

Oral History Interview

with

JOHN FRANKLIN CARTER

Consultant and speechwriter for the 1948 Democratic Presidential campaign.

Washington, D. C.

October 7, 1966

by Jerry N. Hess, Harry S. Truman Library

The Harry S. Truman Library

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HESS: Mr. Carter, we're primarily interested in your relationship to Mr. Truman and to the Truman administration. What was that relationship and when did it begin?

CARTER: My relationship to the Truman administration began right after Roosevelt's death. I was then working on a general intelligence assignment for the White House, and I reported to

Roosevelt and after Roosevelt's death I reported to Truman. And that was where I first came in direct contact with him. I reported to him right up until the end of '45 when that particular operation

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was abolished.

HESS: Was that the Henry Field project?

CARTER: Henry Field was part of my project. Henry Field was my subordinate and I was responsible to the President for everything that he and my other employees did.

HESS: Could you tell me a little bit more about that project?

CARTER: I gave a complete account to the Archives people for the Roosevelt Library in connection with the Henry Field Bush Hill assignment. I think I'd better refer you to that to save time.

HESS: Did you speak to Mr. Truman during that time?

CARTER: Oh, yes, indeed, repeatedly.

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HESS: When did you have your next contact?

CARTER: My next contact came in 1948. In the intervening period, I became somewhat disillusioned with the Democratic Party and the administration. I was strongly attracted to Bob Taft and I decided to make the switch. But after I attended the Republican convention, as a newspaperman in '48, I was so appalled by what I regarded as Dewey's arrogance, and what I also regarded as Taft's stupidity, that I saw nothing for it but to return to the fold. At that time I expected Dewey to win. But in order to clarify my thinking I sat down and made an election forecast and analysis, which I have here, and which I'll give to you. [See Appendix] It was based on the theory that the country was basically 60 percent Democratic and 40 percent Republican, but that there would be a major defection from the Democrats due to Henry Wallace, and as

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later turned up, to the Dixiecrats. I took Louis Bean's figures of how the states went, when there was a sixty-forty break between Democrats and Republicans, and set an arbitrary group of percentage figures for the Democratic defection and worked it out, and very much to my surprise and interest, I discovered that on that basis Truman would win by -- the actual figures I have here -- I gave Truman, at that time, 275 electoral votes, and I thought that was sufficiently interesting to call to the President's attention, so I called up and asked for an appointment and went over and saw him and told him what I thought of the Republican Party situation, and showed him these figures. He was very much interested and he told me to see J. Howard McGrath. McGrath could not have been more discouraged or discouraging.

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HESS: What did he say?

CARTER: He just sort of sighed and said, "Well, I for one do not despair." And actually during the campaign -- this is my personal impression -- the campaign was really run by Harry Truman and a small group from the White House. The Democratic National Committee contributed virtually nothing to his campaign. It did, of course, work -- worked quite efficiently -- but the real work was done by a comparably small group on the White House payroll.

HESS: Who would you include in that group?

CARTER: Well, actually you see, nothing happened -- I'll have to go back a bit. After I saw McGrath, nothing happened. And I went back to my place in Virginia and one afternoon I got a telephone call from the White House and it was David Noyes asking me to come down. So I drove

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down and as would happen on an occasion like that, I had a blowout on the road. I had an awful old car and I got dirty and bloody in changing the tires, but anyhow, I got there about an hour late. He was a pretty dapper individual, a little shocked at the appearance of this man he'd summoned, but, he asked me if I would go into speechwriting, and I said, "Yes."

So I was put on the White House payroll by Donald Dawson. And in that way I found myself in the group. The working group consisted, as far as I could make out, of Philleo Nash, whom I didn't see too much, but saw quite a bit; Charlie Murphy, with whom I worked almost continuously; and I think Charlie and I carried the main load of the big speechwriting operation. Then, of course, during the actual whistlestop campaign, George Elsey. George and I shared

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a compartment on the Pullman, and I used to get up about 6 in the morning and work with George on some of these whistlestop speeches. Later in the day, Charlie and I would work on drafts for this, that, and the other major speech, but most of the speeches were written, except the whistlestops, by Charlie and myself, the major speeches, that is; with the exception, of course, of that Chicago speech, which represented some kind of a campaign commitment; a commitment that Truman had made. That's the only sense anyone could make out of it.

HESS: The Chicago speech was given a little bit further on into the campaign.

CARTER: That was about the last ten days.

HESS: That was in October.

CARTER: Late in October.

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HESS: October the 25th. Could you give me the background for that speech?

