same instruction implicitly to himself; so we spent a couple of days looking over proofs of the Truman Committee report, which, as I say, was a status report, or a report to the Senate as to what they'd been doing the last year or so.

[94]

FUCHS: About what date did you join the liaison staff, in '44, was it?

ABBOTT: Yes, early in '44, around February.

FUCHS: Who was the lieutenant you spoke of?

ABBOTT: John Tolan.

FUCHS: I thought you mentioned someone else. There was just you and Tolan and Kennedy, and what other junior officers were there?

ABBOTT: We were the three officers in the immediate office. That was the office, really. Then, as I think I mentioned earlier, Jim, we had detailed to us a contact officer in each of the bureaus. The same assignment was given to them. We farmed out the complaints. If it was something affecting the Bureau of Aeronautics, we would check our own files and our own recollections, and, at the same time send this over to the

[95]

particular Bureau and ask for their comments. Now the Committee made no commitment as to whether they would or would not use any of the material. They reserved that right, but as I say, I just cite that as an instance of how they went out of their way to make sure they were accurate. If there was any significant point, we might say that we disagree violently, or we disagree mildly, or we do this or that, but there was always that door open. And that was the policy of the Counsel.

Mr. Halley, by the way, was a different sort of a person. He was, I think more aggressive, you might say, than Mr. Fulton. Mr. Fulton was principally disposed to send the material down and rely upon the inherent fairness, and not be too concerned with secondary details. Mr. Halley was a capable lawyer, but his training, I think, had been more in the role of a prosecutor, and he was much more disposed to be aggressive.

[96]

FUCHS: What date did you say, now, you left the Committee?

ABBOTT: I stayed with the Committee in its recurring changes of chairmen until...

FUCHS: It must have been until 1946 then that you were there.

ABBOTT: Until February '46, I believe. From February 1944 where I started, and in February 1946 I was transferred to the Office of the Secretary of the Navy. This office was then, as I recall, consolidated with the Judge Advocate General's office. Captain Kennedy had left the service and Mr. Tolan, I believe, had transferred to another branch of government.

FUCHS: What did you do in the Office of the Secretary of the Navy?

ABBOTT: I served as a special assistant to Mr.

[97]

Forrestal, administrative and press duties. I served in that capacity from February '46 until July 1, '46.

FUCHS: Did you see Mr. Forrestal frequently?

ABBOTT: Yes, on numerous occasions. He had four persons, he had his own private secretary, Catherine Foley, a sister, I believe, of Ed Foley, who was, I think, in the Treasury office at that time. She was his personal and confidential secretary. Then, of course, he had his naval aide, and then he had his own personal counsel. I was a combination man, administrative and press officer; so that was the immediate office of Mr. Forrestal. I fitted into that rather loosely. It was a kind of a carry on, because some of the people who had been with him for a long time had left, in particular the man that I was replacing, Eugene Dufield, who had left after long service with Mr. Forrestal,

[98]

I think a period of five years or more, who had been a civilian, had come in from the ranks of the civilians and held the technical rank of captain. So, I felt somewhat lost in that job for a while, but Mr. Forrestal was very kind and I found that an interesting experience, too.

FUCHS: How long were you in that office?

ABBOTT: I left that at the end of June 1946.

FUCHS: Do you have any reflections about Mr. Forrestal's manner of administering his job?

ABBOTT: Well, I think I mentioned earlier, Jim, in the course of our first interview, that when I came in there Mr. Forrestal was coming to the end -- he wasn't coming to the end, but he had then, I think, served continuously, with no vacations at all, from, I believe, either late 1940 or 1941 with the Department of the Navy. Although it wasn't realized at the

[99]

time, I had a little insight that he was an exhausted man, a tired man. He was a man who had dedicated eighteen or twenty hours a day to that job; and as I think I also mentioned earlier, that was the period in which the tugging and hauling for the postwar merger of the services had begun, and he was under the most intense pressure from his own Navy Department.

FUCHS: I don't think we put this on tape, did we?

ABBOTT: I think I made a mention of this. At any rate, he was beset with myriad problems. He was terribly concerned about all aspects of the Navy. I think he had served in World War I as an enlisted seaman. His bent was toward the Navy, all through his life. He had served briefly, as I recall, in the Navy Department. I may be wrong on this, but it is my recollection that he had served somewhere

[100]

along the line, or at least had been in contact in a minor way during Franklin Roosevelt's tenure as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, in World War I, although, as I say, he started off as a lowly seaman, a fact that he frequently mentioned. I think he was one of the great Americans. I think he did a super job, and his tragic ending has always been a source of great sorrow in my life. I can't say that I was an intimate, but I think no one was an intimate, with Mr. Forrestal. He was a remote and withdrawn figure. His whole life became the Navy. He had made a substantial fortune in Wall Street before he came to the Navy Department. He came to, I won't say "love" Government service, but he came to appreciate the role of Government. He had a good deal of insight into what made Government go and it seems to me that his tragedy was that he just stayed too long in the job. It doesn't mean that he

[101]

had outworn his usefulness, but he had outworn his strength, his personal strength gave out. It was just too much. He stayed on and he was pressured by his own service to resist unification (that was a great word in 1946 and 1947); and of course, this had a natural appeal to Mr. Truman, who all through his career had been trying to look for ways to save money, and unification on the surface seemed to suggest economy, eliminating duplication, and therefore saving money because you weren't spending twice for the same thing. This got into a terrible tangle, this is something of a side issue we're discussing, I suppose, but it simply bears on my estimate of James Forrestal for what it's worth. I really think he was a tremendous American.

FUCHS: Yes.

ABBOTT: His ending was most untimely. Probably

[102]

"unnecessary," is a better word.

FUCHS: From what viewpoint?

ABBOTT: Well, I think that had he had the capacity, or had someone else had the persuasive powers to say, "Mr. Forrestal, the world is going to go on, and it's time you stepped aside." It

wasn't, again, that he had outworn his usefulness. The fact was that he did not have very good, what we call today, rapport, with Harry Truman; Harry Truman being from his shoes to his head an Army man, an infantry man at that, and Forrestal being out of Wall Street and subject to some suspicion, I suspect, by Mr. Truman, being out of the Midwest prairies. The two men were not at any time really compatible. And perhaps the thing for Mr. Forrestal to have done would be to leave in 1946 or 1947 and leave the postwar problems to someone else. The other side of the ledger is that Mr. Forrestal

[103]

felt that his job wasn't done, and of course, he was encouraged in this by the career officers who felt that they had the best spokesman they would ever get in resisting the takeover, as they saw it, by the Air Corps. And so that great postwar battle of unifying the Armed Services began. It was the finishing stroke as far as Mr. Forrestal was concerned, in my opinion. It just ground him up.

