

Oral History Interview
with
RICHARD CULL, JR.

Reporter and correspondent, Dayton (Ohio) Daily News, 1937-41, 1946-62; assigned to Washington, D.C. bureau of the Daily News, 1947-62; head of Press Office, U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1963-75.

Independence, Missouri
May 5, 1986
by Niel M. Johnson, Harry S. Truman Library

The Harry S. Truman Library
Independence, Missouri
November, 1987

NOTICE

This is a transcript of a tape-recorded interview conducted for the Harry S. Truman Library. A draft of this transcript was edited by the interviewee but only minor emendations were made; therefore, the reader should remember that this is essentially a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written. word.

RESTRICTIONS

This oral history transcript may be read, quoted from, cited, and reproduced for purposes of research. It may not be published in full except by permission of the Harry S. Truman Library.

Oral History Interview
with
RICHARD CULL, JR.

Independence, Missouri
May 5, 1986
by Niel M. Johnson, Harry S. Truman Library

JOHNSON: Mr. Richard Cull, Jr. is here with me in the Truman Library. Mr. Cull, would you tell us when and where you were born and the names of your parents?

CULL: I was born in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1914, at the time my father was day city editor of the Cleveland Plain Dealer newspaper. Dad was a native of Miamisburg, a small town south of Dayton in southern Ohio, while my mother, Elizabeth Burns, was a native of Dayton. Both were Irish. Both are deceased. Dad came to Dayton about 1910 to start his newspaper career on the Dayton Daily News and then got a job in the bigger city of Cleveland about 1913. In addition to the Plain Dealer, he also was an editor on the Cleveland Press, one of three papers in Cleveland at that time.

[2]

JOHNSON: How long did your father stay in Cleveland?

CULL: About 1924 James M. Cox, the owner and publisher of the Dayton Daily News, brought Dad back to Dayton to be managing editor of the paper. As you know, James M. Cox served three terms as Democratic Governor of Ohio and then in 1920 the Democrats at their national convention in San Francisco chose him as their candidate for President. His running mate as Vice President was Franklin D. Roosevelt of New York, who later was elected to four terms as President of the United States. The Cox-Roosevelt ticket in 1920, of course, lost to the Republican ticket led by Warren G. Harding, also of Ohio, in an election where voters turned their backs on the policies of Woodrow Wilson, the Democrat who was President during World War I. Cox endorsed those policies, which included support for the League of Nations.

So I came back to Dayton in 1924 and went on to complete grade school, high school and college there at Corpus Christi Grade School, Chaminade High School and the University of Dayton, all Catholic schools.

JOHNSON: Did your father write editorials on the Dayton News?

CULL: Oh, no. The managing editor is responsible for the

[3]

news content of the paper, not the editorials. The editor writes the editorials, which are the opinions of the publisher. The editor was Walter Locke.

JOHNSON: Did you always want to be a newsman like your father?

CULL: Oh, yes, always. I even remember the exact day I knew that for sure. It was the day in March, 1932, the Lindbergh baby was kidnapped from his crib in New Jersey. I was sitting next to Dad in church when an usher tapped him on the shoulder and told him to call his office at once. Turns out he had to make a decision whether the News should put out an "extra," an extra edition saved for the most momentous news stories. You see, 1932 was long before TV brought you the instant story and pictures as it does today in the 1980s, and even radio didn't saturate a community like a newspaper. Well, Dad decided to go with an "extra" and he let me stay with him while it was put out in a hurry. I was hooked by the excitement and my lifetime work was decided right there. As kids would say today, it was a "neat" experience.

JOHNSON: When did you first start writing for publication?

[4]

CULL: I guess it was for the high school paper. Then later I was a reporter on the University of Dayton News before becoming editor in my senior year, 1935-36.

JOHNSON: When did you start to work full-time at the Dayton Daily News?

CULL: I graduated in 1936 at the depth of the Depression. There were no openings on the paper at the time and I finally got a job working nights on the assembly line at a General Motors factory in Dayton. I was there six months, long enough to know I didn't want to spend the rest of my life in a factory. I finally got on the staff at the News as a cub in 1937 when a reporter died suddenly. I helped on the financial page and wrote obits before being assigned as police reporter. Then along came World War II. I was drafted very early, almost a year before Pearl Harbor, and that was the end of my newspaper career for five years.

JOHNSON: Did you see much of the publisher, Governor Cox, while you were there?

CULL: Oh, yes, he was in and out of the newsroom all the time. If you didn't see him, you knew he was there

[5]

because he chewed tobacco and his aim wasn't too good some times when he spit tobacco juice.

JOHNSON: Was the Daily News the only newspaper in Dayton when you were on the staff?

CULL: No, not at all. There were two other daily papers, the Morning Journal and the Evening Herald, jointly owned. The Daily News was an afternoon paper with the largest circulation of the three. The News, with Governor Cox as publisher, was strongly Democratic, supporting FDR and the New Deal and with an internationalist viewpoint, while the other papers were Republican, very conservative and regular foes of the New Deal.

By the way, we always addressed Mr. Cox as Governor. He wanted it that way. He wasn't unusual. In my years in Washington, I found many Senators who had been Governors who preferred to be called "Governor."

JOHNSON: Was there hot competition among the newspapers in Dayton?

CULL: Very much so. Newspapers were king in every city in the country until TV came along in the late 1940s. Who doesn't remember Ben Hecht and the "Front Page," his

[6]

story of the newspaper wars in Chicago in the 20s and 30s? And I remember the circulation wars in New York into the 1950s. For example, I remember Jerry Greene of the New York Daily News and Bill Lawrence of the New York Times, both covering the white House in the Truman era, and one day there was only one copy of a press release available at the White House. Greene and Lawrence lunged for it but Lawrence of the Times got it, and Jerry screamed at him, "Give me that. We throw away more newspapers in Times Square than you print every day." In my own experience in Dayton as a rookie police reporter just before World War II, police early one Saturday evening found what they thought might have been a bomb in the local post office. Well, the police reporter for the opposition paper got the police officer who found the package to allow him to go with him to an area to test for a bomb so I couldn't get a report on the test. That left me holding an empty bag with a Sunday morning deadline approaching. Only at the last minute did I learn it was a fake bomb. But my story was not nearly as good as the opposition's. But that's the hard-nosed way the game was played before the advent of TV. Competition was red-hot but I think

[7]

the public benefited. Today in the 1980s, mergers and buy-outs have killed daily papers everywhere. When the mergers came in, the competition went out.