CARTER: Well, the background was roughly this. David Noyes did represent some kind of a group, out on the West Coast, of Democrats, and my belief was that there was a commitment that he was going to draft a special speech to be delivered in Chicago, which would play up a sort of anti-Hitler line in connection with Dewey. (This is jumping ahead of the game a bit.) Both Charlie and I, when we read the draft, were shocked by it, because we thought it was bad politics, and that it would specifically invite Dewey to come down from his mountaintop and start slugging. And things were very, very tricky then and if he had started slugging, I think he might have very well have pulled off a victory. As I say, this is not exclusively a moral judgment, this is a practical political

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judgment. Charlie told me that he had told the President that if he delivered the speech as it was originally written, that he (Murphy) would vote for Dewey. The speech was toned down but even so it was very bad in its effect, and subsequently Dewey told me that at the time he had wanted to descend from his mountaintop and really crack back but that all of his advisers had assured him that he was going so well that he didn't need to worry about it. He felt at the time it was a mistake not to have done it, but he hadn't done it, and I think that had a real effect on the final result. But all the other major speeches from about Louisville on, Charlie and I did. Of course we didn't do them exclusively, let me make it clear, they had a pretty effective assembly line system. Charlie and I would work on the draft, it wouldn't matter whether I

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wrote the first draft or he wrote the first draft, our drafts worked together very well. We found that we thought in the same terms and we were a very congenial working team. Then Charlie would take it over to Clark Clifford at the White House. Clifford, and, I guess, Matt Connelly to a certain extent, and Mrs. Truman, and the President would go over it. And they would make changes, obviously, but they never called us in to sort of consult about the changes. We were working on the next speech by the time they were going over the speech we'd already written.

HESS: Can you tell me about the assistance that Mrs. Truman might have given?

CARTER: I was only told this. I didn't have that direct contact with Truman during the campaign until just the very end. But I was told she read most of the major speeches and gave the

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President her judgment on them, whether they were good, whether they were bad, whether certain phrases or ideas would be effective or not. I was just told that. I don't know that for my own knowledge, but I believe it to be the case.

HESS: In your article in *Life* magazine on November 15, 1948 you mentioned that Mrs. Truman and Margaret both sometimes did that.

CARTER: Yes, I was told Margaret too.

HESS: But you didn't see them actually...

CARTER: Oh, no. We had a straight military chain of command there, and it was very effective too; the best way of writing speeches I've ever struck, much better than Dewey's system. Dewey gets the roundrobin -- about eight or ten people in a room and they all work. They all

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spend two or three days on the same speech and they all get completely exhausted and by the time the speech is done, it's a work of art, but has no spontaneity and everybody is absolutely exhausted. I told Dewey that, but that's the way he works.

HESS: On that Chicago speech, in Charles Murphy's files out at the Library, I found a draft of the Chicago speech with your initials "JFC" on the speech and it did not have any of the, what we might call, rougher elements.

CARTER: I suspect that what happened was that he and I worked on a draft which was put aside in favor of this rough one.

HESS: I have read in many places -- I think you also mention it in your article -- that the speech that was finally given was toned down some from the original draft.

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CARTER: Yes, definitely, but it was still too rough. It made a personal attack on Dewey. It said he looked like Hitler and sort of acted like him. It was a personal attack rather than a political attack and was completely out of tune with the kind of campaign which Truman had been waging, which was I thought exceedingly the best, actually. You may not recollect the circumstances yourself, but he always had the Republicans guessing whether he was going to speak in a light, not exactly frivolous tone, but a humorous tone, or whether he was going to suddenly do a straight down the line, hard-hitting speech. They never knew what to expect. Although Dewey told me -- this may interest you -- that when he heard that speech that Truman gave at Pittsburgh where he used the doctor image for the first time, well, the doctor idea was Charlie's, and Charlie and I

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dressed it up a bit and we used it several times during the campaign after that. But Dewey said when he heard that, his blood ran cold. He said: "Something new has been added. What in hell is going on?" And he didn't know how to deal with it, and he never did deal with it.

HESS: What other major speeches did you work on? First let's get a little chronology. What was the date that you joined the staff?

CARTER: Roughly about the middle of September. It was after Labor Day, I know that.

The first part of the campaign, so far as I was concerned, was a little floundering, the speeches were being prepared and so forth. But bit by bit, Charlie and I by, I would hope, superior industry, and perhaps superior skill and judgment, became the chief source of the

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semifinal draft, because the final draft always depended on the President himself, plus circumstances. As you know very well, a dandy speech can be ruined by some event entirely outside your control, and you have to just throw away a remarkably fine speech because it no longer fits the set of circumstances. Charlie and I did, from I should say, from about the thirtieth of September on, we did all the major speeches. For example, as we were coming east on that final swing, Sam Rosenman set up a couple of drafts of speeches, and they were very fine speeches for Franklin Roosevelt to have delivered in 1944, but they had nothing to do with Harry Truman in 1948. So Charlie and I sat down and did entirely new drafts of them. We got ourselves in tune with Truman and with the country and with the way things were developing, and between us, I think we really did as good a

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job of speechwriting as was done in that or any other campaign, particularly a close one. Of course, in a winning, avalanche campaign, it doesn't matter. The candidate can recite the alphabet and still get in.

HESS: Did Mr. Rosenman provide any other assistance at any other times?

CARTER: He may have been consulted; I wouldn't know.

HESS: Well, you mentioned the date, September 30th, and that was the date that the Louisville speech was given, and in Philleo Nash's files in the Library, I found a draft with your initials on them, but after Louisville you put a question mark, so you probably were just writing a speech which could have been given someplace else. The draft was generally anti-Republican, anti-80th Congress, and anti-Progressive Party,

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and that wasn't given at Louisville, that happened to be an inflation-housing speech, but of course, Mr. Truman did speak on those other things quite a bit later, but in the speech, I noticed something that I want to bring to your attention. You mentioned the Progressive Party and identified it as follows in your draft: "On the left advances the Communist Republican Party led by Mr. Wallace," and I've never found where Mr. Truman used that phrase.