FUCHS: Of course, you were no longer with him, but thinking back, did you have any thoughts at the time when he accepted this position as Secretary of Defense that it might be a bad thing for Mr. Forrestal?

ABBOTT: I think he accepted it with the greatest reluctance. I think he was then well on the way to physical deterioration. He simply did not have the strength.

[104]

FUCHS: Did you think about this at the time, that it might be...

ABBOTT: I didn't think about this directly at the time I was in his office, except to observe him as a man who was getting terribly tired. I noticed it in little ways. Again, this is hindsight, but one of my regular assignments was to screen the great number of invitations to speak that come to any Cabinet officer, and there would be, of course, several dozen a day maybe, or several dozen a week. I would be asked to send in a memorandum with the invitation, and he always wanted some recommendation. My procedure was to go to the Naval Aide, or if I didn't know the background, go to anyone who might have information, and get their recommendations, and then I would send it in, and he wanted someone's initials "Should I do this or shouldn't I do this, and why should I do this," and he wanted

[105]

it all in very brief form. But I noticed as that spring wore on that there was a great deal of indecision on his part, before he would act on an invitation. This didn't happen too frequently, but it happened more than once. A letter would go out accepting a speaking engagement in Cleveland or Detroit or Philadelphia or somewhere, and in a couple of days I would get a memorandum which would say simply, "Cancel my Philadelphia speech." And needless to say, you didn't go in and ask him why. On one or two occasions I did, and I didn't receive much information. He would simply say, "You got my note?"

I would say, "Yes, sir."

He would say, "Well, that's it."

Looking back, I suspect that he was beginning to have this physical breakdown.

I remember one instance in particular, when he had accepted a speech in Pittsburgh,

[106]

and the text of the speech had been distributed to the press. He took off in his, I think then the great plane for the Secretary was the DC-3, at least that's what he used for the short jumps; and he had no more cleared the Anacostia Naval Air Station when the pilot radioed in, "Cancel the Secretary's speech." I sent word down to the admiral in charge of public information and of course he had sent it all over Washington, and he just groaned. Apparently he had had some of the same insights, but I being a commander, and a Reserve commander, and he being a Naval Academy man, he didn't share too many confidences with me, and I can recall that all he said, was, "What the hell is happening to Jim?" That's all that was said, but there were a number of those instances, and this pressure never let up. He was pushed tremendously, "Get over to the President, get over to the President; tell him how wrong the Air Corps is; tell him how

[107]

great the Navy aviation is; tell him this is the worst disaster in the history of the United States." It was not only the Navy people. These were influential citizens who sincerely believed that this was the end of the Navy. I think he would easily have been able to withstand it had he been the Forrestal of 1940 or '41, but he wasn't. He'd been through six, seven years without rest. He didn't know how to take a vacation; he didn't know how to take an afternoon off. He never quit. I have a picture at home signed by Mr. Forrestal, and I'm very proud of that. He called me on a Sunday morning. He was apt to call at any hour, but he said, "Could you come down?"

Of course, I said I could. I was there in a matter of minutes, and he handed me a large, inscribed picture, a color photograph. He said, "I just thought you'd want to have this." He was there on a Sunday morning signing pictures and looking over documents. There was no particular

[108]

urgency. This was in 1946. There were plenty of problems, but I didn't know of too many people who were working Sunday morning then. I asked the Marine guard at the door when Mr. Forrestal came in, and he said, "He was in here at 6:30 this morning." This was 11:30 on Sunday morning, and he stayed until 3 o'clock -- typical.

FUCHS: You have already indicated that President Truman leaned towards the Army in the unification matter. Do you think when he was head of the Senate Investigating Committee that he leaned toward the Army? Say there was something came to his attention where it might have been between the Army and the Navy, say, something to do with war production, and he showed a little bit of prejudice?

ABBOTT: No, not the slightest. I think he just took those things as they came. I think if there was a bias on Mr. Truman's part, and I

[109]

suppose we're all made up that way out of our past experience, if there was any bias at all, it emerged in this postwar period. Mr. Truman, as Chairman of the Senate War Investigating Committee, to my personal knowledge, never made the slightest attempt to tilt things in any direction. Each case was taken up on its merits. The Marine Corps was one thing, the Navy, the Army Air Corps, the Infantry, anything that had to do was just a case, a file, and was judged on its merits. It, had nothing whatever to do with whether he was pro-Army or pro-Navy or anything else. He just took it as it came. This other aspect that I am discussing, surfaced after the end of the war. That is what I have always thought was something that history still has to judge. I just don't know the answer to that. I think that's a chapter in American history that could stand a little more investigation.

[110]

FUCHS: I've been told that the Navy liaison had a system of sort of "Paul Revereing" these investigations. Do you know what I have reference to there, and if so, would you comment on it?

ABBOTT: Well, to a degree that's true. The Navy would get word, sometimes through their own internal system, that all was not right somewhere; and being human, I suppose they, in a number of instances, decided that events would take care of themselves, and so they did nothing about it. But let's assume they did know that something was wrong and they didn't have to have someone else come and tell them about it. If a complaint came to the Truman Committee, we would hear about it in due course, as I have indicated before, and our procedure, naturally, was to put the people on notice that some trouble was headed their way. I think the term "Paul Revere"

[111]

arose from some of the Truman investigators who accused us of being outriders and getting the whitewash brushes ready, particularly if there was to be any kind of field investigation. I think Rudolph Halley, whom I've mentioned before, the Associate Counsel, coined a phrase, that the Navy always began a senatorial visit by what he called a "super-abundant luncheon." He said that I think with some justification in at least one instance, that -- let's take a shipyard as a typical example -- the Committee announced that they wanted to visit this installation, the commandant of the yard greeted us with appropriate fanfare and suggested they have lunch before any serious business was accomplished. Mr. Halley thought that the luncheon went on a little too long in that end in many instances, so he said that he was for cutting out the super-abundant luncheons, because by 2:30 the Senators were not nearly

[112]

as much in a mood for records investigation, particularly tours of the shipyard that would involve long hours of walking and climbing up and down ships, and so forth. I believe that's where the term "Paul Revere" originated. We did spread the alarm. We would probably have to stand guilty. Our defense was that there was no point in bringing the Committee down if the appropriate officers weren't informed and didn't have the facts at hand. I'm not altogether sure we sold this at all times; but at any rate, we battled it out and if they weren't satisfied, they were not slow in letting us know about it.

