

Oral History Interview
with
JOSEPH A. FOX

Newspaper reporter from 1913 to 1956. Worked for the Washington Evening Star, March 1924-August 1956. He was the Star's White House correspondent from April 1943 to February '54 and its national correspondent, 1954-56. Served in the Information Service of the Department of Commerce, 1957-67.

Washington, D.C.
October 5, 1970

by Jerry N. Hess, Harry S. Truman Library

The Harry S. Truman Library
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HESS: All right, Mr. Fox, to begin, would you give me a little of your personal background: Where were you born?

FOX: Well, strangely enough I'm a Missourian.

HESS: Oh!

FOX: By birth.

HESS: Whereabouts?

FOX: Well, Springfield. I was born in Springfield in August, 1891. And so I'm seventy-nine years old. I'm getting to be an old guy.

HESS: How long did you live in Springfield?

FOX: Oh, let's see. Well, actually, we left Springfield in nineteen hundred and two, or nineteen hundred and three. My father was in railroad construction work so we were pretty well through the Southwest. And then I was working there for a while, after the St. Louis *Republic* folded in 1919. I worked on the Springfield *Leader Democrat* for, I don't know, two or three months, something like that.

HESS: When did you first start to work in the news field?

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FOX: In the news field? In 1913 on the old *Houston Press*. I'd been working for the Frisco down there. I started out in railroad work and I was doing that when I met the editor of the *Press*. I always wanted to get into newspaper work, and I quit a pretty good job on the railroad to go to work for a newspaper for twelve dollars a week, so you can tell how nutty I was.

Well, anyway, that was in 1913 and then things got bad that year, and actually I fooled around in Houston and Galveston, and then I went back to railroad work again. It was in 1915 that I went to work on the *Newport News Daily Press*. I had been working checking freight on a pier up there for a fellow that I knew. It was kind of hard to get a job in those days, and I went to work on a pier up there. And so then, as I say, I went to work for the *Press* and *Times Herald* in 1915, and I was in newspaper work from there on with the exception of two years, of course, during the war.

HESS: What were some of your early jobs when you first started out in the news field?

FOX: Oh, I was just a cub reporter, that was all. Just a cub reporter.

HESS: And then when did you come here to town, to

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Washington?

FOX: I came with the -- during the war -- I had better start back this way. During the war I was stationed in Washington for a while with the Signal Corps.

HESS: This was WW I, World War I?

FOX: Yes, and I met a young lady there, and after we were married she always wanted to come back to Washington, so eventually we got back here. At that time I was with the AP, that was in 1922. Just an anniversary this week incidentally. And in October 1922 I came to work in

Washington on the *Post*. I always wanted to get another job -- actually I felt I needed more background in newspaper work after a couple of years in the press service. And I was with the *Post* from October 1922 until I went to the *Star* in March 1924, and I was with the *Star* straight out from March 1924, until August 1956.

HESS: And while you were at the *Star* you were the White House correspondent. What were the dates that you were at the White House?

FOX: I went to the White House in April 1943, and as I say, I left the White House, on a permanent basis, in about February of 1954. That was during the Eisenhower administration, and then I was the national correspondent of the *Star* for the next

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couple of years and I was at the White House off and on.

HESS: And then what was the date of your retirement?

FOX: The date of my retirement was in August 1956. And then I was just loafing around, you know, for about a year and then I went to work for the Department of Commerce in the Information Service. I was there ten years.

HESS: Oh, with the Department of Commerce.

FOX: Yeah.

HESS: All right, what are your first recollections of when you went to the White House as a White House correspondent during the Roosevelt days? What comes to mind when you look back on those days?

FOX: Well, naturally, I was scared to death.

HESS: Did you hesitate to ask questions in a press conference?

FOX: Oh, no. I didn't hesitate to ask questions. As a matter of fact, Roosevelt told me one day, I was checking on a *New York Times* story and he says, "Joe, I don't have time to answer damn fool questions."

I said, "Mr. President, this wasn't intended as a damn fool question. I was just trying to check on the story of the *Times*."

Well, he said, "It's still a damn fool question."

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So, that was that.

So, anyway, I never forgot that one.

HESS: All right.

FOX: But I was with Roosevelt from 1943 through the 1944 campaign, including that sixty mile trip through the rain in New York.

HESS: What do you recall about that trip through the rain?

FOX: Oh, the people were crazy, as bad as the weather was. It was cold and rainy, and people were out there with homemade signs. You know the people worshipped Roosevelt, absolutely worshipped him.

HESS: I understand that he caught a cold during that drive.

FOX: Well, I don't know whether he did or not. Maybe so. I just don't know about that. I know one thing, I know we were leaving New York that night, I saw his personal physician, Dr. [Ross T.] McIntire, and I said to him, "I didn't know whether he'd be able to make it tonight."

He said, "I've got a good patient."

So, I don't know whether he caught a cold or not. But Roosevelt used to love to put on that old blue navy cape that he'd throw over his shoulder -- you know, working with Roosevelt was just exactly

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like being part of a stage production.

HESS: In what way?

FOX: What?

HESS: How's that?

FOX: Well, because he was always the center figure, you know, and everybody else were the supers around him. It was a little...

HESS: Spear carriers.