CARTER: I don't think he did, but the strategy, as far as Charlie and I saw it, was simply this: to leave Dewey alone; in effect, to isolate him by crushing this left-wing movement led by Henry Wallace, the theory being any vote cast for Wallace was really a vote for the Republican victory. And we knew very well that Dewey dared not go to the defense or rescue Henry Wallace. Jonathan Daniels and that

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group, they were babying the South along, so that the Dixiecrat defection might not get so far out of hand as to upset the applecart. They did lose four states. Charlie and I had nothing to do with that end of the campaign; that was another thing. But we thought the thing to destroy was the Wallace movement, and we knew very well that Dewey couldn't come to Wallace's aid or rescue,

so the real effect of what we did was to destroy Wallace and to make people who might have voted for Dewey a little doubtful as to whether they wanted him to get in really by virtue of a bunch of Communist votes cast for Henry Wallace. That was the strategy in a nutshell as I saw it. That might not have been the way Mr. Truman saw it, but that's the way Charlie and I saw it.

HESS: On Mr. Truman's part, he seemed to attack the

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80th Congress a great deal, and not so much Mr. Dewey. He mentioned this in his memoirs, in fact. He made the 80th Congress his main target. Why do you think he did that?

CARTER: Well, because somebody hit on a phrase "The do-nothing, good-for-nothing, Republican 80th Congress." It sounded pretty awful. Actually, of course, on the record, that Congress made a pretty good record, but he hit at them and kept on hitting. Of course, Congress, generally speaking, is not a popular institution in a presidential campaign. That Congress had been dominated by Taft. Taft, I thought, had made a frightful mistake of trying to make his particular line of Republicanism the only official line, which left no room whatever for maneuver, for intelligent opportunism. So he had painted the party out of a position where it could maneuver in terms of what an election itself

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might bring forth. Well, that would have been fine if Taft had been the nominee, but he wasn't. So there was Dewey, who was certainly an anti-Taft man, being stuck with the Taft record. I think it was a way of embarrassing Dewey and also, as I say, it was a good phrase. Truman used it again and again and again. It always got a warm response.

HESS: On the subject of the 80th Congress, this happened a little before you joined the staff, but do you know who originated the idea of calling Congress back into that special session?

CARTER: Bernie [Bernard M.] Baruch told me that he had made that suggestion to Truman; there may have been others.

HESS: I believe he has that in his memoirs, that he suggested that, but we have found where other people probably did also.

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CARTER: They probably did too. After the election I saw Baruch up in New York, and one of the things he told me was that he had given Truman the advice to behave as he did at the Philadelphia convention and to wait out the then civil rights issue, and then to call Congress back into session. I'm sure there must have been others who made the same suggestion. But he did make it according to what he told me.

HESS: Now, you spent part of your time on the train. Did you also stay here in Washington some of the times when Mr. Truman was gone?

CARTER: Oh, yes, I only went out on the last swing around.

HESS: Would you tell me about that?

CARTER: Well, my feeling was this: in the first place one of my principal political sources of

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support at that time was the Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen; Al Whitney, and I had got Al to detach his public relations man, Walter Munro, whom you may or may not know -- a very able man. He and I had worked together for twenty years. I got Whitney to detach Munro from the wage negotiations in Chicago, I believe it was, and come on to stand by to assist me. Well, of course, he was very helpful, but the real thing was that Truman was very grateful to Whitney for the support he gave him after the earlier fight, and so when I wanted to go on that last trip, which I felt I could be most useful on because of the last campaign swing through the Northeast, which is my part of the country -- I wouldn't pretend to speak with any authority on the South or on the West, but I knew that area very well, and I was not only born and brought up in the Northeast but

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through my newspaper column and so forth, I had frequently been in Chicago, and Indianapolis, and Cincinnati, and Cleveland, so I knew that area pretty well and the kind of people they were. I thought I could be especially useful because of my familiarity with that region. So the final stages of the campaign would be almost a Currier and Ives picture, touching first base and getting back to decent, simple, American principles. But through Al Whitney I put enough pressure on -- I won't say pressure -- I did use his influence, though, to get me assigned to work on that last campaign trip. I think it was a justifiable use of political pressure.

HESS: Who went on that trip?

CARTER: Well, I can only tell you offhand. There's the presidential party including Matt Connelly

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and Clark Clifford, and there was Charlie Murphy and myself, and George Elsey. Philleo Nash came in now and then, but he wasn't on the thing all the way through, and Bill Boyle was along. Bill and I were honestly the only two people on the train that believed that Truman was going to win. The others hoped so.

HESS: Did they say that; did they tell you that?

CARTER: In the course of conversation, yes. Charlie didn't care; he thought Truman was going to lose but he was going to go and fight down to the very last minutes; but Boyle, I believe he had been told by the state chairman in Iowa, about the way the farm vote was going, and I had my own little set of papers here which I'm going to give you, which had long ago convinced me that Truman could win and that it would be a very close election and probably would

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be patterned somewhat like the 1916 election with Ohio and California being the real key states.

HESS: Which they were.