FUCHS: Did you have much personal contact with Matthew Connelly?

ABBOTT: To some degree. I think Matthew Connelly was the nominal Chief Investigator of the Committee when I first came there. I believe I

[113]

indicated before that I had very little to do with Matthew Connelly in that capacity. After the war, during the campaign of 1948, he was with Mr. Truman, and I had some contact with him in arranging appointments and a little to do with the itinerary through California; but nothing in the way of a day-to-day operation. I think he was more active in the Truman Committee operations in the opening days, and that was before I came there. The Truman Committee was created, I believe, in '41, and I didn't appear on the scene until '44 and by that time I think Matt Connelly was off in other duties, and I had just surface contact in a couple of cases. My recollection is that he was no longer active in the affairs of the Committee. He had gone on to more political things.

FUCHS: Were there any staff members, investigators, who you thought were pretty high powered in

[114]

carrying more than their weight, as against others you might care to name who you thought were less so?

ABBOTT: Well, the most capable man I think by far was Harold Robinson, the Chief Investigator, who had the FBI experience, and knew what he was about in all respects. There were two or three others, I've forgotten some of their names, Walter Hehmyer was certainly a capable man; Wilbur Sparks; I don't think of any other names offhand.

FUCHS: Do you recall any incidents, or any anecdotes connected with either of these gentlemen, that might be worth putting on the record?

ABBOTT: I think nothing terribly noteworthy. As I mentioned, Harold Robinson, I thought, was the best because I believe he had had in general a more thorough preparation for this kind of work. He prepared his cases very, very well. He was

[115]

an accountant, I think, by profession, and he was able to cut through an awful lot of stuff; and this doesn't reflect on the Navy Department, but it's natural if somebody says, "Give me all your records," then you give them all your records, but you don't necessarily refine the records. You say, "Here you are. There are the records." Harold Robinson had an ability to cut through an awful lot of red tape, read balance sheets, and judge a case for himself. While we were willing to help, I'm not altogether sure that Harold thought we were helping when we were helping. I think he stood out from the staff. The others were good, they were competent people. I didn't run into anyone who was really below par in his job.

FUCHS: I thought I might mention some of these staff members, some of whom are just names to us. We have practically nothing about their background

[116]

or what they did specifically, and maybe you would have some recollection. If not, why, at least we've covered it. One was Robert Irvin.

ABBOTT: Robert Irvin, I think he's in Southern California.

FUCHS: He was later appointed Executive Assistant to the Chairman. He came on February 9, 1942, and he resigned September 15, 1945. Did you have any contact with him?

ABBOTT: I remember Bob Irvin as a man I worked with on several occasions, a man who did his job, who was competent, and I don't recall anything outstanding about him other than that.

FUCHS: I wanted to ask you about a couple of points. Did you ever hear of any complaints by some of the other members of the standing committees that the Truman Committee was sort of

[117]

impinging on their jurisdiction? Thinking maybe of the Senate Military, Affairs Committee, or the House Committee on Military Affairs?

ABBOTT: Yes, there was a little of that, but I don't believe it amounted to a great deal. It was confined, as far as I recall, to some grumbling from the old established order of things that this was something in the nature of an upstart committee and also, as this Truman Committee went on, there were other special committees created, both in the House and in the Senate, and in our office we also had something to do with those committees. For example, there was a committee formed under the chairmanship of the late Senator James Murray of Montana, which I think was the Small Business Committee, or the Senate Special Committee on Small Business. The Navy had been accused of giving all of its business to half a dozen large

[118]

contractors. The Army was in the same position generally speaking. The Senate Small Business Committee was engaged in trying to break up the prime contractors and get more sub-contractors.

So we had that, and then we had, oh, maybe three or four similar efforts. These things impinged, to a degree, on the long-standing House and Senate committees, so I think there was some, of what my boss, Captain Kennedy, would call "fussing," which was his name for anything short of a cyclone, about whose jurisdiction was involved. Of course, for most of the Senators and the House people, too, these committees, particularly the Truman Committee, became very valuable reference points you see. A Senator from California, or someplace else would receive a complaint and the best thing for him to do would be to pass it over to the Truman Committee. He might do something on his own, but he could do a lot more by getting hold of Senator Truman and

[119]

say, "Harry, there's a situation out in my shipyard, I've been getting a lot of mail on it, and I'd like to turn this over to you and see what's back of it." So, he could then write his constituent and say, "I referred it to the Senate War Investigating Committee." It worked out very well for most

of the Senators. They didn't have the facilities, really, to do anything with the Armed Services, but the Truman Committee by then had achieved a pretty good name and so that was not a bad answer, it wasn't passing the buck exactly, it was just...but it became a very useful avenue for an awful lot of Senators. There were only a couple of committees that might really be bothered, the Armed Services Committee, Military Affairs or whatever they were called, and the Naval Affairs Committees. But they were preoccupied with the day-to-day operations of the war, because they were in a big military

[120]

strategy, this kind of thing, really appealed to them. Truman stuck closely to his line, just investigating the waste, and he didn't ever get in the path of the operation of the war. You see, that was the safety valve that he had. He just said, "I'm going to stick with the waste here. You fellows, I'm not going to tell you how to run the war. That's up to you and the generals and the admirals to work out, but if you're spending six billion and you can get by with one billion, that's our business."

FUCHS: In his *Memoirs* Mr. Truman has said, "Senator Brewster and Vandenberg tried at times to make another Committee on the Conduct of the War out of our Committee by attempting to bring the Congress into control of the operations of the military establishment, but we never permitted that to happen." Do you recall anything of that? Of

[121]

course, this may have been before you became liaison.

ABBOTT: I have no direct knowledge of that, Jim. I would suspect that was true, to a degree, and that was the very thing that Mr. Truman attempted to avoid. He wanted to stay out of that, and did stay out of that. That may very well have been true. It seems to me that Senator Vandenberg, and possibly Senator Brewster, served on that Pearl Harbor Committee, which was convened, I believe, soon after Pearl Harbor. You remember, they had a tremendous parade of admirals and generals who were responsible.

FUCHS: Well, now Vandenberg never served on the Committee. It sounds to me as though he meant Vandenberg was attempting to get the Committee to go into this kind of thing.

ABBOTT: Yes. Brewster, I think, was one of the

[122]

original members of the Committee.