JOHNSON: Do you think those good old days of competing newspapers in cities from coast to coast will ever return?

CULL: No, never. TV has changed everything. You know, when I came back to Dayton in 1980 after being in Washington almost 35 years, I could see the change at once in my neighborhood. When I left in the late 40s, nearly every home on the block got either the morning or afternoon paper delivered. Not any more; today about one house in five still gets delivery. The TV set replaced the newspaper as the main source of news. Harry Truman would have been disappointed because he liked to read several newspapers every day. Today he would have to watch several TV sets, just as Lyndon Johnson did as President.

JOHNSON: Going back to your start as a newsman in Dayton, did you say you broke in as a part-time sports writer while still in college?

CULL: Yes. In those days, a generation ago, you usually started on the daily paper as a copy boy, which meant

[8]
you picked up the copy as it was written and edited and sent it on to the composing room to be set in type. You also did the other routine jobs of sorting the mail and running errands. After a while, if you showed some promise, you could be sent to cover a high school basketball game, which would show if you had any reporting or writing talent. By the way, that's how Leonard Reinsch, who later served in many roles for President Truman at the White House, got his start. I remember Leonard doing the radio broadcasts of local high school games in Dayton in the mid-1930s for WHIO radio, the station owned by the Daily News. Leonard got a job in Dayton, I believe, soon after he graduated from college in the Midwest. Later he became head of the Cox TV-radio empire. Leonard was always a very personable, a very able guy. He also was in charge of arrangements for several Democratic National Conventions as well as for the inauguration of Democratic Presidents, including Harry Truman and John F. Kennedy.

JOHNSON: How do you break in today in the 1980s?

CULL: I think you must have more experience today to break in on most dailies of any size. It seems to me from

[9]
reading Editor and Publisher, the magazine of the newspaper business, that it's like going to the minor leagues in baseball and working yourself up to the majors. You develop your skills that way. Besides, newspapers today hire more specialists, not just general assignment reporters. You often must be a specialist in something like energy or environment or economics to get on the bigger newspapers. And many papers require you to take an aptitude test, even a drug test, or, as in the case of the Knight-Ridder newspapers, you may have to attend their training school in Miami, Florida. The vast explosion of knowledge and information beginning with Harry Truman's Presidency right after World War II requires news people with much greater training than I had.

JOHNSON: What was the route to Washington for a reporter in your era?

CULL: I think almost all of us who came to Washington from newspapers around the country after the end of World War II followed the same route: city hall to the State capital to Washington. That way you learned the affairs of your city and state and the people who wrote and administered the laws. Washington was Broadway at that time and you

[10]
were pretty well rounded in your State's government affairs when you got there. Then you had to learn to mesh your state's interests into the national interest.

JOHNSON: Is Washington still Broadway for young news people today?

CULL: No, I don't think so, even though it is and always will be the news capital of the world. In my time, as products of the devastating Depression of the 1930s, we were intensely interested in job security, and Washington meant lifetime security. Today's generation, with no personal memory of the jobs-short Depression, doesn't have that interest in job security. I see newsmen come and go in Washington now; they go where the opportunity is.

I want to add here that I think it is better to have a frequent turnover of people in news and government in Washington in this era of rapid world-wide changes. I have found that Washington is a deadly place for people who stay too long in that island cloister and lose touch with the changes going on back on the mainland of the country. You know, I think Harry Truman's upset victory over Tom Dewey in 1948 did more to wipe the shine off the seat of the pants of newsmen in Washington than

[11]

anything ever did. In their superior wisdom, they just didn't believe the country thought differently from them. I remember John O'Donnell, Washington columnist for the New York Daily News, pounding his highball glass on the National Press Club bar and saying, "How could anyone be so wrong?"

JOHNSON: Before you were drafted into World War II did you write politics at the Dayton News?

CULL: No, I was just learning to be a reporter. An older man, Bernie Losh, was political editor. He was a red hot Democrat as was Glenn "Whitey" Whitesell, who helped him. You know, party loyalty was much more intense then than it is today in the era of TV and I can remember Whitey accusing some people of voting Democratic until they got "wrinkles in their bellies" when they turned around and voted Republican. He meant, of course, the Democrats made them prosperous and then they turned on the Party. Now in the mid-30s in Dayton, as well as in many other areas of the country, the New Deal of FDR was very controversial because it brought government intervention into what many thought were areas reserved for private business. I remember clearly that in Dayton

[12]

the News under Governor Cox supported the New Deal while the opposition papers, both Republican, opposed it. In fact, the Dayton News was one of the very few papers in Ohio to support the New Deal of FDR and the Fair Deal of President Truman.

JOHNSON: You say you were the first newsman in Dayton drafted into World War II and that you were in the very first draft call in the city?

CULL: Right. Soon after Congress passed the draft law in 1940, Secretary of War Henry Stimson conducted the first drawing of draft numbers in October, 1940. I can still see the picture of Stimson blindfolded and reaching into a goldfish bowl to draw the first number.