CARTER: Which they were. I did talk to the President at breakfast on the morning after we came into Kansas City, and while he didn't say that he expected to win, I got the impression that he wasn't at all sure he would win. I told him that he would win.

HESS: This was just before the election?

CARTER: This is just before the election, but of course, he was very rightfully running scared, he should have run scared, and of course, his humility and simplicity in that campaign was what did it.

HESS: That was just after his St. Louis speech, is that right?

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CARTER: Yes.

HESS: Would you tell me about his St. Louis speech?

CARTER: Well, that was very funny because on the last long ride rattling west from his speech at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, all of us had picked some pieces of lovely speeches which we had composed from time to time during the campaign, and for one reason or another hadn't been delivered. We got together a final script for St. Louis which was, oh, a wonder...it contained all our darlings, and then Truman read it and he liked it fine, and he stood up and didn't deliver a word of it. Afterwards, they applauded continuously for about two and a half hours. I've never seen anything like it. It was a wild, wild reception.

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HESS: Did he work with you in any of your speech sessions on that particular speech?

CARTER: No, no. You see, I never worked with him. Any work that he did on speeches was done, let's say with Clark Clifford, maybe Charlie Murphy would go in, but I was down in the galley there; I was taking care of the stove.

HESS: They'd take your draft and then they'd go off and work it over someplace else.

CARTER: Oh yes. That was a very good way to prepare speeches because it left people like George Elsey and myself and Philleo Nash free to work on the next draft. We weren't always dragged away from what we were doing to come in and rehash something which we had done three or four days ago. It's a very good way of preparing a political speech, because the high command would have the latest word from whatever it was

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and they would know whether such a speech should be delivered at all, maybe it needed some modification.

HESS: You mentioned the whistlestop speeches too. Will you tell me a little bit about writing those?

CARTER: Well, George Elsey, of course, had a full portfolio full of dope about every place we were going to stop, who was who and what was what, and those speeches were, oh, two or three minutes, five minutes, something like that, and we would just sit down early in the morning and work out drafts for each place, Chillicothe and others, so we wouldn't be repeating ourselves. We liked to pick up something that had been said the night before in Cleveland or in Pittsburgh or some other place, but on the whole we'd just try to have ready for the President, and for release

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to the press, a page and a half or two pages of script. He might not even deliver it but generally speaking he did because it was easier.

HESS: On the various speeches, did you receive very much help from the Research Division of the Democratic National Committee?

CARTER: Not that I was aware of. Stuff may have come in to Murphy, but my judgment was that the help we got was more through the Government departments than through the national committee, and that we worked almost entirely independently of the national committee. It was a parallel campaign.

HESS: What were they doing at this time?

CARTER: They were trying to, of course, reelect Congressmen, Senators, and I assume, Governors, and so forth. They were going through the normal

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motions of a national committee, but this was not a normal campaign at all. Truman had discovered his own particular style and effectiveness. That whistlestop technique was really remarkable. I think I may have mentioned it in something I wrote, or many things I've said: I remember coming into Pittsfield, Massachusetts about 6 o'clock on a very frosty morning, and Pittsfield has a population of something like thirty thousand people and there were fifty thousand people waiting to see the train. And then I realized that something really phenomenal was happening. And for a while, I wondered whether they had just come out to see a brave man killed, and then I thought if that was the case there would be some sign of hysteria in the crowd; and they weren't a hysterical crowd at all, they were very calm, they were quiet, they were a friendly crowd. So I

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assumed that there was the basic mood of the country in the election. They knew he was going to win; they wanted him to win. They had just come out to see him and give him approval and support and that was it.

HESS: When the train would come into the station, would you remain on the train, or did you ever get off and talk to people?

CARTER: I never got off to talk to them because we didn't have much time, you see. They had one of those beepers that would start yipping at you the moment the President would stop speaking and you had to race back to the steps and get on the train or you would be left behind. As a matter of fact, I wouldn't have objected to talking to people, but they were listening to the President. They didn't want to be buttonholed by somebody from the train saying, "What do you think?"

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They came out to see the Trumans. Oh, yes, I would quite often get off just to get the feel of the crowd and get a little fresh air and stretch our legs and then beat it back before the train pulled out.

HESS: Do you recall anything in particular about the importance to the campaign of the refusal of the 80th Congress to appropriate money to the Commodity Credit Corporation for grain storage bins?

CARTER: Not personally. I think Bill Boyle worked on that. You see, that again was outside of my area of competence. I remember the point being made in several speeches.

HESS: Can you tell me anything about the background of the mission that was proposed during October of 1948 to send Chief Justice Vinson to Moscow?

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CARTER: All I know about it was that David Noyes was deeply concerned in that and was bitterly disappointed when it didn't materialize. He thought that was the most important thing that could be done, that the issue was not specifically war or peace but that the issue was really survival of civilization, and this was a chance to do it. He felt, I gathered, and I know that I felt this summary veto that was imposed on Truman by Jimmy Byrnes and so forth, abroad, was a pretty unseemly thing. Things had come to a pretty past when a guy like Jimmy Byrnes, who as you know was a great rival of Truman's, and resented very much Truman getting the Presidency, was able to dynamite what appeared to be a very promising move to explore a possibility of ending the Cold War. Well, probably the Cold War could not have been ended, at least the attempt wasn't made but it should have been made.