FUCHS: Yes.

ABBOTT: Brewster may have had a tendency to go in that direction. I think that he did. He wanted to get into the operations but he never did to my knowledge. And Vandenberg was never on the Committee itself, anyway. He was a power in the Senate.

FUCHS: Do you have a feeling, reflections, about who were the main powers, workhorses, say, of the Senators, other than Mr. Truman?

ABBOTT: Senator Kilgore, certainly. Harley Kilgore of West Virginia was a powerhouse. Senator [Monrad C.] Wallgren of Washington, a particular friend. It was not a crony thing that Truman was so often accused of. Senator Wallgren carried a good share of the load. Senator Ferguson of Michigan, a Republican, was very strong,

[123]

and Senator Hatch of New Mexico. I believe almost everybody on that Committee was quite active. I can't recall the whole makeup now: There was Wallgren, Kilgore, Truman, Brewster, Hatch, and I've just forgotten who the other -- Ferguson. I think there were nine in all. But it seems to me that almost every Senator took some part. The three active people, other than Truman, would be Ferguson, Kilgore and Wallgren, with Hatch.

FUCHS: Brewster?

ABBOTT: Brewster was in and out. If things interested him, he would be on hand for days at a time, and if it didn't have anything to do with what he particularly was interested in, he seldom appeared. Joe [Joseph H.] Ball of Minnesota, you may remember, the boy wonder out of the Stassen days, 1940, he was very active. He went on many trips.

[124]

FUCHS: Did you have any occasion to deal with the War Production Board? Did you come in touch with Eddie [Edwin A.] Locke?

ABBOTT: No, I can't say I did. I know the Truman Committee did a great deal of work on the War Production Board, particularly in the field of conversion to war industry on the part of our big industries, such as the automobile industry, metal producing, and so on, aluminum, steel -- the War Production Board came into that. I had no contact with them. Eddie Locke is a name. I didn't have any contact with him. I don't remember him.

FUCHS: There has always been an interest in how much Mr. Truman saw of President Roosevelt, much of it centered on how much he saw of him as Vice President, but also as a Senator; and he says in his *Memoirs* that he saw him, oh, probably once a week, sometimes more often, many

[125]

of these meetings being off-the-record. Do you have any knowledge of how much he saw President Roosevelt?

ABBOTT: Do you mean as Vice President?

FUCHS: As Senator.

ABBOTT: As Chairman of the Committee.

FUCHS: As Chairman of the Committee.

ABBOTT: No, I have no direct knowledge of that. My impression is that Roosevelt paid very little attention. I think he was informed by assistants, largely, as to what was going on, but he was so engrossed in the conduct of the war. I think what happened, in fact, was that Mr. Truman had the confidence of the majority leadership in the Senate, and they reported that the Committee was doing a good job. I think I mentioned that one of my Navy friends, an Admiral,

[126]

who said, "Keep it up, you're helping me devote my attention to winning the war." Perhaps Mr. Truman did see Mr. Roosevelt; I have no knowledge of that. If he did I think it was on a very limited basis. I think Roosevelt at that time just dealt with the majority leadership. Truman in his *Memoirs* said that as far as knowing what was going on, on the conduct of the war, the plans for the atomic bomb, and things like that, he had no more knowledge than the guy outside the door as to what really was going on.

FUCHS: Did it ever come to your attention that some of the Committee investigators had tried to look into the Hanford Project and the Secretary of War had called them off by appealing to Mr. Truman directly? This may have been before you joined.

ABBOTT: I'm not sure about the appeal to Truman

[127]

directly. Now that you mention it, I think there's one other man who should be added to the list of staff people, and that is Francis Flanagan. The name just came into my mind. He became the Chief Investigator for the Committee, I believe, after Senator Mead took the chairmanship. I believe, I'm not certain of this, I think Harold Robinson had left; but in any case, Flanagan had been a staff member, and at some point at least, he became the Chief Investigator. Where he is now, I have no idea. I believe it was Flanagan who told me that at one point the Committee had started an informal inquiry on Hanford. They would pick up reports of things that were going on, but they didn't have more than the most fragmentary notion of what it was. It was a totally secret project, of course, and they never could find out or get any leads. I guess they got a few letters in, but they got nowhere with that. You might try

[128]

to find Flanagan. I haven't seen him. His nickname was Frip.

FUCHS: I have heard of him.

ABBOTT: He was a very able guy.

FUCHS: I thought we might briefly go over some of these others who served concurrently with you. We've already mentioned Irvin. What about Donald Lathrom?

ABBOTT: At this stage of the game, it is a name that rings something of a bell, but no special context.

FUCHS: He resigned on August 31, '44, and he had been appointed in July of '41, and...

ABBOTT: No, I don't have a...

FUCHS: What about Harry S. Magee?

ABBOTT: No. It seems to me that we had Wilbur Sparks

[129]

and Walter Hehmeyer.

FUCHS: Hehmeyer was more in charge of public relations wasn't he, the press and so on?

ABBOTT: Well, he did some investigating. He did quite a lot of investigating of the Navy Department, as far as the Navy was concerned. The names of Irvin, Robinson, Hehmeyer and Wilbur Sparks, stick in my mind as Navy people; they, of course had quite a staff assigned to Navy matters. This wasn't everything they were doing, and we used to encourage them to do other things-- "Are you sure you don't have somebody else to investigate"-- but those people, just offhand, and of course, Robinson was sort of the chief man; occasionally he would take a hand, but he was also, you know, the assignment man, and the evaluator and the reviewer and so on.

[130]

FUCHS: What about Franklin N. Parks?

ABBOTT: Yes, Parks is another name that occurred to me, but nothing special.

FUCHS: Joe Martinez?

ABBOTT: He came from New Mexico. I remember him. He was a protege, I believe, of Senator Hatch, who was also from New Mexico. He's another name in the crowd.

FUCHS: Do you remember Haven Sawyer? He was on the staff from March 16, '42 to September 17, '46.

ABBOTT: Haven Sawyer, I believe, was kind of a desk man. I recall the name, but I don't recall him as associated with any of the kind of work I was doing. The name is very definitely familiar. We used to have a Christmas party once in a while, the Truman

[131]

Committee in those days would have a Christmas party, and we'd go up there and I'd meet, you know, a dozen or two people that I'd never heard of before, and they'd never heard of me, and we'd all have a drink or two. So these names came in, in this context. Sawyer, I do recall, but in no sense in any direct identification.