FOX: Yes, spear carriers, yes. But -- oh, the people worshipped Roosevelt.

HESS: What else do you recall about events of 1944? Did you go to the convention that was held in Chicago that year?

FOX: No, I did not. No, I did not. The political -- or rather the -- let's see, '44 -- I don't believe -- yes, Roosevelt did go. That was the time when they had that voice from the sewer wasn't it?

HESS: Well, I think that was a little earlier, I'm not sure. But in 1944 Mr. Roosevelt was on the train and he went through Chicago on his way to the West Coast. I think the war being on they apparently wanted to keep his location secret or something like that.

FOX: Yes. He -- oh, he did. It was all very secret.

HESS: You didn't make that trip to the West Coast?

FOX: No, I -- nobody did except the press services. No, during the war, nobody traveled with Roosevelt but the press services.

HESS: And then in 1944, of course, was when Mr. Truman was chosen as a vice presidential candidate. What are your earliest recollections of Mr. Truman? When did you first become aware of Senator Truman?

FOX: Well, the first time I became aware of Senator Truman was when I covered that Truman Committee for a day or two. And -- but that was only temporary. Somebody else was away from the Senate, so I went up there, because ordinarily I didn't go around the Senate. And so that was the first time I ever encountered him. Of course, I never knew the President intimately until I got to the White House. Some of the other men did.

HESS: Do you recall what your reactions were at the time that you were at the Senate covering the Truman Committee?

FOX: What my reactions were when?

HESS: Yes, when you were up covering the Truman Committee, did you think it was an efficient organization?

FOX: I thought it was very -- the thing that struck me about the Truman Committee was the President's

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courtesy to the witnesses. I spoke to him about that later. He said, "Well," he said, "they were decent people." Everybody else was giving them hell you know. They had those people up there on this rubber, synthetic rubber business, and they were questioning them hard. No, he was -- and he was a nice person I think. A nice person.

HESS: Had you known of Mr. Truman before he was here in town as a Senator?

FOX: No. No. I had never known him.

HESS: All right. And did you -- let's see, you went with Mr. Roosevelt in the 1944 campaign. Mr. Truman also made a swing during the 1944 campaign. Did you go with him any?

FOX: No, I did not. I didn't even know that, to tell the truth. I didn't remember it.

HESS: All right. Does anything else come to mind about Mr. Roosevelt? Were you there at the inauguration on the south portico of the White House?

FOX: Yes, I was, and so was my wife. There were very few people there.

HESS: What do you recall about that?

FOX: Well, it was a cold gray day and there was hardly anybody there. Ordinarily the *Star* would have had fifteen or so people covering the inauguration and

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whatnot, and I covered it by myself.

HESS: What was your impression of Mr. Roosevelt's health?

FOX: Well, you never could tell about Roosevelt's health because he could bounce back. He could bounce back. The first time that people really got to thinking, I think, that he was in pretty bad shape was when he came back to report to Congress after the Yalta trip, and asked the pardon of the House and the Senate for sitting down, but he said, "These damn braces" (you know, he wore braces on his legs), he said, "are heavy to carry."

HESS: Now that was after he came back from Yalta.

FOX: From Yalta, yes.

HESS: And what was your impression of the state of his health at the time of the inauguration on January the 20th?

FOX: Well, I thought he was in pretty good shape. As I say, Roosevelt would fool you. He could bounce back. He could be in pretty bad shape and then he could bounce back. And he just - I don't know, as a matter of fact, in March 1945, just before he died as a matter of fact, he was the guest of honor again at the White House Correspondent's Dinner. That was the only function that he'd go to during the war. And I became president that year, and I sat next to

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him all evening. And Lord, he was in the finest shape in the world, the finest shape; ate well, had his usual two martinis before dinner, and then we pulled a good joke. That was on a Thursday, and Friday we were due to have a news conference, or a press conference. He used to have two conferences a week, one on Tuesday and one on Friday. And so Bill Hassett (God rest his soul), went around to the President that evening and said, "Mr. President, you're going to the White House dinner tonight?"

"Yeah, I'm going to the White House dinner for sure."

"Well," he said, "tomorrow's Friday."

He said, "I know it."

And he said, "You've got a press conference scheduled on Friday."

"Yeah, I know that."

Well, Bill said, "Mr. President, I've known times when the White House correspondents didn't get back to work for about three days after their dinner."

And Roosevelt laughed like hell. He said, "Well, we'll call the press conference off then for tomorrow morning."

So, we decided that that night when I asked him

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as usual if he wanted to tell the men good night, that he'd announce the press conference cancellation. So, I can see him now. He stood up and he said, told the people that he loved to attend these dinners and he always liked to help people, or think of what he could do for people, and he'd just been thinking there what he could do for the White House correspondents. And of course, the men down at the dinner got scared, thought, you know, they were going to -- just about to have a story. So, he said, "I've made one decision," everybody listening, "there'll be no press conference tomorrow."

Well, at that they shouted and yelled. I said, "Good night, Mr. President," and he got up and walked out and they were cheering. That was his last public appearance. That was, as I say, early in March of 1945.

HESS: Yes, just before he left for Warm Springs.