You see, the order in which your draft number was pulled determined the order in which you would be called. As I recall, all males between 18 and 35 had to register under the draft law and each was assigned a number. All over the country, in offices and in factories and in schools, just everywhere, the eligible men put up, say \$1 each, for an office pool and the first number drawn was the winner. It was a pool hardly anyone wanted to win. I didn't want to win ours at the Daily News, but

[13]

I did and I was called to report on February 6, 1941. We were told not to worry, there wouldn't be a war and we'd all be home again in a year. In fact, the popular song of 1941 was "I'll be back in a year, little darling." Both Governor Cox and President Roosevelt said we'd be back in a year. How wrong they were.

JOHNSON: Where were you sent when you were drafted?

CULL: We were inducted at Fort Thomas, Kentucky, and then sent by troop train to Camp Shelby, Mississippi, in the cut-over pine area of Southern Mississippi near Hattiesburg. I was assigned to headquarters, 62nd Field Artillery brigade of the 37th Division, Ohio National Guard. The Guard had been federalized in the fall of 1940 as war clouds gathered and a cadre of the 37th went to Shelby to await the draftees. There were two brigades of infantry in the 37th at Shelby also.

JOHNSON: President Truman was an artillery man in France in World War I, you know.

CULL: Yes, I know that. In fact, I think it was at Shelby when I began a career of following Harry Truman around, first as an artillery man at a southern army training camp, then

[14]

on to Washington after the war when he was in the White House and I was a newsman writing daily about his Presidency, and finally along the campaign trail, his last campaign as President, in 1952. It was a long, long trail a winding . . .

JOHNSON: What shape was Shelby in when the first draftees arrived?

CULL: Primitive. There was a shortage of everything, all the way to toilet paper; you got a ration of 11 sheets under your breakfast plate every day.

As for weapons, forget it. Weapons were in such short supply you often used broomsticks to simulate them. Hell, artillery shells were so scarce that I was sent out several times to the firing range on the fenders of ancient weapons carriers to mark duds. So what if the dud exploded in your hands. The Army said we can afford to lose men more than we can afford to lose a shell.

I tell you, if it weren't for Harry Truman we would have waited even longer to get supplies and equipment. As you know, he made a tour of southern Army training camps in 1941 as head of the Senate committee to investigate defense preparedness. He was Senator Truman from

[15]

Missouri then and he sponsored the legislation for the investigation. I have read he found something like \$200 million in waste in defense production.

JOHNSON: Do you think camp life at Camp Shelby was about the same in early 1941 as it was in the fall of 1917 when Lieutenant Harry Truman went to Camp Doniphan at Fort Sill, Oklahoma to train for World War I?

CULL: Yes, I do. Army training camps have been the same in all wars. You are citizen soldiers or officers, in most cases; your life has been disrupted. You are sick and bored and lonely; you suffer abject despair and feel abandoned by your fellow citizens not in uniform. At Shelby, we counted the days until our year would be up and we could go home because we had been assured there was not going to be a war; then, I think it was early summer of 1941, the House of Representatives voted by one vote -- just one vote -- to extend the year's service. I remember hearing the news and burying my head in a pillow in my tent and crying like a baby.

JOHNSON: Was there a good spirit at Shelby between the Guardsmen and the draftees?

[16]

CULL: Not exactly. The Guards held all the non-com ratings, which meant the draftees did all the work. The draftees taunted the Guards with such remarks as, "I'd rather be a rubber in a whore's back yard than a goddamn sergeant in the National Guard." I'm sure the same thing happened in Truman's time.

I remember something else in 1941 at Camp Shelby that was there in 1917 at Camp Doniphan. I have read where Truman said they had a balky Sibley stove in their tent that operated at two extremes -- red hot or not at all. We had the same old World War I Sibley stoves in our tents. You had to beat on them all night to keep the fire going.

And I was one of the citizen soldiers who ended up in the hospital with the flu in the winter of 1941. Compare that to Camp Doniphan in 1917 when Truman wrote that fatal epidemics of measles and pneumonia swept the camp, along with some scarlet fever and smallpox.

You know what Truman said of all this? He said all this for "30 bucks and beans." Well, at Shelby, the song title was, "Twenty-one dollars a day, once a month." That's the pay I started at.

And, oh, yes, Truman talked about that early reveille at his camp. Well, at Camp Shelby, we were awakened at

[17]

5:15 a.m., by the charge of quarters banging on the tent pole with a broom handle and bellowing, "Drop your clocks and grab your socks. Let's go! You wanna sleep all day."

Yes, I wish I had a chance in the years I followed Harry Truman around the country to talk to him about Army barracks life.

Well, enough of life in the Army camps of World War I and II. But I think our experiences are worth recording here because in this era of the nuclear bomb there will be no more need for the mass training of millions of soldiers to fight a conventional war.

JOHNSON: How long were you at Camp Shelby?

CULL: I was there from February until the end of November, 1941, all through the period of the summer Army maneuvers in Louisiana and East Texas along the Sabine River between the Second and Third Armies. I transferred out in November to the Air Corps. I always wanted to be in the Air Corps since my home was in Dayton, which was the home of the Wright brothers, who made the first powered flight in 1903. Dayton calls itself the birthplace of aviation. I was able to get the transfer because war

[18]

still did not appear imminent in early fall of 1941.

JOHNSON: What group were you with in the Air Force?

CULL: I was at Patterson Field.

JOHNSON: Air Corps, of course.

CULL: That's right, with an air transport squadron in the Army Air Corps. Of course, the independent Air Force didn't come along until 1947 when President Truman signed the legislation. Yes, it was the Army Air Corps and

I was at Patterson Field in Ohio for a while and then I was transferred to Fort George Wright, in Spokane, Washington. I was there the rest of the time.

JOHNSON: What was your rank and your . . .

CULL: I was a master sergeant, enlisted.

JOHNSON: What kind of work did you do?

CULL: Well, I handled publications, and edited publications -- magazines, newspapers and information. I was the head of a writing staff of five or six.

JOHNSON: Sort of a public relations office.

[19]

CULL: Public relations. Today they call it public information or public affairs which I think is probably a better term.