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HESS: What was Byrnes' part in this?

CARTER: He was Secretary of State and I think he raised hell about it and the joke on the campaign train was: "Who the hell does Truman think he is, President of the United States?"

HESS: Several authors, Jonathan Daniels for one, mentions Noyes, and also Albert Carr, as being behind the Vinson mission. Do you recall Carr at all?

CARTER: I just remember Carr as a name. I don't place him beyond that, but Noyes, I think, was the principal agent. He was a representative of a group that thought this should be done.

HESS: I see, he was spokesman for the group, but it really wasn't perhaps his original idea?

CARTER: He might have sold it to them, but he was not just a lone man.

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HESS: How closely did the President follow the polls?

CARTER: He didn't pay much attention to them.

HESS: Did you ever have any meetings to discuss the polls among the staff members?

CARTER: Well, just Charlie and myself. You see, we didn't work on a committee basis. We worked on a line of command basis. We didn't think the polls meant a thing.

HESS: Did you ever work with Philleo Nash at this time?

CARTER: I did a little work with him, not much. He was specializing on minority groups. His special interest was the Negro vote and I guess the Chippewa Indians who picked his cranberries for him in Wisconsin. He didn't want anything to interfere with the supply of cranberries.

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HESS: Now, on the swing through the Northeast, that was the time that he had the address at Harlem. Were you along that time?

CARTER: No, I wasn't. Philleo Nash wrote that speech, at least, he had most to do with drafting it. That was his special line.

HESS: I have a list of people here who worked in the White House at that time. Some of them we've already mentioned, but I wish that you would tell me if you worked with these people or if you had any connections with them at that time. Charles Ross?

CARTER: Oh, yes. He was the press secretary. I was on friendly terms with him. I saw him from time to time during the campaign, after the campaign, on election day, election night, and so forth. He and I, for example, worked on Truman's final speech on election eve, which

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I drafted, Charlie and I worked it over together, and I'm not sure but I think we worked with Truman on that.

HESS: Was that his radio remarks?

CARTER: Yes, it was on the radio.

HESS: How about Matthew Connelly?

CARTER: I had nothing to do with Matt, in terms of campaign operations. Of course, I knew him.

HESS: Clark Clifford? Who we've mentioned here a couple of times.

CARTER: He was, I should say, the principal aide to Truman on the speechwriting end of things, and Charlie would generally take the speeches up to Clifford, you see, after he and I had done the draft. Once or twice, I think, in connection with a Madison Square Garden speech,

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I did have a conference with Clifford because Jerry Green of the New York *Daily News* had read the release and was very much upset; he thought the speech was too frivolous for the occasion, and wanted to make a pitch for another draft. So I took Jerry in to see Clifford, to discuss Jerry's point of view, and then Jerry's point of view was received with interest and ignored.

HESS: George Elsey, we've mentioned. He was on the train. How about James Sundquist?

CARTER: I didn't have anything to do with him that I know of.

HESS: Jonathan Daniels you have mentioned here a couple of times.

CARTER: Yes, I met Jonathan several times. I remember when I was working over in the old State-War-Navy Building, he came in one day when I was working

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on a speech with Charlie and said, "John, they tell me you are crazy enough to think that Truman has a chance to win?"

I said, "Yes, he is going to win." And I showed him again these papers, the final of those papers, these are just my work sheets, and told him exactly what I thought was going to happen, and that's about the only real contact I had with him during the campaign. I think he was a little shaken.

HESS: Just exactly what was his job at that time?

CARTER: I think he was one of the White House aides, the so-called "passion for anonymity boys." Of course, he was never distinguished by a passion for anonymity, but I think he was a holdover from the Roosevelt setup.

HESS: I believe he had been gone from the White House for quite some time, and was called back

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for the campaign.

CARTER: He was specifically working on the Southern problem, which of course was the serious threat of a major secession on the racial issue -- the Dixiecrats.

HESS: Mr. Truman just made one trip, you might call it, down into the South. I wonder if there was any discussion about the advisability of Mr. Truman making a more extended swing into the South? Have you ever heard anything about that?

CARTER: I didn't hear anything about that. I think Charlie and I, so far as our own discussions were concerned, felt that the less he went South the better for him. Let the Southern situation be handled by the Southerners in his administration, and not go down there.

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HESS: Fine. Did you have any dealings with John R. Steelman?

CARTER: No. I know John. I've known John for many years. I never had any occasion to have any dealings with him.

HESS: Any with his assistant at the time, David Stowe?

CARTER: No, I may have met Stowe, but I don't place him.

HESS: Did you have any dealings at all with Harry Vaughan?

CARTER: No, I did have in 1945. I had some dealings with him when I was still working on intelligence, and through Vaughan I got a man sent -- the only man in the Government who prophesied Churchill's defeat, in my organization -- we sent him over to Paris to see what was going to happen to de Gaulle.

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We got the right answer there but I had to do that through Vaughan.

HESS: Did you have any dealings with two other men on the national committee: Jack Redding or Sam Brightman?