FOX: Just before he -- yeah, he went to Hyde Park the next day and then a couple of days later he went to Warm Springs, and of course, as you know, he died down there.

HESS: He died on April the 12th of 1945.

FOX: April the 12th, yes.

HESS: Where were you when you heard the news of

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Roosevelt's death?

FOX: Well, as a matter of fact, I was at home. Doug [Douglas B.] Cornell of the AP and I were the only ones that were left at the White House and we left there that afternoon, I guess at half past four or somewhere along in there, and I got home and I was sitting down having a drink, and

Harold Rogers, who now also is dead, called and said, "Joe, the President has just died. Start dictating."

Oh, Lord. So, I guess I dictated for forty-five minutes or an hour. Stuff that I had held back, you know, back, back, back, and so that was when I heard of the death of the President.

HESS: What kind of a President did you think that Mr. Truman was going to make at this time?

FOX: Well, nobody knew. He was an unknown -- he was an unknown quality. But the thing of it -- the thing of Truman a lot of people have forgotten: Truman had always been an avid reader, an avid reader, and while he might not have known much about being President per se, he knew what the President was supposed to do, and boy he did it.

HESS: All right. What comes to mind when you look back on those days just after Mr. Truman became President? First was the San Francisco conference of the United

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Nations, and then in July he went to Potsdam. Did you go to Potsdam?

FOX: No. I didn't go to Potsdam. They decided they were going to shorten that trip. I was to go, but when they decided to shorten the trip, why, I didn't go. So, again, he didn't have but four or five newspapermen with him.

HESS: And then, just some general questions about Mr. Truman's press conferences: What is your evaluation of the success that Mr. Truman may have had running his press conferences, say in comparison with the way that Mr. Roosevelt ran his?

FOX: Oh, I thought Truman handled his press conferences beautifully. I really did.

HESS: Now he cut his -- the number of press conferences held, back from two a week to one a week. Did you think that that was a good thing or a bad thing?

FOX: Yeah, yeah.

HESS: Did you -- were you in favor of that or not?

FOX: Oh, probably, yes. Because you know you can have too many press conferences and go over the same ground.

HESS: Now, during Mr. Truman's period in the White House he was accused sometimes of "shooting from the hip," what do you think -- did you find that to

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be true?

FOX: I don't know. He'd have a great habit of saying what he thinks. I know one time they asked him if we'd use atomic weapons in case of attack. He said, "That's a weapon isn't it?" And the first thing you know the British Prime Minister was over here. But I know, he generally knew what he was -- but I'll say he knew what he was saying.

HESS: In general, how successful was Mr. Truman in fielding questions from the press?

FOX: Well, Truman would try to give you an answer. Once in a while, why, he wouldn't, but he always knew what you were talking about.

HESS: Do you believe that he tried to give an honest forthright answer to the questions that he was asked?

FOX: Oh, yes, I do! I certainly do! He might have, you know, once in a while -- I know once they asked him about that Chinese situation -- if we were going to have a composite government down there, you know. And he said, "No." Well, of course, they were doing everything in the world they could to get the Chinese situation straightened out. But when he decided to move, he moved.

HESS: Now, when you were covering Mr. Roosevelt, did you

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feel that there were times when he was asked a question that his answer may not have been quite as forthright and direct as Mr. Truman's?

FOX: Oh, if Roosevelt didn't answer a question, he'd start -- you know, he'd start talking about something else. That way of getting around, yeah. I have the highest respect for Mr. Roosevelt. He was a damn good President. He was the man that we needed at that time.

HESS: Now, some people have said that Mr. Truman did not use his press conferences to greatest advantage, that he could have used them to enlist support for a congressional action, or he could have used them to greater effect to enlist public support. Do you think that he could have used his press conferences for better effect had he tried to use them as backgrounders, to try to educate the people through the press?

FOX: Well, I think he used the press conferences to get his ideas out. Knowing what the administration was doing, and what the newspapermen wanted to know. No, I find no fault with his press conferences.

HESS: All right. And during the period of the Truman administration and when they first started out, the press conferences were held in the Oval Room, and

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were later moved to the Indian Treaty Room.

FOX: That's right.

HESS: Were you in favor of that move?

FOX: Oh, I don't remember any more. Probably didn't make a whole lot of difference.

HESS: I have heard that when the meetings were in the Oval Room, the press conferences got a little crowded in the Oval Room. Is that right?

FOX: Well, they did of course, and the hearing wasn't too good. People -- an awful lot of people would have to stand up and stand in back of the place. When you got to the Indian Treaty Room you had chairs.

HESS: All right, I'd like to ask you a couple of questions about some of the men who held the position of Press Secretary, both under Mr. Roosevelt and under Mr. Truman. Starting in there, Mr. Roosevelt had two press secretaries, he had Steven Early and then for a while Jonathan Daniels. What is your evaluation of those two gentlemen?

FOX: And then for a while had who?

HESS: Jonathan Daniels.

FOX: Oh, John, well, he wasn't around too-long. And as I say, I was one of Early's staunch admirers and Early was the sort of a man that every President needs.

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HESS: What's that? What kind of a man is that?