JOHNSON: So you were something like a historian too. You were writing about the . . .

CULL: Yes, because at the place in Spokane, it was an Air Force convalescent hospital, and these airmen had come back from Europe and they had all been in combat and they all had some problem, either physical or emotional. I think the Air Force did a great job out there because these fellows had to have some sort of help to rid themselves of these terrible phobias and war experiences. They had very capable medical people out there who helped them do that. I sent President Truman a report on the work being done at Fort Wright and got a nice letter back from him saying how important it was. I'll try to find that letter.

JOHNSON: And so you covered the war experiences of some of them or related some of those, I suppose.

CULL: Yes, that's right. And towards the end of the war, I was on the sports staff of the Spokane Spokesman

[20]

Review, the morning newspaper in Spokane, and spent about a year with them. You know, that's the newspaper Truman in his 1948 campaign called the second worst newspaper in the country after the Chicago Tribune because of its political attacks on him as President.

JOHNSON: Were you a civilian then or were you still in the Air Corps?

CULL: No, I was still in the service. Of course, the war ended in Europe and in the Pacific, in '45, and I was discharged in November of '45. The publisher of the paper asked me if I wouldn't stay on, and I said, "No." I preferred to go back to Dayton and resume my career on the Daily News.

JOHNSON: You never went overseas then?

CULL: No, I didn't go overseas.

JOHNSON: What about April 12, 1945 when Roosevelt died?

CULL: That was the day Roosevelt died. Yes, I remember it clearly. I was on the base at Spokane, outside the Post Exchange, and I can remember the feelings of the personnel there.

[21]

JOHNSON: What was their reaction then?

CULL: I think it was of genuine grief. I don't think maybe the shock was too great because the President hadn't been too well. But we all admired him as a great war leader. Well, frankly at that time the GIs were mostly interested in getting out and going home. Although they had great sorrow over Roosevelt's death, the war in Japan was still going on and there was the chance that troops would still have to go to Japan. If Truman hadn't dropped the bomb over there, you know, we probably would have gone there. It would have cost many more American lives.

JOHNSON: Did they say "Harry Who?" when they heard that Truman was now President?

CULL: I don't remember that they did.

JOHNSON: They just assumed he would carry on Roosevelt programs, I suppose.

CULL: Yes, but we weren't so politically acute after being locked up in uniform so many years. We just wanted to get out and go home and rejoin the "feather merchants," the civilians. I think they were happy when Truman decided to drop the bomb, you know. They had a personal

[22]

interest in that.

JOHNSON: You remember that day I suppose, too.

CULL: Oh, sure. Spokane was only some 40 miles from Hanford, Washington where some of the research was carried on, and we never knew a thing about it. We even had gone down there once or twice and played ball, softball, after the war in Europe ended, and never had the slightest inkling of what was going on. I guess it just had to be carried on in great secrecy.

JOHNSON: So there was a lot of elation when they heard that the bomb had been dropped and they wouldn't have to go over.

CULL: Yes, there was great elation. I have a brother-in-law who went through the Marines' campaigns in the South Pacific as a combat paratrooper. Luckily, he survived them. At the end of one of the last campaigns, probably Iwo Jima, his Marine division — I think it was the 5th -- was then sent back to Hawaii and told to prepare for invading Japan. In fact, he was in a combat group from the First Marine Division that went to Japan. He couldn't be sure, he has told me often, just what was going to happen to

[23]

them over there. But he remembers clearly how the marines cheered and cheered when they learned Truman dropped the bomb.

JOHNSON: They were among the first to land and occupy Japan?

CULL: Yes, they were . . .

JOHNSON: What is his name?

CULL: Norbert Christensen. He is a stockbroker in Dayton and . . .

JOHNSON: He was one of the first American Marines to land?

CULL: Yes, he was, and he landed on Kyushu, the southernmost Japanese island. He was there with a group and he has told me how they couldn't be sure what reception they were going to get because the Japs had always said they would fight to the last to defend their homeland. Chris remembers the Marines holed up in a cave and waited for something to happen. But trouble never developed.

JOHNSON: Okay, you're discharged in November of '45 and you go back to Dayton to work for the newspaper?

CULL: Yes, I came back to Dayton on November 30 of '45, and

[24]

the paper asked me soon after to come back to cover City Hall. Newspapers in World War II had a lot of temporary people and just did the best they could, you know. A lot of these temporary people at the end of the war wanted to get on with some of their own plans too. So the staffs on papers everywhere changed. I was asked to cover City Hall, and I went to City Hall and spent a year there learning the operation of the City. Now, it's not a political form of government in Dayton; it's a non-partisan City Commission form of government. There wasn't any great politics in city affairs there. But it was a chance to learn from a flatfooted start about the operation of city government, and there I learned the things that would be useful later to me in Washington. It was especially useful in Washington for a reporter to know his own city, what the problems are of that city, and relate what happens in Washington to that city. And all those problems of postwar readjustment -- problems of shortages of food and housing and strikes by unions that felt they had held the line on wages long enough -- were the ones that ended up on Harry Truman's desk at the White House.

[25]

You could see them all as a newspaper reporter in Dayton. And in addition to writing about the strikes and shortages, you also had postwar investigations by committees of Congress similar to the one Harry Truman headed while a Senator from Missouri. All told, I think Harry Truman confronted one of the most difficult jobs any President ever faced. And lest I forget, he also had to implement many of FDR's New Deal programs, often very controversial, that had been delayed by World War II.

JOHNSON: How long were you City Hall reporter?

CULL: I was a City Hall reporter for about eight months. I started there in January of '46 -- I guess it was; it was about eight months. Then they sent me to Columbus, and I was in Columbus until '47 when I came to Washington.

JOHNSON: In the bureau of the Cox newspapers?