CARTER: I knew both of them, but I didn't have any campaign dealings with them at all. Let me again repeat that so far as I can see, the entire Truman campaign was run out of the executive offices of the White House. For example, I was on the White House payroll, on per diem. I was not employed by the national committee at all.

HESS: We mentioned Bill Boyle a while ago. In his book *Inside the Democratic Party*, Jack Redding states that Bill Boyle was set up in Washington to direct a central operating headquarters for the train. Do you recall anything about that

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in particular?

CARTER: I wouldn't know. He was on the train and he probably had a good deal to do with the organization of the itinerary, the reception committees and all that. That wasn't my area.

HESS: You were there to write speeches and that's what you did.

CARTER: Yes.

HESS: In your speechwriting, did you look for any particular things to structure your speeches around such as a minority problem -- or what did you think were the important issues to write speeches about?

CARTER: I can't recollect now, frankly, what all the specifics were. The only image I was trying to project -- we hadn't gotten to the stage of using images then -- this is sort of a

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semi-nostalgic, back to basic, decent, simple Americanism; somebody from the West too, the Mark Twain country. That was the idea I was trying to project, as I say, the Currier and Ives touch.

HESS: Why?

CARTER: Because I thought that was the soundest approach. It was closest to Truman's own nature and also closest to the very large and inarticulate voting group to whom he should appeal.

HESS: And did you also think that would contrast a great deal with Dewey at the time?

CARTER: I guess so but I didn't think in those terms. I thought Dewey had booted away his chances. I thought it was like a chess game, only here you have a guy -- he's going to lose

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his queen and there's nothing he can do to save it.

HESS: About the Republicans; what do you think was their major campaign strategy mistake?

CARTER: Their major campaign strategy mistake was to go around and tell the country that Dewey was going to be their next President. It foreclosed in advance the possibility that the people had any voice, any power of decision. The thing had already been decided. I think that was their basic mistake. I still think, I thought then and I still think, that if Dewey had not paraded himself around as "our next President" but had come around and campaigned vigorously -- stumped -- and was a good stumper, a good fighting stump speaker when he gets aroused, I think he could have turned the trick, at least, I think he might have swung the election his way if

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he'd done it.

HESS: You think that he would have if he'd started as late as the Chicago speech?

CARTER: Even after Chicago, he could have done it, I thought. Of course, you can't prove it now, but I thought even then, that Truman had given him the break, the excuse to depart from his strategy, which was strangling him and break out of the net and come in slugging, that he could really have gone places.

HESS: Why do you think he didn't take that opportunity?

CARTER: He wanted to; he told me that he'd telegraphed all the state chairmen, all the national committee, and God knows who, and they all, without exception, said, "No, no, no, you're winning, don't rock the boat." He said at the time he thought it

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was a mistake but he felt obliged to follow their advice, and he regretted it.

HESS: Were you with the party in Kansas City on election eve?

CARTER: Yes that's right, yes.

HESS: Will you tell me about that?

CARTER: Well, as I say, I had an ace up my sleeve in the form of that little memo there, that I knew pretty well was going to happen, how it was going to happen, and I knew that New York was going to go for Dewey, Pennsylvania would go for Dewey, and those would be fairly early returns, so I was waiting outside in the outer room until New York went for Dewey, and then I decided I belonged inside with Bill Boyle and these other people, because I felt that morale was needed at that point. So I went in and got

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inside there and told them that we were going to win without New York, just to hold everything, so for the rest of the night, Bill and I particularly, because there were other people milling around, just stuck by our guns. He was sure that the farm belt would go; I was sure that California and Ohio would go, and that the thing would work out right. So it was the only minor point of interest in that particular connection -- we had a radio going, of course...

HESS: Where was this, was this in the Muehlebach?

CARTER: Yes, the penthouse in the Muehlebach. We had a radio and a man assigned to listen to it, to see if anything was breaking. And at one point there was a little pause and they heard Drew Pearson's voice, and Boyle asked this man (I forget his name now), "What is Drew Pearson saying?"

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The reply was, "He is devouring his young. He is conceding that Truman is going to win."

HESS: What time was that, do you remember?

CARTE: Oh, that was about 3 or 4, I guess. Then I went to bed having shaken hands with weary friends and saying, "Now, it's all set." And bang, at 6 in the morning, I guess it was, Jerome Walsh came slamming at the door and said, "Come on in, the President's here." So we all came in and had a dawn press conference, set up a reply to Dewey's telegram of concession.

HESS: The President had spent that night at Excelsior Springs, hadn't he?

CARTER: He spent it somewhere, but, boy, he was not just sleeping. He had his ear on the telephone.

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He knew what was going on.

HESS: I have heard that James J. Maloney, who was Chief of the United States Secret Service, was with Dewey that night on election eve. Did you ever hear anything about that?

CARTER: I think I did, but I don't recollect. Of course, you know at the very end, the Secret Service has the responsibility of protecting the President or the President-elect. And, of course, all the advance dope, all the polls, all the wise people insisted that it was going to be Dewey. Although I remember the day before election, I met some gambling man at headquarters and I told him that if he wanted to make some money now, "They're quoting ten to one on Dewey, for God's sake, grab it." He tried to and couldn't get it. Finally, the best he could ever get was even money; he couldn't

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get anything except a token bet. So I figured that the gambling fraternity knew what was going to happen even if the newspapers didn't.