FUCHS: There was a Hendrick R. Suydam, whom I know nothing about, except that he served as an investigator from November 25, '42 to July 31, '44. Of course, that would have been only about five months concurrent with you.

ABBOTT: Nothing.

FUCHS: George Meader succeeded Halley as Chief Counsel, and stayed with the Committee then until the first of July, '47. Do you have any recollection of him?

ABBOTT: I had lots of contact with George Meader,

[132]

yes. What were those dates he served?

FUCHS: He became Chief Counsel October 1, '45.

ABBOTT: He was third man on the totem pole, it seems to me. He was under Halley, for a while. Fulton left, and Halley came up, and Meader came up, and then he came up again, and he was finally Chief Counsel. I believe by that time Senator Ferguson had the Committee, if I'm not mistaken. In '46, Congress changed hands. Somewhere along the line there was Senator Mead -- I guess he had it for a while...

FUCHS: Mead succeeded Truman and then Ferguson.

ABBOTT: Then they got off into the Howard Hughes investigation and all that, and that's where Flanagan came in strongly. They went into the Howard Hughes flying boat and all the rest of that stuff. I wasn't in on any of that. I was gone by then.

[133]

FUCHS: It wasn't Ferguson, it was Kilgore that succeeded Mead, but Mead served from August '44 to October '46. Could you contrast his handling of the Committee as Chairman with that of Truman?

ABBOTT: Did Mead succeed Truman, he did, didn't he?

FUCHS: Yes. And then Kilgore served for a short time, from October '46 to January '47, succeeded Mead, and then Brewster took over.

ABBOTT: Because the Congress changed.

FUCHS: Yes.

ABBOTT: To the Republicans.

FUCHS: Yes, the 80th Congress.

ABBOTT: Yes, that's right. Well, Mead was not the man that Truman was. He handled it in a

[134]

more political fashion. He didn't have the strength that Truman did. He didn't have the same grasp; and also the temper of the times had changed. The problems were quite different. They were redeployment and getting the troops home and all kinds of problems that no longer bore an urgency to winning the war. It was not the same thing at all. I can't remember exactly where George Meader came in, but I made a trip around the world with him in 1946. That was one of the last things that I did with the Committee.

FUCHS: Well, Meader was appointed Assistant Counsel on July 1, 1943, Executive Assistant to the Chief Counsel on August 1, 1944, and then he was appointed Chief Counsel on October 1, 1945, and he resigned July 1, 1947, so he served as Assistant Counsel, then Executive Assistant to the Chief Counsel shortly after you went there,

[135]

and then in October of '45, he became Chief Counsel, succeeding Halley.

ABBOTT: George was a Republican from Michigan who later served in Congress for a number of terms. He was later defeated eventually. I don't know where he is now. He may be in Michigan somewhere practicing law.

The problems shifted, the focus shifted. You know, when Truman started, it was prewar, '41 period, it was just at the beginning of the war and going on through; then later when things were on the downgrade, so to speak, when all these other people came in, and I suppose I tend to view Truman as the keystone, a cut above everybody we're talking about. I think in a real sense, that's probably true, but it's also unfair to the other people because they were dealing with problems without that impetus that Truman had. He created it in a

[136]

way, but he also sustained it. Halley, and Meader, and Senator Mead, and Homer Ferguson, and all the rest of these people didn't quite have it. They didn't have what Truman had. It's very difficult to decide because Truman had the initial breaks and had just what he needed to go with them. That was something, but I still think there was an ingredient in his makeup that set him apart from the other people. Ferguson, for example, was a great Senator in some ways, and a petty man in others. He would take a little bit of a detail and just shake it like a terrier, eight hours on end, just stay with it. In the naval shipyard at Norfolk we had some wasted manpower. I think I told you this or told you a related incident once before. There was a constant complaint. The Navy and the Army had asked for a National Service Act which would have put everyone under military orders, whether they were in uniform or not, and

[137]

their argument was that they had to have help. So, people complained all over the country. They naturally didn't like this, particularly night shipyard work, so they would send in reams of complaints about the wasted manpower in naval shipyards. This was true, no question about it.

We went down to Norfolk and investigated these complaints and Ferguson was in charge. He got very The Committee always had their little They never quite told us everything, and we never quite told them everything, everybody professing the utmost integrity and full disclosure and so on. Ferguson had some little thing that he attached great importance to, I can't recall the details, now, but he had some secret thing. He called in two or three of the foremen, and he made a great to-do out of three or four naval foremen who were using Lucite, which was a plastic material and some

[138]

what scarce to find. These fellows, in their so-called spare time, which they weren't supposed to have any of, if you needed a National Service Act nobody had any spare time, if you were using every person to his utmost; but these men were sitting around making chessmen and chess counters out of this Lucite material. Well, it was a relatively trivial thing related to the overall expenditure, and the big objective. But Ferguson spent six hours on this one point. He was there until midnight with these three or four people just going over and over and over this kind of detail.

Then he had another instance where a man had said, in the same shop where everybody was supposed to be winning the war yesterday, some valuable artisans had been given the job of crafting an oyster shucking board, special handling and so forth. You know, Ferguson demanded that that board be taken to Washington

[139]

and we had to have public hearing on this, and he used his oyster shucking board as an exhibit of how this Navy which was hollering for a National Service Act had this kind of time to waste. He would just as I say, go off into big diversions. He came from Detroit. My family knew him, I had known him slightly, but my then wife's family knew him quite well. So, we got to be good friends. It didn't count for much, but I went to Detroit with him and took a lieutenant from the Bureau of Aeronautics out with me, and that poor guy got the grilling of his life. The Bureau of Aeronautics had contracts all over the country, the automobile companies and everybody else, and they were manufacturing parts, tanks, ships, planes, and so on.