FOX: Well, he didn't stand for foolishness. And he -- as I say, he didn't hesitate to tell the President if he thought he was wrong. And Early was a man of great integrity, great integrity. I know when he was leaving the White House, he told me that he was destroying all of his papers because he didn't want someone pawing over them, and writing their recollections. And his son told me afterwards that all they found were a little trivia.

HESS: Where he had destroyed his records?

FOX: Yes, he had.

HESS: Do you recall an instance when Mr. Early may have told Mr. Roosevelt that he was wrong about something?

FOX: No, I do not.

HESS: And then what is your evaluation of Jonathan Daniels, even though he was Press Secretary for just a short time.

FOX: Well, he was in just a short time. I really couldn't give you much of an evaluation of him.

HESS: And then when Mr. Truman came in, there was a gentleman by the name of J. Leonard Reinsch who was around for a few days, do you recall?

FOX: Just for a few days. He was Jim [James M.] Cox's

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man. He was a radio man. He wasn't around but just a few days.

HESS: Do you think that the newsmen, the press media men, would have resented it, had a radio man been the Press Secretary at that time?

FOX: Oh, I don't think so. You say resented it?

HESS: Yes.

FOX: No. No, they wouldn't pay any attention to it.

HESS: All right. And then Charles Ross was Mr. Truman's first Press Secretary.

FOX: Yes.

HESS: What is your evaluation of Mr. Ross?

FOX: Ross was terrific because it was -- worked this way: If you wanted a question answered, Charlie would just step across the hall and ask the President so and so and so and so wanted to know so and so, and the President would answer, and that was all there was to it.

HESS: Do you think that he was as effective a Press Secretary as Steven Early?

FOX: I think he was, yes. I think he was a very effective Press Secretary. They were two different people.

HESS: And then during the time that Mr. Ross was there -- because he died on December the 5th of 1950...

FOX: Yes, he died at his desk.

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HESS: He certainly did. And during that period of time were the events of 1948. What do you recall about 1948? The events surrounding the convention, the campaign, and the election. Now, Mr. Truman took a trip in June of 1948.

FOX: Yeah, I've got a piece about that.

HESS: What's your piece:

FOX: It was right funny. Right there.

HESS: All right.

FOX: Here's what I have from Truman. I've got his book here and he wrote this in the first volume.

HESS: What did he write? It's *Year of Decisions*.

FOX: "To my good friend, Joe Fox, with kindest regards and happy memories. Harry Truman, Independence, October 31, 1955."

But actually, that's a good rundown of that campaign.

HESS: It certainly is. Now this is...

FOX: That campaign trip.

HESS: Is this clipping from the *Star*, I trust?

FOX: Yes, that was when we went to Key West just after the election.

HESS: It's headed, "No Politics Tour Helps Truman Win," and I'll read just the first paragraph here so historians will know what to check on this. It

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says:

Key West, Florida - In the backwash of the election it develops now that President Truman's celebrated 'non-political' swing to the Pacific Coast in June actually served as a sort of testing block for the Democratic campaign machine which was built up from a scrap pile into a surprising juggernaut.

All right, fine. So, historians will be able to check that and see what you have to say here in your column, I'll just ask a couple of questions about this: What do you recall about the event in Omaha, Nebraska where they were at the auditorium?

FOX: Oh, listen, that was the Ak-Sar-Ben Auditorium out there at the fair grounds.

HESS: That's right.

FOX: Well, that was -- that started off on a terrifically sour note. The President had good crowds all day in Omaha and we had been out to Boy's Town, and he'd reviewed a parade and all that sort of thing. And then we got out there, and that auditorium seated ten thousand people there. And I can still hear his footsteps going across the vast stage. Well, of course, they had -- bad

arrangements had been made, and so, luckily -- it was a good farm speech, and luckily they had radio, and so the speech got out. But, of course, it was -- as I say started off on a

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very sour note.

HESS: It looked bad.

FOX: But it worked out all right.

HESS: It looked bad in *Life* magazine.

FOX: Oh, of course. They made it look bad.

HESS: And what do you recall about what happened in Carey, Idaho where he dedicated the airport to the wrong person? Do you recall that?

FOX: He got off on the wrong foot on that one.

HESS: Were you along on that?

FOX: Yes, I was along on that trip. It was an airport. All they had there was a rude field overgrown with weeds. He thought it was some war hero, and as a matter of fact, it was some kid there that had gotten killed buzzing the field. But that was just one of those things.

HESS: And then from there he took a swing down through California, and went down to the commencement. I think he gave the commencement address at the University of California.

FOX: Well, that was in -- yes, that was an afternoon address. He did give it. I don't remember whether it was commencement address or not, but it was an address. But I remember him making it.

HESS: All right, and then you came back with the President,

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and the convention that year was held in Philadelphia.

FOX: Yes.

HESS: What do you recall about the convention in Philadelphia?

FOX: Well, all I remember was that they came out of there -- you know what I mean, with [Alben W.] Barkley as the Vice President and Truman said that he was going to call Congress back into session.

HESS: Do you think that was a politically smart move to try to pin the 80th Congress as the villain in the....

FOX: Well, it undoubtedly highlighted it, yes, whether it was politically smart or not I don't know, only the historians will tell you that.

HESS: All right, what do you recall about the campaign of 1948?