HESS: You mentioned Mr. Whitney a while ago, but in your article on November 15, you mentioned that at the beginning of 1948, back in January, only three people thought Truman would win: Truman, A. F. Whitney, and yourself. Now I have two questions on this. Why did you just think that three people thought he would win, and I know why Mr. Truman's on that list, but why did you fill the other two spots with A. F. Whitney and yourself?

CARTER: Well, because A. F. Whitney and I agreed on that, I suppose. Nobody else at that time thought that he had a chance. There may have been others. Of course, that's too general a statement, too broad a statement. But,

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let's say, of people who had any major access to Democratic Party policy -- Whitney certainly had, I had, and certainly Truman had -- we were the only people to my knowledge, of any sort of position to do anything about it, that had that belief. Except I didn't think I said it as early as the beginning of '48, because I think it was later.

HESS: Let me read a portion of the article to see if I have it straight. It says, "The Truman campaign began last winter when the President told his intimates that he intended to make the fight if he had to do it singlehanded. The real plan of action matured at the Republican National Convention" (I was wrong -- it was at the time of the Republican National Convention). "At that time, only three men really believed that Truman would be elected: Truman, A. P. Whitney, and myself." So what this means,

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is that at the time of the Republican National Convention when you filled this form...

CARTER: When I came back from the convention, filled in this form, I got in touch with Al Whitney, and I put in for time to see the President, and I had written fairly critical columns about him and I was very interested, because I got in to see him very fast.

HESS: In your folder at the Library, there's a note from Gertrude Ely, and it's to the President and she says that "John Franklin Carter just told me that he had talked to you this morning about the proposal that an effort be made to organize New Dealers for the coming campaign." Do you remember that?

CARTER: I don't remember the details? Gertrude Ely is an aunt of my sister-in-law, and she has been, or was at that time, quite active in Democratic politics,

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but I don't recollect that particular incident. In fact, I stayed at her house during the Republican convention. I didn't go to the Democratic, but I went to the Republican one. I stayed with her during that.

HESS Well, do you have any other things to add on the 1948 campaign and your part in it?

CARTER: No, I don't think so. I've tried to give you a perfectly unvarnished account of what went on, so far as you have put the questions to me. The only comment I'll have to make afterwards is that, I wrote a column, a newspaper column, expressing the opinion that after this campaign, the so-called bipartisan foreign policy would cease to have much significance and Truman would have more to say about what was done, which I later checked with Dewey, and Dulles, and they both agreed that was true, but this was sometime later. At that time, Dorothy Thompson

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and Arthur Vandenberg got very excited and protested to Truman that this column had been written. And Truman instructed Charlie Murphy to get me off the White House payroll right away. Bill Boyle protested to Truman and said, "Who won the campaign anyhow, Dorothy Thompson and Arthur Vandenberg, or you and Jay?" But Truman felt that it was better policy so far as he was concerned, if I had no direct connection with the White House. So that ended that.

HESS: Is that the same thing as your article in *Life* magazine in January?

CARTER: I had received a request by *Life* to write an article on the general pressures on Truman and so forth, and first of all I took it up with Charlie Ross, and Bill Boyle, and they told me to go ahead, and then I completed a draft,

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and I sent it into Matt Connelly, and said, "Of course, although I am no longer connected with the White House, my name had been closely connected with Truman during the campaign, and I would like to have it checked, read and censored and whatever, before anything was done with it." Of course, Matt sent it back with a nice letter saying, "Go ahead, you're perfectly free to write anything you like."

So I sent it into *Life* and then the applesauce hit the electric fan, and it was, I gather, quite embarrassing to the President at the moment because he, at a press conference tore me limb from limb and said that the article was false in every paragraph and almost false in every line, and that the only time he'd ever met me was when I'd come to ask him for a job. He didn't say that the job was to help him out in the campaign. And that was that.

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HESS: Why do you think he said that?

CARTER: I think myself -- this is just guesswork -- some of the people around the President at that time, and I would say specifically Clark Clifford and Matt Connelly, did not welcome a Johnny-come-lately, in the form of Jay Franklin, and I had a feeling then that they had in effect greased the skids so far as I was concerned, and this was the result. I can't prove that and certainly, at this stage in the game, I have no desire to prove it, and there's no animosity left. I didn't allow myself to be consumed with bitterness. I was a little surprised at the vehemence with which Truman denounced me.

HESS: You said Clark Clifford and who?

CARTER: Matt Connelly.

HESS: And Matt Connelly. What were your relations

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with Charles Murphy?

CARTER: Very friendly all along. They couldn't have been nicer all along. Charlie felt very badly about the whole business.

HESS: Did you notice any animosity with Clifford back at the time that you were writing speeches with Murphy?

CARTER: No. Of course, again, Clifford, according to report now, Clifford had arranged a job with a big corporation, I forget which it is, for after Truman got beaten. He was one of those, according to gossip on the train, who didn't expect Truman to win. So he had no reason to be

antagonistic to me. He was going through the final motions of the thing, and he knew where he was going after election day. All those plans, of course, were changed sharply, and a new group of political opportunities opened up. Now,

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I'm not making any accusations against Clifford because I don't know. But my feeling was that there was a group of old intimates of Truman, and I would not include Charlie Ross in that, Ross was a thoroughly decent, honorable fellow, and I don't say the others were dishonorable, but I think they played the Washington game of trying to keep the inside track with the big man and trying to keep others from breaking in. I think that was the real story.