CULL: The Cox. bureau in both Columbus and Washington, right. But at that time, right after World War II, the Coxes and the Knights and the Gannetts were so wary of being charged with monopoly, you never put the sign "Cox Newspapers" on the bureau door. You just listed the

[26]

individual papers by name. Not any more. Today there are huge chains of newspapers, all listed under the name of Cox or Knight or Gannett.

JOHNSON: I asked you before we started the interview if you were acquainted with Sawyer, Charles Sawyer.

CULL: I'm acquainted with Charlie Sawyer more by name than personally. Charlie Sawyer was from Cincinnati and he was Secretary of Commerce. And I think he was the businessman-Democrat type similar to Governor Cox.

JOHNSON: And he was a newspaperman.

CULL: He was an attorney and owner of smaller-sized newspapers in Ohio. He has a son-in-law who still runs radio station WING in Dayton for him. Charlie Sawyer, I know, was a good friend of President Truman, but I may have . . .

JOHNSON: But he didn't figure in state politics?

CULL: No, he didn't figure after 1938 when he ran for Governor and was defeated by John W. Bricker, later a U.S. Senator from Ohio. He did serve as Democratic National Committeeman from Ohio 1936-44.

JOHNSON: What names kind of come to mind who were important in Ohio politics right after World War II?

[27]

CULL: Well, Governor [Frank] Lausche was the popular Democratic Governor of the state for three terms, and Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio was the "Mr. Republican" of the United States Senate in his era.

JOHNSON: In '46 there was an election where the Republicans came in with a majority in the Congress.

CULL: Yes, did they call that the "beefsteak election?"

JOHNSON: They could well have.

CULL: There was a meat shortage at that time, wasn't there? I remember writing about the long lines at the meat counters in Dayton. People were mad and they took their anger out at the polls in November 1946. The Democrats around the country suffered most of the losses. That's what brought in Republican control of the 80th Congress, the one he ran successfully against in 1948.

JOHNSON: You covered some of the Congressional races for Cox?

CULL: Yes, oh yes, some of the Congressional races. But actually while in Columbus you were more concerned with the coal strikes that bedeviled Truman, plus the state

[28]

government and the Governor's office, and the legislature -- the full range of state affairs. I had covered city affairs; now I moved up to state affairs enroute to Washington and the Truman era in the White House.

JOHNSON: Your first exposure to national politics as a newspaperman, would that have been '48?

CULL: Well, it was '47. I went to Washington in September of 1947, when the Cox newspapers for the first time opened a newspaper bureau in Washington. McNeill Lowry, who had been an editorial writer on the Dayton News, was named the chief of the bureau. I was sent there to cover Ohio for the Dayton paper, and we had a man from Atlanta covering Georgia for the Atlanta Journal. We had a man from Florida covering for the Miami News. You see, Lowry, the bureau chief, was the guy who did the national general reporting, but the rest of us in the bureau still got into, of course, national affairs and Truman press conferences. As I told you, I remember going to one Truman press conference in his oval office and

JOHNSON: Do you happen to remember when that was?

[29]

CULL: Well, let's see, I don't know whether it was before the '48 campaign or not. I remember going a number of times to the Oval Office and standing in front of President Truman's desk while the press crowd gathered around him. Then, when all the crowd was in, a fellow by the name of Beckley, the superintendent of the Senate press gallery would say, "All in, Mr. President," and they would close the doors. Then the questions would begin. And the questions covered everything on the world news scene.

JOHNSON: Did you ask any questions, or were you . . .

CULL: No, I'll tell you, Washington in the late 1940s was a case really of "little children are seen but not heard." The veterans and the old timers in the White House Press Room did most of the question-asking. One question I remember, and I don't know just who it was, was a question by somebody, obviously a political enemy of Mr. Truman, a question from a paper with a political bias, asking "Mr. Truman, what do you think of this congressional investigation of Communists?" And Mr. Truman replied, "Oh, that's just a red-herring." Well, I know some of his friends on newspapers on the

[30]

Democratic side shook their heads and said, "He'll regret saying that." I'll tell you a little more about that "red herring" remark in a side paper later.

JOHNSON: Any other press conferences that stand out in your mind?

CULL: I don't remember any especially, but I do know that when Truman defeated Dewey, one prominent Ohio newspaper immediately recalled its Washington correspondent and closed its bureau office. They contended they had been lied to, that it wasn't possible that Truman could defeat Dewey and so they closed it, and kept it closed for several years. That's what you call taking it pretty hard. And I heard later at the National Press Club how the New York Journal of Commerce had stories written the day before the election about the changes in Government Dewey would make.

JOHNSON: So you were in that Washington bureau from '47 . . .

CULL: I was in the Washington bureau from '47 until about '61.

JOHNSON: You mentioned McNeill Lowry. Was he your boss there?

[31]

CULL: Yes, Mac was bureau chief of the Cox newspapers.

JOHNSON: How long was he in that position, and did you succeed him?

CULL: Well, McNeill Lowry was in that position until about '52. I might tell you that McNeill Lowry in 1948 won the Sigma Delta Chi award for national reporting from Washington because of his stories, which showed the discontent among the farmers for the Republican efforts to abolish the grain storage program in the Commodity Credit Administration.

JOHNSON: Grain storage program.

CULL: He wrote this series, and they were pretty darn knowledgeable stories. And after Truman pulled the upset of all upsets, Mac got the Sigma Delta Chi award, and it was well deserved.

JOHNSON: Ohio went for Truman by only a few thousand votes.

CULL: Yes it did. But remember, Ohio usually votes Republican for President. For instance, John F. Kennedy did not carry Ohio in 1960 against Nixon. And don't forget, Henry Wallace's Progressive Party took votes

[32]
away from Truman in Ohio in 1948.

JOHNSON: Would you say that Lowry's reporting may actually have swung the Ohio vote in '48?