FOX: It was terrific: People came out to see Truman at all hours of the day and night. I remember one morning I think it was Toledo, Ohio, it must have been 3 o'clock in the morning, and the station was filled, and that was the story every place. The people liked Truman.

HESS: Did you think that Mr. Truman was going to win the election?

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FOX: I'll tell you. Yes, I thought he was going to win it, but I thought it was going to the House. I couldn't see -- I never could figure out how Dewey could win. I've got a piece here that the *Star* wrote after the election: "Mr. Fox Returns From Washington," about...

HESS: "Mr. Fox Returns to Washington," and it's a picture, says, "Welcome Home, Joe." It says:

Mr. Fox, left, receives the Idaho Oscar [a potato] from the *Star's* newsroom, presented by George Kennedy, *Star* staff member who lost on Dewey. President Truman was not alone in the idea that he could win this election. There was also Joseph A. Fox, the *Star's* White House reporter. Not that Mr. Fox is a man to advance his political two-bit's worth as having gilt-edged valuation, no one would ever call him opinionated. He is a man who follows Polonius' advice, 'Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice.'

So, you thought Mr. Truman was going to win, too?

FOX: Yes.

HESS: But you thought it was going to go to the House of Representatives.

FOX: I thought it was very apt to go there, yes. I tell you what a lot of people don't recognize about that '48 vote. Truman got 303 votes and Dewey got 189. But actually, it was a whole lot worse than that for Dewey because he got the advantage of a Henry Wallace split in Maryland, Michigan and New York, and that was better than seventy votes

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as I recall it. And Strom Thurmond got thirty-nine votes, Alabama, Louisiana, South Carolina, and Mississippi, and he picked up one in Tennessee.

HESS: Do you recall at the convention when the Southern delegations walked out that year, were you there when the Southern delegations walked out?

FOX: Well, that's about all I remember about it.

HESS: Okay. Where were you on election night? Do you recall?

FOX: In good old Kansas City watching that ticker at the Muehlebach Hotel.

HESS: At the Muehlebach.

FOX: Yes.

HESS: And then I believe Mr. Truman that night slipped off and went up to Excelsior Springs.

FOX: Yes, that's...

HESS: Did any of the newsmen know where he was?

FOX: No, they did not.

HESS: Did any of them try to find out where he was?

FOX: No, I don't think they did.

HESS: And then you saw him early the next morning, is that right?

FOX: Yes. Yes.

HESS: What seemed to be his attitude at that time when he came back?

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FOX: Oh, well, he was very happy because he came in just about the time that Jim Hagerty conceded.

HESS: Yes.

FOX: And, of course, he was very...

HESS: Now, did you go with the President all the time? Now there were some newsmen who spent part of the time on the Truman train and part of the time on the Dewey train.

FOX: There were only three of us that were with Truman throughout the '48 campaign.

HESS: Who was that?

FOX: That was Bob [Robert G.] Nixon, Tony [Ernest B] Vaccaro and myself. We made the distance.

HESS: Did you ever speak with any of the newsmen that traveled with Dewey to get their impressions as to how they saw the crowds around Dewey?

FOX: I can't remember that I did. After the election I probably did. I know that Dewey had given some people his estimate of what his Cabinet was going to be.

HESS: Yes, who was going to serve on his Cabinet after he got in.

FOX: But that's about all I know about it.

HESS: Okay. And then after the events of 1948 and then Mr. Ross died on December the 5th of 1950.

FOX: Yeah, he died at his desk.

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HESS: Yes. And the next morning a reviewer, a critic, in town by the name of Paul Hume received a letter...

FOX: Hume, yes.

HESS: Do you recall -- what do you recall about Paul Hume?

FOX: Yes, I know him. Well, yes I remember it very well.

HESS: I believe Margaret had sung at Constitution Hall the night of December the 5th also.

FOX: Yes.

HESS: And then Steven Early was called back for a few days until they could get a new Press Secretary.

FOX: Yeah. Yeah.

HESS: And then Joseph Short was the next Press Secretary. Do you know why Mr. Short was selected?

FOX: No, Truman had always liked Joe Short.

HESS: What kind of a Press Secretary did Joe Short make?

FOX: Well, I -- it -- I have to be honest about it. I liked Joe personally, but I thought that he tended to build a wall between Truman and the press, and he had two awfully good assistants, Roger Tubby and...

HESS: Irving Perlmeter.

FOX: Irving Perlmeter.

HESS: Yes. In what manner did he try to build this wall?

FOX: Oh, I don't know. You see, it's a little bit hard to explain, but it just seemed that we did better

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with the two assistants, let's put it that way. But as I say, I don't want that to be construed as a rap at a dead man, because it's not intended that way, it was simply the way that things worked out.

HESS: Do you think it possibly could be because Mr. Ross, being an old friend of the President, just had better access to him?

FOX: Well, that could have been too.

HESS: All right. And then Mr. Short died on September the 18th of 1952, that was during the campaign.

FOX: Yes, he did.

HESS: And then Roger Tubby...

FOX: Roger Tubby took over.

HESS: That's right, along with Irving Perlmeter.

FOX: Irving Perlmeter, yeah.

HESS: They were acting press secretaries together until December when Roger Tubby was made Press Secretary on his own. Mr. Perlmeter had had a heart attack out in Seattle during the campaign.