HESS: Is there any more background to your January article?

CARTER: Oh, there's a minor -- there's a very minor detail, of course, that shows how -- I had written some statement which was construed by *Life* as implying that Bob Lovett had improper financial motives in some of his policy positions.

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I had not meant to imply such a thing at all. They rewrote a paragraph and read it to me over the telephone at the last moment, and it sounded all right, but when it came out it sounded worse than what I had originally written. That I considered dirty pool. A fellow named Jim Shepley was head of the *Life* bureau at the time. I don't know what the hell he was trying to do, but as I say that was the only minor incident that occurred.

HESS: That was something that appeared in the January 10th article.

CARTER: Yes. My old friend, Bill Riis, who was then on the *Reader's Digest* staff, wrote me a pretty nasty letter about it. I kept my temper and wrote him back, a very friendly letter, saying that on account of our many years of friendship, I didn't regard his letter as impertinent and I

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was just giving the facts under which this particular passage was written, and I told him that; and I never heard again a word from him.

HESS: Are there any other points that you want to bring up on the article of January the 10th?

CARTER: No, it was just one of those unfortunate journalistic coincidences that it came on the newstand just about the time when Truman was ready to unveil the North Atlantic Treaty alliance, and for that reason it caused him, and the Administration, very serious embarrassment; and it was followed almost immediately by Marshall's resignation and the appointment of Dean Acheson. I don't think the article was the cause of that but I think it precipitated things a little faster than Truman had intended to precipitate them.

HESS: What is your estimation of Mr. Truman's place in history?

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CARTER: I think he has an ambivalent personality. I think when he is, as he can be, humble, as he was after Roosevelt's death, as he was during the campaign in '48, he is magnificent, one of the great men of the country. In the hour of success, he is quite a different person. I wouldn't say he's insufferable, because that's much too strong a word, but he's arrogant and cocky, and sometimes it's funny, and sometimes it's not worthy of a man who is in that position; although I think a lot of his appeal was that "Foxy Grandpa" element in him. But every now and then, as I say, when he was in adversity, political adversity, he showed up awfully well, I thought. And when he was feeling his oats he didn't show up so well. I imagine that his major foreign policy decisions were inevitable in terms of the conflict that developed between

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Russia and the United States. I think he was perhaps just a little casual in letting the British Government write our foreign policy in major matters, but maybe that was inevitable. You can't tell. The pressures of world affairs today are so enormous that what you read in the old history books doesn't affect them too much. I suppose that his Greek-Turk aid, his Berlin airlift, NATO, must be considered as a very vigorous and honorable attempt to lead the country in the direction of safety and peace. I think he got loused up in the Korean situation, either by poor political advice, or by lack of familiarity with the field, or by other considerations with which I know nothing. You probably saw the other day that finally let out the fact that the way he ended the war in Korea was a quiet word to the Russians that if the Communists did not come to the peace table,

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we were going to use the atom bomb. That was never publicized at the time, but of course, Truman had had the same things within his power to do and he let this thing drag on into a rather meaningless slaughter. So, I would put a question mark against his handling of the Korean war. I think in terms of domestic policy, it was time that the country had a man from west of the Mississippi. It was time they had a rather simple man. I don't mean that in any derogatory sense, but a man of homespun, discernible fiber, and I think that that was a very healthy thing for the country to have. I think that they, like the rest of the world, had got a little tired of high-powered, intelligent leadership and wanted to touch first base. As I tried to explain about the mood that I felt in the campaign, we were trying to touch first base again. I suppose to that extent, he, and of course, Ike,

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continued the same thing, although Ike was a much more complicated character. I would hesitate to describe him as worldly, but he certainly had a wider, broader experience than Truman had, both of war and of policy. But there again, Ike was a man who read westerns, and so forth, I don't know whether he ever cracked a western, but that was the legend put out. And then, of course, after a while we got tired of that and so we got Kennedy who had razzle-dazzle; now you have Lyndon, who is a different kettle of fish altogether. I don't know whether the Presidency will ever come east again, I mean, the way things are going, because the bulk of the nation is now, the population is moving on out. But I think Truman did contribute a great deal, a very great deal, to the country, both his foreign policy and his domestic.

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HESS: You mentioned several things on foreign policy; Greek-Turkish aid bill, the Marshall plan, what do you think his major contributions were on the domestic scene?

CARTER: I hate to say it, but I think it was spiritual. That is to say, he got us down to a more homey, homespun, authentic tone in public affairs. The legislation of his period -- domestic -- was not important. He contributed very little to the picture, except to carry on programs which were already in existence, and which Eisenhower in turn carried on, and which Kennedy continued, and which Lyndon Johnson continued. Well, of course, you know, lots of Government politics consist of just keeping on with what's already going; a slight increase in emphasis here, a slight slacking off there, but it's a continuous process; the great innovations don't come except when you have great crisis.

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So that's just about all I can tell you.

HESS: All right, that's about all I had.

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