CULL: No, I wouldn't say that. I think Harry Truman carried Ohio the way he carried other states that year he wasn't supposed to carry. He carried them on his own. It was a personal victory. He sold himself to the voters from the back end of that whistle stop train. Let me tell you this: Governor Lausche, a Democrat, was one of the most popular Governors Ohio ever had. He told me one day after that astounding Truman victory over Dewey that he hadn't given Truman much chance. But he said he changed his mind when he traveled in Ohio with Truman and saw the size and enthusiasm of the campaign crowds.

Ohio is a very difficult state to predict. Cleveland and Cincinnati are different the way St. Louis and Kansas City are different, the way Los Angeles and San Francisco are different: ethnically, economically, geographically -- ever way. You learn that in a hurry as a national political writer. Cincinnati and Cleveland like to ridicule each other. Cincinnatians say the difference between Cleveland and the Titanic

[33]
is that the Titanic had an orchestra aboard. Clevelanders quote Mark Twain as saying that Cincinnati is so backward he hopes he is there when the end of the world comes because everything happens a year later in Cincinnati.

So anyhow, Mac stayed until 1952 when he accepted a job as vice president of the arts and humanities program at the Ford Foundation. He stayed there many years.

JOHNSON: In '52 did you take his place?

CULL: No, at that point we didn't have a bureau chief for several years. The Cox newspapers in Ohio, Georgia and Florida decided that they would like just to have each newspaper with its own man, and that way it opened up more coverage to all of us, and more even on the national scene for Ohio. For instance, I spent a lot of time on the Bricker amendment, named for Republican Senator John Bricker of Ohio. Our Dayton paper vigorously opposed this amendment which would have restricted the President's treaty-making powers. Truman also opposed it, of course, and it was defeated.

JOHNSON: What was your title then?

[34]

CULL: Washington correspondent for the Dayton Daily News. And then several years later I became the bureau chief of the Cox newspapers, all the Cox newspapers.

JOHNSON: In the '48 campaign, did you have anything to do with that? Did you do any reporting at all on the '48 campaign?

CULL: No, I don't believe I did, I think Mac Lowry did that.

JOHNSON: You were still covering Ohio?

CULL: Well, I spent so much time in 1948 covering Harry Truman's old Senate war investigating committee that I had little time for the Ohio scene. We had a huge Air Force procurement scandal in Dayton at Wright Field. And this came to the attention of Congress. This was a procurement scandal where an Air Force major general at Wright Field, which was world-wide headquarters for Air Force procurement, had been shown to have set himself up a dummy corporation during World War II, and then steered orders, huge orders, to it.

Well, this became quite a scandal, because there was a beautiful girl involved in the thing. The general said she was his "gal friend;" she was the

[35]

wife of the president of the corporation. Newspapers called it the "kiss and tell story." As soon as they did that, this thing got to the attention of Truman's old Senate committee and the officers and everybody at Wright Field, plus the biggest names in the aircraft industry, were brought into this hearing, which lasted for a month on Capitol Hill and got sensational play. As I say, it was Harry Truman's old committee but now it was headed by Senator Homer Ferguson, Republican of Michigan, who had been on the committee when Truman was chairman before he became President in 1945 when FDR died suddenly. It was quite a finale for Truman's old group. I don't think I ever covered a better story in all the years I was in Washington. It was on Page One every day for weeks in 1948. I am going to append a summary of that spectacular case for researchers at the Library because it typifies the sort of waste Harry Truman had in mind when he suggested the committee be established. The Air Force major general was put on trial in D.C. Federal Court, and was convicted of subornation of perjury. That trial lasted six weeks. So I was kept busy filing news stories to my paper two and three times a day, and it took up most of my time. There wasn't much time for

[36]

anything else. In fact, I was tied up in court so long I had to give up a sideline job I had as Washington correspondent of the Springfield, Massachusetts, Union newspaper.

JOHNSON: So you weren't out there for any of the whistlestops . . .

CULL: No. I came to Dayton to vote in 1948 and stopped at the News office the day before election day. I remember Governor Cox saying to me Truman would win if the campaign would last one more week. So he was close.

JOHNSON: Did you have any involvement in covering the 1950 congressional campaign for the paper?

CULL: Yes, I was involved. I'll tell you, I often was called back to Ohio. Governor Cox always told me, "Now, you newsmen go to Washington and become statesmen," and of course, I think he was right to a large extent. He said, "Don't lose your foothold back here in Ohio." Well, he may have been a little selfish in that regard, figuring he would bring me back to Dayton someday to stay. But I'll have to tell you frankly that once I

[37]

went to Washington, I just never wanted to go back to Dayton to work.

JOHNSON: Do you think it was that "Potomac fever" that Truman talked about?

CULL: To an extent, maybe so. But I think it is understandable to want to keep working in bigger leagues with bigger challenges. I don't think Harry Truman would have been content to stay a county judge in Missouri rather than be a U.S. Senator. Let me tell you a story about when it is deadly to have "Potomac Fever." It is when you are an elected politician and you figure after being elected several times you don't have to go back home to campaign anymore. You figure your name is so well-known your reelection is automatic.

Well -- and this is a true story -- there was this Congressman from Kansas who had been reelected several times. He bought a house in Virginia across the Potomac from Washington and decided one year he wouldn't go back to campaign, that his name would be enough to make him a winner. Well, his opponent hired a band and had the band play, "Carry Me Back to Old Virginny," at his campaign rallies. And that's just what the voters

[38]

did to the absentee Congressman at the next election.

JOHNSON: Where did you live in Washington?

CULL: I lived in three or four places. I lived near 16th and R, N.W., and I lived near 14th and Irving, N.W., and I lived in the 3100 block of 16th, N.W., and then I lived for 13 years in the 1800 block of Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., downtown near DuPont Circle, on Embassy Row.

JOHNSON: You weren't married?

CULL: Never have been married.

JOHNSON: How about brothers and sisters?

CULL: Well, I was in a family of six and we also raised another young girl whose mother, my mother's sister, died. Her husband had died too.