FOX: Oh, yeah.

HESS: And then Mr. Tubby was made Press Secretary.

All right, about the events of 1952. When did you first become aware that Mr. Truman was not going to run as Democratic standard bearer in 1952?

FOX: Well, that was at the Democratic dinner on

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March 29th.

HESS: At the National Guard Armory.

FOX: National Guard Armory.

HESS: Were you down there that night?

FOX: Yes.

HESS: What do you recall about that night?

FOX: I remember I was surprised. Harry -- what's his name, Harry Vaughan, had just come by the table and told me that the President wasn't going to make any announcements. And good Lord, I phoned my office and it wasn't ten minutes afterwards that he did. And Vaughan later said to me, "I bet you think I'm an awful heel after what I said."

I said, "No."

Well, he said, "He fooled me," or something like that.

HESS: Yes. So Harry Vaughan didn't know that he was going to make the announcement either.

FOX: Well, I don't know whether he did or not. He -- no he didn't.

HESS: Now, in Mr. Truman's *Memoirs* he mentions that he had told a number of his staff members prior to this announcement, several months before, that he -- that this would be his decision, but he told them to keep quiet about it.

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FOX: Yes.

HESS: Was this the first time that you had ever heard anything about it?

FOX: Absolutely!

HESS: Do you know if any of the press men had got any inside information about that?

FOX: I remember that some time before that Tony Vaccaro had written a story and said that Truman wasn't going to run, that somebody told him he wouldn't.

HESS: Were there members of the White House staff that you could go to and receive inside information?

FOX: I never looked for it.

HESS: Why?

FOX: Well, it just wasn't necessary.

HESS: You could get whatever information you wanted to from the Press Office or from the President?

FOX: Yes indeed. Yes indeed. I never liked backstairs business.

HESS: Okay.

FOX: No, I dealt with the people in charge.

HESS: And then in 1952 when Mr. Truman removed himself that night in March -- he removed himself from the contest, who in your opinion, would have made the best Democratic standard bearer? Who did you think was the best man in the field?

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FOX: I don't believe I had given it any thought to tell you the truth, because I thought Truman was going to run again.

HESS: Now, several people at that time were promoting [Adlai] Stevenson; a few people Barkley; a few people Judge [Fred M.] Vinson; a few people Estes Kefauver, and then as you know, at the convention Mr. Stevenson was prevailed upon to...

FOX: Yes.

HESS: What did you know about Adlai Stevenson at this time?

FOX: I'd say nothing.

HESS: And then in 1952 did you travel on the campaign train?

FOX: Yes, I did, with Truman.

HESS: With Truman.

FOX: Yes.

HESS: What do you recall about the Truman trip in 1952?

FOX: Well, I know that he worked as hard as he had ever done. And that Colorado Springs speech, I think it was, that he blasted Eisenhower, and that's where their trouble dated back to. I remember that very well.

HESS: What was the basis for the misunderstanding between Mr. Truman and Mr. Eisenhower?

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FOX: He didn't think that Eisenhower had handled [Senator Joseph R] McCarthy right. He said he thought that he had buttered him up too much.

HESS: Do you recall at the time that you were traveling with Mr. Truman in 1952, if there seemed to be very much liaison between the Truman campaign and the Stevenson campaign?

FOX: No, I wouldn't know anything about that.

HESS: Okay, and what was your opinion of Mr. Stevenson's chances for election that year?

FOX: I thought he was going to win.

HESS: Did you?

FOX: I did. I was impressed by his speeches. I thought they were lovely.

HESS: But General Eisenhower won in 1952.

FOX: Yes, he sure did. Won big.

HESS: And then again in 1956.

FOX: Yes.

HESS: Well, Mr. Truman left town On January the 20th in 1953. Do you recall anything about Mr. Truman's departure from town?

FOX: No, he just left quietly, that's all. I think he went back in just regular Pullman accommodations, he and Mrs. Truman.

HESS: All right. Now, we've got several other things to

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cover. Let's go back in time and tell me about the trips. What trips did you take with President Truman during his administration, other than the campaign trips? Now tell me about Key West, for instance. You went to Key West each time?

FOX: Oh, yeah, I was always at Key West.

HESS: What comes to mind when you look back on Key West?

FOX: Well, nothing, we just -- it's just simply a nice place to loaf. And he'd walk every morning, of course, and he may have gone fishing once in a while, not often. And it's just a nice loafing place, lovely place down there.

HESS: I've heard the complaint that on a trip such as this you very seldom get any hard news, just mostly routine matters. Is that right?

FOX: Well, on these trips you don't get much hard news. Once in a while, maybe.

HESS: It's just a nice vacation for the press as well as for the White House staff?

FOX: That's right. That's right.

HESS: Okay. And also one other trip that Mr. Truman made was to Wake Island, did you go to Wake Island?

FOX: I didn't go to Wake Island, no.

HESS: When did you first become aware that he was

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going to make that trip?

FOX: I don't know, I guess when it was announced at the White House.

HESS: Now, of course, now he went over to see General [Douglas] MacArthur, that's all involved in the Korean matter, and of course, South Korea was invaded in June of...