Ferguson insisted that we have a hearing in Detroit, which happened to be his home base. He had gotten a lot of complaints, and he spent

[140]

nine hours on this same kind of grilling. I don't think this lieutenant was ever quite the same. Senator Ferguson could have been a tremendous force. You see, he had come to the Senate with a great reputation as an investigator, because in Michigan, under their circuit court system, which corresponds to the California superior courts, the judge of the circuit court can, if he wishes, impanel himself as a one-man grand jury, and he can summon witnesses, question them, and have all the powers that ordinarily go with a county grand jury. Homer Ferguson had done this in Detroit, and he was elected to the Senate of the United States, to a very large degree, on his reputation, but his tendency was to go for the particulars. That's good, but here again, it wasn't the same caliber, it wasn't the same breadth in which Harry Truman would approach the problem. Harry Truman would go after the principle. Jim Mead did the same thing to a

[141]

degree that Ferguson did. If Jim Mead got interested in a particular thing, and he would grind away on that. He would grind it down until there was nothing left, but there wasn't any great sweeping conclusion to be drawn, you know, and no kind of thing to reproach the country on. It sort of got lost in details. Now, whether this was again the freshness of the original approach that Harry Truman had against the sentiments prevailing after long years of the war, is something I can't really decide. My own opinion is that Truman had a broader grasp of what was needed, and in the postwar years this Committee, in my judgment, went down hill quite a bit. They got into terrible trouble with Howard Hughes. That was another story, and I was not around at that time. I think that occurred way into 1947. It seems to me it was when Senator Brewster finally came to the chairmanship. He

[142]

got off into some awful tangles with Howard Hughes, the details I don't remember now; but it got into controversy and personalities and all kinds of complications that were not present in the best years of the Truman Committee under Truman's personal guidance.

FUCHS: What was the battle of Savo Island? I came across that someplace. Do you have any knowledge of that?

ABBOTT: No, no.

FUCHS: Savo Island. I can't figure that out. I read that in something I was reading.

ABBOTT: There was the military battle of Subo Island.

FUCHS: Well, maybe that was a misspelling.

ABBOTT: But that's a military engagement. I don't

[143]

know. I believe it was a major engagement of the Pacific War, but I doubt if it had any bearing on the Truman Committee.

FUCHS: Nothing was outstanding about it in regard to supplies or deficiencies of anything?

ABBOTT: Nothing that I can recall.

FUCHS: I don't know where I saw that. I thought maybe it was maybe some sort of a joke or something, like Truman, the "Battle of Who Run" or something.

ABBOTT: I don't know.

FUCHS: It could have been a typo. You don't know how the Truman Committee came into it?

ABBOTT: I have no idea.

FUCHS: One more thing, did you have any knowledge about Mr. Truman's thoughts about the vice-presidency or his disclaimer of aspirations for

[144]

being nominated for Vice President.

ABBOTT: No I have nothing at all to contribute on that that isn't already published. The only knowledge I have is what I think everyone else knows, his own account as in his Memoirs, and I think most people interested have read other accounts as well. That's all I have. I don't have any insights at all.

FUCHS: There wasn't any scuttlebutt around about that?

ABBOTT: None at all. I would guess that it came as something of a surprise to him. I doubt that he was first choice, by any means; but that's strictly from reading. Nothing that I had anything to do with.

FUCHS: What about the 1948 campaign? Did you want to go into some matters there that you think might be worth putting on the record? Your

[145]

part in it or anecdotes about Mr. Truman perhaps?

ABBOTT: I don't recall offhand anything that would be of particular significance.

FUCHS: What did you do in the campaign?

ABBOTT: My role in the campaign was to serve as an assistant to Oliver Carter, who was then the chairman of the State Democratic Central Committee of California; I was concerned with arrangements, of one kind or another, and Mr. Truman's tours and his arrangements in general within the state, which were scanty indeed. Hopes were low and I will say for Oliver Carter that he never lost heart. He exhorted the small army he had around him that they were not to despair. I don't believe he had any inside knowledge, maybe it was just his natural-born optimism, but Carter always contended that California could

[146]

be won for Mr. Truman, and, as I say, he didn't have a very large army to get that message across to. He had only to look around him at a handful of people. My chore was to try to make arrangements, as best we could, for Truman's visits out here.

FUCHS: Both for the pre-convention, so-called, non-political tour in June, and then his subsequent visit in September?

ABBOTT: Yes, this involved gathering the faithful, or what could be found of the faithful, and helping in general to see Mr. Truman through California, or at least Northern California. There was a great difference from the pre-convention, so-called non-political tour and Mr. Truman's swing, as I recall it, through California in September or whenever it was, it was early in the campaign, in the fall campaign, and the spirits of everybody had picked up

[147]

noticeably. He was making headway. It was apparent or at least we were eager to read it that way.

FUCHS: Is there anything else you might have to say about the '48 campaign; did you come into personal contact with him? Anything you recall that might be of interest, amusing or otherwise?

ABBOTT: I think of only one other thing. I believe it was in the earlier tour. Mr. Truman came to San Francisco -- it seems to me I sent you a color postcard that we developed, which was a novelty in 1948, in the campaign. Mr. Truman took time out of a tremendously busy day to pose for that photograph in the Fairmont Hotel here. That was arranged, incidentally, by Matt Connelly, who saw to it that we had our photographer in, Mr. Truman took about forty minutes out of a day that was packed full to start with,

[148]

and he did it on two counts. I've always been rather pleased about one of the counts. He said at first that he didn't see how he could do it, and then someone said, "It could be useful to local candidates." Well, as it turned out, we couldn't take any group photographs. First of all, it was a non-political tour, so he had to turn it down on that, and then he said, "Well, is there any other reason?" Matt Connelly told me afterwards he said, "Can you do it on any other basis?"

And Matt Connelly said, "Well, one of your friends from the Truman Committee days wants to get this done for the State Central Committee."

He said, "Who's that?"

He said, "Well, Jack Abbott wants you to."

Mr. Truman said, "Well, damn it, let him in. But no more than a half hour." Well, he took forty-five minutes, and we came out with a first-class color photo, which it later

[149]

proved very valuable. It was distributed at the convention in Philadelphia. We used it as an effective friend-to-friend postcard to get out the votes here in the fall, with results. But just the same, I don't know anyone else who would have crowded that in, given the fact that he just had no time at all, and he just had to see a lot of people, who, on the surface, certainly, were a whole lot more important than just getting his picture taken once more. He did it, and I thought he was very gracious. about it, just one more indication of a fine man.

FUCHS: Did you go to the convention?

ABBOTT: No, I didn't. I was sorry afterwards, but I couldn't do it. I saw to it that ten thousand of those cards were put into the hands of the California delegation to take to Philadelphia, and they were put to good use

[150]

all around the hall; but that was the extent of my participation at the '48 convention. I'm sorry I didn't go, it was a historic occasion, as everyone knows.

FUCHS: I've heard a story that a great many of those cards were destroyed by someone en route. I don't know whether it was the sum total, but that there were some fifty thousand being sent to Philadelphia for distribution.