JOHNSON: Would you like to run their names through?

CULL: Yes, there's Elizabeth, who died a couple of years ago. There's my brother Joe, and my sisters Eileen, Janet, Margie, and Barbie.

[39]

JOHNSON: Did any of them get into newspaper work?

CULL: Well, no, none of the brothers or sisters. But journalism must still be in the blood of the next generation because my niece is a reporter and weekend anchor on the Post Newsweek TV channel in Jacksonville, Florida,

and her younger brother is now a TV reporter on the station in Gainesville, Florida. Their older brother, Kim Christensen, was on the staff of the Dayton News for three years and just a few weeks ago, why, he was hired away by the Orange County Register in Santa Ana, California.

JOHNSON: Where was your office in Washington located?

CULL: Our office was in the Albee Building at 15th and G Street, just one block from the White House. The Albee Building for many years was the major news bureau headquarters building outside of the National Press Building which is still at 14th and F Streets N.W. In the Albee Building, on the same floor with our Cox newspapers were the Kansas City Star, the Cleveland Plain Dealer, the Dallas News, the Indianapolis Star and News, and on the floors above use were the New

[40]

York Times, and the Chicago Tribune. By the way, Duke Shoop, who was the bureau chief of the Kansas City Star all the time Truman was in the White House, often recalled how Senator Truman stopped in to say hello on his way to work on Capitol Hill.

JOHNSON: Was there some sharing of news, or was it very highly competitive?

CULL: It was highly competitive all over Washington in the years after World War II ended. There were stories everywhere as you readjusted from war to peace and as you told the stories of shortages of food and housing, and of strikes, actual and threatened, and of such new programs as atomic energy. Everything focused on Washington, right up to the door of President Truman's White House. I think it was one of the most difficult, maybe the most difficult, eras of transition in American political history. And, of course, Truman's troubles didn't end at the water's edge. Europe was devastated and needed our help, which came in the Marshall plan, and eastern Europe seethed under Russian control. I remember the press crowd on Capitol Hill growing every day with reporters from all over the world.

[41]

JOHNSON: Was there sharing of news?

CULL: No, certainly not with another paper in your circulation area. Reporters love their scoops, you know. Besides, in the late 1940s, you saw the start of this trend toward one-newspaper towns. The stronger paper was trying to destroy the other paper in town, and one way was through more aggressive news coverage in Washington, which is where the action was. You could hardly get by without a Washington bureau. But yes, there were times when maybe there were a couple of stories that you just couldn't get to that day. If I'm with the Dayton News, and maybe the Dallas News, or the Kansas City Star, was working on a story of mutual interest, then you tell them, "Look, will you give me some help on this if I need it?" They would say, "Yes," and then you'd do the same thing for them. We called this "trading black sheets."

JOHNSON: On a typical day what would be your routine, so to speak?

CULL: I would go into the office and read the Washington and New York morning papers and hope that the paper from

[42]

Dayton from the day before had reached there by Air Mail Special, which is the way it was sent. Then you always had an Associated Press wire in the office, which brought you the committee meetings of the day up in

Congress, and the events at the White House and at the big government agencies all over town. Then you would be in touch with your congressman's office for news of home-town visitors. You usually contacted not only your local Congressman, but the one from the counties above you and the one from the counties below you. Larger papers like our Atlanta Journal "covered Dixie like the dew." Then you'd get calls from the office back in Dayton, saying, "Look, we're interested in this or that."

I paid a lot of attention to the Defense Department because Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton was the procurement headquarters for the Air Force. I wrote many stories about alleged waste in spending, stories similar to the ones Truman uncovered while head of his Senate committee, and in 1951 or 1952 my newspaper nominated me for a Pulitzer Prize for my reporting. The Pulitzer Committee did not award me the prize, however. Then just before 12 o'clock, which is the

[43]

time Congress meets, you would go up to the Hill as they called the Capitol, and go into the House press gallery, and see what was going on up there, and whether anything was taking place on the floor or would take place on the floor that day that would interest you. I think most of the reporters from individual papers I worked with in the years after the war ended had a special interest in housing legislation. Every city was beset with housing shortages and every city put its problems right at the White House and Congress. It was one of the greatest headaches in this hectic period of going from war to peace. I followed housing legislation, including rent controls, daily. Then at the end of the day on Capitol Hill, you go back to the Bureau office, and maybe you have some more calls outstanding. Then you start writing. Usually you would be there until after 6 o'clock, because you would send all of your copy overnight by Western Union. We had a Western Union office right on the sixth floor in the Albee Building and most of the newspapers used it. The telegrapher for years was Peyte Neunam, a very hard-working guy.

JOHNSON: Now, Lowry would have a similar schedule except he would be going to the White House?

[44]

CULL: Sure he would, yes he would. But not the White House alone. He spent a lot of time on Capitol Hill also, especially in the Senate. He would be getting the national aspect of things, say on the Marshall Plan or Taft-Hartley or the cold war.

JOHNSON: Well, how did you get in on Presidential press conferences?

CULL: Well, as correspondents for our individual papers, we were accredited to the White House.

JOHNSON: Do you have any idea how many of those you might have attended?

CULL: Well, you know, through the years, starting with '47 and all through the '50s, it must have been a hundred with Truman and Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy.

JOHNSON: You attended most of them by your own choice?

CULL: Oh, yes. But sometimes your paper would say, "Look, take that White House press conference today; there might be something that would be said about such and such." Or you would say to the managing editor on the telephone that morning, "Look, I think I ought to go to the

[45]

White House rather than the Capitol because there's something that might be said today by Truman on housing or price controls that would interest us." Governor Cox always was interested in bringing the world into land-locked southern Ohio. He had a great interest in national and international news. I remember one day, I think it was in the winter of 1952, I went to visit him at his home in Biscayne Bay in Miami, Florida. He spent his winters in Miami where he owned the Miami Daily News. Well, he spent an hour telling me how the Republican Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act had been such a disaster; it helped bring on the Depression of the 1930s. He was no isolationist or protectionist.