FOX: 1950.

HESS: Where were you when you first heard the news?

FOX: It was on a Sunday. I don't know, maybe at home. He was in Kansas City.

HESS: Mr. Truman was in Kansas City.

FOX: Yes.

HESS: Do you recall what newsmen had gone? Had any of the newsmen gone out with him? Do you recall?

FOX: I just don't know.

HESS: And then he came back. He heard about it on Saturday, I believe, and he came back to town on Sunday and held a meeting in the Blair House that evening with Dean Acheson and some of the other men.

FOX: Yes.

HESS: And then following that in September of 1950 Louis Johnson was replaced as Secretary of Defense by George Marshall.

FOX: Yes.

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HESS: Do you recall anything in particular about that?

FOX: No, I don't. They just -- all I remember was that he was replaced.

HESS: And then the following month in October, was the trip to Wake Island to confer with General MacArthur, and then the following month the invasion of the Chinese Communists coming into the fray in Korea, and then in April General MacArthur was dismissed by President Truman.

FOX: Yes.

HESS: What was your opinion of that?

FOX: Oh, if anything, I thought he waited too long.

HESS: To dismiss him.

FOX: Yes. The men that were out there on that trip to Wake Island, photographers, said that you would have thought that MacArthur was the President and Truman was his underling. So, I don't know.

HESS: Well, in April of that year, of 1951, Anthony Leviero had an article in the *New York Times* about the events at Wake Island...

FOX: Yes, he did.

HESS: He had several documents that had been under top secret classification until that time. I believe he won the Pulitzer Prize for this article, did he not?

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FOX: Did what?

HESS: I believe he won the Pulitzer Prize.

FOX: He did indeed.

HESS: For that article. Do you know where he received his information for that article?

FOX: No, I don't.

HESS: He never did say, or you didn't ask him?

FOX: I don't know.

HESS: All right. Did you ever go with Mr. Truman on the *Williamsburg* or over to Shangri-La?

FOX: I never went to Shangri-La, I went to *Williamsburg* once. We only went down there once as I recall it.

HESS: What comes to mind when you think of that?

FOX: Actually nothing. It was a Saturday trip I think, just a few hours.

HESS: Down on the Potomac?

FOX: Yes.

HESS: On the yacht?

FOX: I think we drove down, I think he went on his boat.

HESS: But you didn't go on the boat?

FOX: No, no.

HESS: All right. Well, I've been asking most of the questions. Just let me ask you a general question. What comes to your mind when you look back on the days that you spent in the White House? What are

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some of the high points?

FOX: Well, the high point for me, was the morning that Dewey conceded. And it was because I had wanted so badly for Truman to win, as I say, that was the high point as far as I was concerned.

HESS: And then after Mr. Truman left and General Eisenhower came in, his Press Secretary was James C. Hagerty.

FOX: Yes.

HESS: And you say that you were there for just about a year?

FOX: Just about.

HESS: But what would be your evaluation of Mr. Hagerty?

FOX: Hagerty was a good man. Whenever he spoke, you knew he was speaking for the President.

HESS: Did General Eisenhower seem to turn more authority over to Hagerty than the other Presidents that you have known?

FOX: Oh, I kind of doubt that. Maybe he did, somebody else would have to appraise that.

HESS: Okay. What comes to mind when you think about General Eisenhower, President Eisenhower? What type of a President did he make?

FOX: Well, he was entirely different from Truman. I'll tell you, Truman was a man who grew in the Presidency

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and I wasn't around long enough to see whether Eisenhower did or not. You can't appraise a man on a year's association.

HESS: Okay. It's sometimes said that a majority of the working press are Democrats.

FOX: Well, I believe it.

HESS: Why? Why is that so?

FOX: Well, I don't know. I know on the Truman train during the Eisenhower-Stevenson campaign, there were only about three Republicans.

HESS: What do you see as Mr. Truman's major accomplishments during his administration?

FOX: Well, you know, that's a little bit hard to say. He was in eight years, and I don't even know that I asked him -- I talked to him after his -- one day we had a chat and I asked him if there was anything that he had done that he would do differently if he had it to do over again and he said no, he would not.

HESS: How often did you see Mr. Truman, personally, when no one else was around?

FOX: Very seldom. Very seldom.

HESS: Would you get together with him more on a trip than you would at the White House? On the campaign train, or at Key West would you be more likely to have a personal visit with him?

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FOX: No. No.

HESS: All right. What was your opinion of the time that Mr. Truman gave the exclusive interview to Mr. Arthur Krock? Do you recall that?

FOX: As a matter of fact, that was played up all out of its importance I think. Everything that was in that interview had been said before, and he was just reviewing some stuff with Krock and then Krock wanted to print it and he did. And of course, it created quite a little bit of a stir. But, I wouldn't attach a great deal of importance to that interview.

HESS: All right, now about Mr. Truman's accomplishments, or the events that transpired during his administration, just let me ask a few general questions. One of Mr. Truman's first and major decisions was to go ahead with the dropping of the atomic bomb.

FOX: Yeah.

HESS: Do you think that that was a good decision?

FOX: Yes, I do.

HESS: In the light of the times?

FOX: Because it saved a lot of lives in Japan. Yes, I do.