ABBOTT: Well, I'm inclined to doubt that because I don't believe the production was that great. The production was here in the north, and it is possible that something to that effect happened, but I've heard that story also and I've never been able to trace it down. I'd be inclined to doubt that that was so. It's possible that of the 10,000 some of them never got to Philadelphia.

[151]

FUCHS: It was a very good picture, anyway.

ABBOTT: It was a good picture. It was, as I say, a novelty in those days, because it was one of the first -- this was '48 and it was one of the first kodachromes, color photographs. The process was just coming in and for politics it was thought to be too expensive. But later on about a dozen candidates here in California picked up the idea and used it, even though they couldn't get in on the original picture with Mr. Truman. The truth was that some of them weren't sure then they wanted to be pictured with Mr. Truman. Later on they would have given anything to have been in such a picture.

FUCHS: I've got quite a bit more I should ask you about, but I think we might close in view of the time. I wanted to ask you, what about your relationship with Fulton?

[152]

ABBOTT: My relationship with Fulton was not close. I was a junior officer, and in the beginning months of my service with the Navy, as liaison to the Committee, I was third in line, and so my contacts with Mr. Fulton were few. I can't say I had a close relationship with him. I can't recall more than one or two instances I had any direct negotiations with him.

FUCHS: What were your reflections when Mr. Truman succeeded President Roosevelt? Did you feel, "Well, maybe he was good as a Senator, as a head of a committee, but as President he will do what?"

ABBOTT: I had a feeling that Mr. Truman would do well. I suppose it was just because I had seen the way he operated as a Senator, or more particularly speaking as the Chairman of that Committee. I suppose that's a rather narrow

[153]

base out of which to judge a man, but after all at that time, there were not very many people who had any insight into Mr. Truman's ability. I don't say that I had particularly, but I did know that he had a good deal more to him than the popular concept. So I made a private guess that he would do a great deal better than most people gave him credit for, and I think, obviously, history has borne that out. I don't want to appear as a prophet. That would be the furthest thing in my thoughts, but I never did have the idea that he was a mediocre man. I saw for myself that he was everything but that.

FUCHS: Finally, I want to ask you about the "Moles."

ABBOTT: Well, the Morrison Moles came on a little bit after Mr. Truman's heyday. It might be an interesting sidelight. It doesn't have any

[154]

particular application. We got that started, as I recall, in 1949. There were really two organizations, both of which were wholly unofficial. There were the Moles and the California Coonskinners, which was formed in '49. That was harking back a little bit to the valiant efforts of Senator Alben Barkley, his campaigning in 1948 and some of his Kentucky background. So we dreamed up the idea of having a coonskin cap as our emblems; this was way before Senator [Estes] Kefauver had appeared on the national scene. We also got up a scroll and called ourselves the California Coonskinners, and I think we made Mr. Truman an honorary member. As for the Moles, they don't quite fit into the pattern we're talking about. It's just an amusing little sidelight, I guess, an illustration that once in a while you have to have a little fun in politics. In 1956, at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago which nominated

[155]

Adlai Stevenson the second time, the California delegation, as usual, was given the poorest accommodations that anyone could find, we having the largest contingent and the least influence. This had been our experience, and so we were quartered in the old Morrison Hotel, which I believe has since been torn down. The late Senator [Clair] Engle of California was prominent in the proceedings, and although he was very prominent in our delegation, he didn't seem to draw much water nationally because he had one of the smallest rooms in the Morrison. We got into a place that had a light well, but not a very big light well. I went up to get him one morning and knocked on the door and, as he later told it, he emerged out of the gloom and he said, "I finally made out who it was, and it was Jack Abbott, and Jack said to me, 'You've got to get up.'" I said, "Well, where are we?" He said I told him the Morrison

[156]

Hotel. Engle said, "What time is it? I can't see my watch."

"It's 7 o'clock."

He said, "Wait I'll put a light on, but I don't think it will help much." As Clair later told it, he then went to the phone and called the operator and identified himself and demanded to know what time it was and the operator told him, and he said, "I know that, but is it day or night. I can't

tell." So she said it was a.m. Forthwith Clair Engle went downstairs and talked to Bill Malone, and said, "You know, we're just like moles in this place. I think when I get home I'll form an organization known as the Morrison Moles." That's how it all came up, and so we had another one of these things just like the California Coonskinners. The requirements of membership were minimum. You had to have been at Chicago and roomed at the Morrison Hotel, and

[157]

you had to have had a room where it was necessary to inquire of the operator whether it was day or night when you asked for the time. We had some escapees who were wiser than we were, and went off to the Drake and other places where the light was a little better and they had a hard time getting in the Moles. In passing, that's just a little anecdote, and as I say, an illustration that sometimes you have to have a little fun.

FUCHS: Did you get up a beautiful scroll for the Morrison Moles like you did for the California Coonskinners that Harold McGrath displayed?

ABBOTT: I believe we did, but I am not sure now. I looked around the other day. I still have my Coonskinner certificate which was framed and duly signed, but I can't locate one for Morrison Moles. I think I'll have to conduct a further search. Incidentally, there are two

[158]

mottoes on the California Coonskinners scroll. On one side was the replica of the Kentucky squirrel hunter complete with double-barreled shotgun and coonskin cap in pursuit of game, squirrel in this case, and there were two inscriptions on it: One was, "Always do right -- for yourself." And on the other side was, "Shoot, Luke, the air is full of pigeons." And both of these were signed by Oliver Carter. I sometimes wonder if both of these anecdotes don't illustrate an era when there was a more personal approach to politics, where there was a kinship of a sort, and the personality politics was portrayed in a different way. If you study the situation, I've been somewhat intrigued because my thoughts began by trying to compare the concepts of personality politics and the difference media is making. Certainly if there was any politician or public official who had a personality approach to politics,

[159]

it was Harry Truman. And yet, the term today is applied to anyone who can project on television, regardless of any other concept. Adlai Stevenson was another figure with a personality, so I think the issue is still in doubt, whether media, per se can carry the day. Many times it appears to, and this is interesting, I think. Harry Truman, in his day, won an election, won public approval, on nothing else but personality. He didn't have television in 1942 to '46. He didn't really have it much in 1948. It's something that students at the Harry S. Truman Library should pursue, the many facets of politics. It's something I would like to pursue in greater detail myself. I think today every candidate is beguiled, almost -- is persuaded -- that, "Once I can get on that television tube, I can just carry the day, because people don't care about anything else." I don't believe this is true.

[160]

I still think you have to have something else. We can all prove the contrary, according to our prejudices, people who say, "This or that man doesn't have anything, but all he has to do is get on television." My thesis is that you do have to have something else. Harry Truman had something else. Franklin Roosevelt had something else, to go with the use of radio.

I would hope that at the Truman Library some student of history will come along and maybe this could be a project to try to prove where personality -- personality politics, in short, is nothing new. Television is a means of extension, most dramatic, but it has nothing new about it other than that.

FUCHS: This is very interesting in light of the book that was recently published by Joe McGinniss, *Selling of the President*. I assume you...

[161]

ABBOTT: Yes, I am familiar with it.

FUCHS: People are apprehensive about what we might get in the way of national leaders who have nothing but charisma or the television image, which is good, because they do project, but that may not be what we need.

ABBOTT: Well, this is always the danger in a democracy. And after all, even with every edge in that election going to the Republicans and to Mr. Nixon, the outcome was hairline, with every handicap facing Mr. Humphrey. The result was just so close that it could hardly be measured. Everyone talks about Harry Truman and the little man and how he came through and all the rest of it, but I don't know whether this aspect we've just recently gotten upon here has been adequately examined -- the real kernel of Mr. Truman's appeal. Everyone has written about it, the common man who was a

[162]

failure, the haberdasher; Battery D in France, and all the stories about playing poker and drinking bourbon. But I still don't know whether this element has been seen. Maybe it will never be.

FUCHS: You're probably right. There's a lot to be studied yet.

ABBOTT: That's part of the pursuit of history, just what did make the difference. I think that the research at the Truman Library is just tremendously engrossing, and should certainly be pursued, because it's going to be a long, long time if ever, before anybody can put his finger on just why Harry Truman won that 1948 election.

FUCHS: That's very true and I certainly appreciate your comments about it. I know your time is short now, so I guess we can conclude on

[163]

that note. I appreciate all your help, not only by submitting to this interview, but also in lining up some very worthwhile interviewees for me while I was out here. You've been most helpful.

ABBOTT: Well, I'm delighted to do it, Jim.

INDEX

Abbott, John:

- appointment to Office, Chief of Naval Operations, 7
- biographical data, 1-4
- Clearance Section, Office of Chief of Naval Operations, 58-59
- duties of, on Truman Committee, 21-22, 26, 28-29
- as editor of Truman Committee reports, 92-93
- Fulton, Hugh, relationship with, 152
- liaison officers in Judge Advocate General's Office, meetings with, 65-66
- Office, location of, 51-52
- in Office, Secretary of the Navy, 33-34
- Presidential campaign of 1948, role in, 145-150
- as special assistant to James Forrestal, 96-99
- Truman Committee, attitude toward his role in, 83-84
- Truman Committee liaison position, resigns from, 32
- Truman, Harry S., first meeting with, 84-85
- Truman, Harry S., meetings with, 30-31, 32, 33, 36-37

Armed services, unification of, 34

Atomic bomb (Manhattan) project, and the Truman Committee, 126-127

Augusta (cruiser), President Truman's trip on, 36

Ball, Senator Joseph H., 123

Brewster, Senator Owen, 120-122, 123, 141-142

California "Coonskinners," 154, 157, 158

Carter, Oliver, and Presidential campaign of 1948, 145-146, 158

Connelly, Matthew, 112-113, 147, 148

Democratic National Convention of 1948, 149, 150

Dufield, Eugene, 97-98

Engle, Senator Clair, 155-156

Ferguson, Senator Homer, 122, 123, 136-141

Fillion, Edward, 66

Flanagan, Francis, 127-128

Forrestal, James V., 33, 35, 68, 97-108

Fulton, Hugh, 27-28, 48, 86-88, 89, 152

Gatch, Admiral Thomas L., 65

Halley, Rudolph, 87, 88, 95, 111

Hehmeyer, Walter, 129

Horne, Admiral Frederick, 19-21

Irvin, Robert, 116

Kennedy, Captain John A., 4, 27, 45, 58 63, 77-78, 79, 80-81

Kilgore, Senator Harley, 122, 123

Knowles, Colonel Miles, 53

Knox, Frank, 62-63, 69

Lowe, Brigadier General Frank E., 52-53, 54-58

Mead, Senator James M., 132, 133-134, 136, 140, 141

Meador, George, 131-132, 134-135, 136

"Morrison Moles" (1956 Convention), 153-157

Murray, Senator James, 117

"Paul Revereing," Navy investigations described as, 110-112

Politics, role of television in, 158-160, 161

Rand, James, Jr., 39-40, 43

Robinson, Admiral Samuel M., 72-73

Robinson, Harold, 59-60, 114-115, 129

Roosevelt, Franklin D., relationship with the Truman Committee, 124-126

Senate Special Committee to Investigate the National Defense Program. See Truman Committee.

Tolan committee, 2-3

Tolan, Congressman John H., 2, 22

Tolan, John H., Jr., 4, 7, 93, 94

Truman Committee:

- Abbott, John, appointment to liaison position between Office, Chief of Naval Operations and, 7

- Abbott, John, recruited for liaison work with, 5

- complaints from public, processing of, 59-61, 77-80, 94-95

- contributions of, 8, 13-14, 16, 73-74, 118-120

- investigations of:

- Corrigan, Osborn and Wells firm, 37-43

- gambling in Hunters Point Naval Shipyard, 17-19, 24-26

- secrecy in ship repair production records, 47-49

- liaison with U.S. Army, 52-55

- liaison with U.S. Navy, 58-62, 63-64

- method of conducting investigations, 9-13, 25-30

- objectives of, 6-8

- and procurement contracts, clearance of, 68-69

- reports, preparation of, 91-93

Truman, Harry S.:

Abbott, John, first meeting with, 84-85
Abbott, John, meetings with, 30-31, 32, 33, 36-37
Corrigan, Osborne, and Wells case, role in, 40-43
duties of, as chairman of Truman Committee, 11-12, 23-24, 31, 45-46~, 47-49, 71-72
estimation of, 31-32, 49-50, 109, 140, 141-142, 152-153, 158, 159
Forrestal, James, relationship with, 101, 102
leadership style, 49
modesty of, 15
and postcard portrait in 1948, 148-151
and presidential campaign of 1948, in California, 146, 147-149
speechwriting for, 89-90

Unification of the Armed Services, 34
U.S. Navy, bureau structure of, 70-71

Vandenberg, Senator Arthur, 120-122
Vaughan, Harry, 56-58
Vinson, Congressman Carl, 70

Wallgren, Senator Monrad C., 122, 123