HESS: As you know, that had come under criticism recently as to something that probably was not necessary, but in the light of the times it did seem to be.

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What's your evaluation of, for instance, the Marshall plan?

FOX: Well, it was -- I just really don't -- I just really don't evaluate it, because I never thought a great deal about this foreign aid. I mean, I never thought much of this business of foreign aid.

HESS: Why?

FOX: Oh, just on general principles.

HESS: Do you think we had ought to keep our money at home?

FOX: What?

HESS: Do you think we ought to keep our money and products at home? Give less of it away, is that your...

FOX: Do I think we'd...

HESS: Yes, you said that you did not think much of foreign aid. Do you think that we should keep our money and products at home for our own use rather than shipping it to foreign countries?

FOX: Well, that's a pretty broad statement, but as I say, I don't know what we get out of the foreign aid. That's always been a question in my mind. Maybe it was a good idea, but I'm not enough of a statesman to...

HESS: Well, we've mentioned the men who were in the

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press office, all but one, Eben Ayers, who was the Assistant Press Secretary to Charles Ross.

FOX: He didn't have much to do.

HESS: Is that right?

FOX: Yes.

HESS: Was he very effective for what he did or not?

FOX: Oh, as I say, he didn't have much to do.

HESS: All right, now some of the other people who were in the White House, not in the press office, but they were can the White House staff at that time, did you have any occasions to work with, or what do you recall about the men who were the Special Counsels? Now, Sam Rosenman was there for just about a year, Samuel I. Rosenman.

FOX: Yes.

HESS: As Special Counsel.

FOX: Well, Rosenman was a speechwriter, and he had been with Roosevelt and undoubtedly he was a good one. But that's about all that I would know about him.

HESS: All right. And then after he left, he was replaced. There was a period of a few months when there was no one in the job and then Clark Clifford became Special Counsel. Did you ever work with Mr. Clifford?

FOX: No, I did not. Clifford's a good lawyer.

HESS: And then when he left there was Charles Murphy.

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What would be your evaluation...

FOX: I really don't know, I have no evaluation of him.

HESS: What about some of the other members that were in the White House at that time, members of the White House staff: Matthew Connelly? Did you ever speak with Mr. Connelly, or work with Mr. Connelly?

FOX: Yes, I was on very close terms with Matt. I liked him a great deal. I thought he was a good man.

HESS: After the administration, as you know, Mr. Connelly had some difficulties. What do you recall about that?

FOX: Yeah, I remember. I think that was a job that they did on him.

HESS: "They" being the...

FOX: The Eisenhower administration.

HESS: And one other man who was on the White House staff was General Harry H. Vaughan. Do you recall -- did you ever have very many dealings with General Vaughan?

FOX: I liked Vaughan. He was a good fellow and I don't know how heavy he was, but he was a good fellow.

HESS: All right, would you see any major shortcomings in the Truman administration? Any things that should have been done differently?

FOX: Well, it's a little hard to second-guess the President of the United States in saying he might have done better. But I think by and large, that Truman

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made a mark for himself.

HESS: All right. Just what would be your general evaluation of Mr. Truman?

FOX: I think he was a strong President. He didn't hesitate to act when he thought that action was called for.

HESS: Anything else that we ought to cover that we have not covered? Anything else come to your mind about your days as a reporter, either in the White House or some other interesting event that you may have covered for the *Star*?

FOX: Well, there was a lot of stuff in -- there was thirteen years there. I think one of the best stories was the day that Truman fired Henry Wallace.

HESS: In September of '46.

FOX: Yeah.

HESS: What do you recall about that?

FOX: I remember it very well. He just called us into his office and said, "I have just fired the Secretary of Commerce." You know Wallace had been in a hassle with [James F.] Byrnes over a speech, and as I say, they -- remember that one very well.

HESS: What else comes to mind when you look back on those eventful days?

FOX: Well, I'll tell you something that comes to my

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mind, and it sounds a little bit like self-praise, but I've never forgotten it. President Truman's mother died in July of 1947, July 24 I believe it was, and on a Saturday when he was on his way out there. She had been bedridden since February with a broken hip and the newspapermen stayed away -- she was out at Grandview naturally. The newspapermen stayed away from there because they knew that that was what the President wanted. So, that Sunday morning I had just come back from church and I ran into Charlie Ross and Wally [Dr. Wallace] Graham in front of the Muehlebach and they said, "Come on and ride out to Grandview."

I said, "I will not." I said, "The President doesn't want newspapermen out there and I certainly am not going out there."

They said, "Oh, you can ride out."

So, I let myself be persuaded. But when we got out to Grandview I said, "Now listen, I am not going in that house." I said, "I'll just sit out here, if he wants to see me, why, he'll come out and say hello."

And sure enough in a few minutes, out comes the President and Margaret, and I -- we chatted for a few minutes and he went on back in, but I've never

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forgotten that. There the President of the United States was, standing out there in that little old backyard.

HESS: Because you knew that he would appreciate your...

FOX: Yes, that's it. That's the reason that he came out.

HESS: ...respecting her privacy.

Okay, anything else come to mind this morning?

FOX: Well, that's -- that's the thing particularly. No, I don't think so.

HESS: Okay.

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