Governor Cox was a businessman, but he was also a newsman; he had trained as a newsman. He would keep a sharp eye, and you'd get notes from him. I got notes from him frequently in the mail. One day I had gone back to Ohio and written a series on conditions at the Ohio State penitentiary. Since he had been Governor of Ohio, I thought that he would be interested in a subject like this. Also it was kind of a topical subject, so I came back to Washington and wrote the series, and got a good play. When it was over, I

[46]

mailed the series of five articles to him at his home, Trails End, in Dayton, and said, "Governor, I just wanted to make sure you saw these, because I think they will be of interest to you." I don't know how long he kept them; it wasn't very long, because they came back to me in the mail with an abrupt note, "You don't have to send me these things. I read every line in the paper, all day, every day, even though I have to stay up some nights to midnight to do it."

Well, you know, at least it showed he was reading the newspaper, which was something that pleased you.

I'll tell you another story about how he watched things.

I ran into him one day on the street when I was en route back to Columbus in 1947, when I was State House correspondent. I put out my hand and said, "Hello, Governor." Well, instead of shaking hands, he just raised his right arm up and down and kept repeating, "Dick, you haven't sounded the alarm, you haven't sounded the alarm." I knew what he meant. One of his contacts in Columbus -- he had been Governor three terms -- had told him the Republicans were trying to make changes in the progressive workmen's compensation law he had

[47]

fathered while Governor. Well, I got on that story as soon as I got to Columbus.

JOHNSON: What impressed you about Truman at these press conferences?

CULL: Well, I think there was always a ring of honesty to Truman; we felt that he wasn't evasive. He was also knowledgeable. I think 1947 was the year of the Marshall plan and many other big stories in the U.S. and around the world. And he just seemed to be, you know, on top of everything. Of course, a few reporters thought he shot from the hip on occasion. Again, as I say, I think Truman was a man's man. We used to say at the Press Club we'd like to play poker with him or go to an American Legion picnic with him.

JOHNSON: What do you think of the differences between the role of the press conference in his day, and the role of it today?

CULL: Well, today of course, it's more theater, because it's more TV. There was no live TV in Truman's era. And you could get run over at the end of one of those press conferences in the oval office as maybe Merriman

[48]

Smith of the United Press or somebody would say, "Thank you, Mr. President," and then turn and race for the door to get to a telephone, which would bring the first news the world had of what happened in that room. You better get out of the way, because these wire service reporters were going to roar through. Today it's all television, and there's no stampede to the phone. It's theater and I think it's played that way, with the red carpet and all the trimmings.

By the way, I have a picture to give to the Library of the stampede for telephones that took place at the White House the day in 1945 Truman announced to the press the Japs accepted surrender terms.

JOHNSON: Where were these telephones everybody was rushing to? Where were those telephones located there in the west wing of the White House?

CULL: Well, at that time they were pretty close to the Oval Office in the west wing. There was a press room there, you understand. There was a big press room near the Oval Office.

JOHNSON: Was that right next to Matt Connelly's office?

[49]

CULL: Yes, it was close by there, and there used to be a huge table in the lobby adjoining the press room where everybody would throw their hats and coats when they came in and then grab them and take off as soon as the press conference ended. All of the wire services, UP, AP, INS, had a private phone in the press room of their own. I certainly won't forget that! Was it '51 that they tried to assassinate Truman at the Blair House?

JOHNSON: November 1950.

CULL: Anyhow, right after the shooting had taken place at the Blair House, I was up at the Capitol, in the press gallery, and suddenly the word came out they were trying to assassinate Truman. Well, man, I took off as fast as I could to get to the Blair House, which of course, was across town, way down the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue and beyond the White House. I got right to the gate, and stood right there where you could see where the shots had knocked off the top of the spiked fence, the tips of them. So I stood around for a while; it was all over by that time. Then I went over to the White House press room, diagonally across the street, and said, "Man, I've got to call and tell the newspaper about this."

[50]

So, I went back, dashed in there, went to a phone and picked it up, and called Dayton -- called the managing editor, Herb Koehl -- and told him about it. I noticed somebody was standing right next to me when I was talking. So I told Herb about it, and then the conversation ended, and I hung up. The guy next to me says to me, "It's okay this time, but don't ever do that again." It was Joe Short of the Baltimore Sun, and that was his private phone to his newspaper. Joe Short later became Truman's press secretary after Charlie Ross died.

JOHNSON: Were you well acquainted with Charlie Ross?

CULL: No, I knew Charlie barely. He was mostly before my time. I knew him as a nice guy. Yes, he had kind of a "hang-dog" look, but I think he was well-liked. He was around a while and then Joe Short was there.

JOHNSON: Was that the only call you made about the assassination attempt?

CULL: Well, I'll tell you what; it happened in the afternoon, and our last edition had gone to press around 3 o'clock. So they wouldn't do anything for us until

[51]

the next day.

JOHNSON: Did you have a morning paper?

CULL: There was a morning paper in Dayton, but we were separate.

JOHNSON: So they got the scoop on that?

CULL: They did, right. But it was still a good story the next day because, you know, there were still things to report.

JOHNSON: Did you see the casualties lying around?

CULL: As I recall it, I think one of them was still there. But I know that the tip was shot off the spiked fence because Time magazine had made a picture of me and two other people looking at it, which they used the next week.

JOHNSON: Oh, they did, Time magazine.

CULL: Yes. In their press section. I'll also make a copy of that page available to the Library.

JOHNSON: Of course, that's an event that you wouldn't

[52]

forget. That was when we were doing well in the Korean war, and then things turned bad. Then, MacArthur got fired. Did you have anything to do with covering that at all, MacArthur's firing?

CULL: No. MacArthur, of course, came back to Washington and got a hero's welcome. Oh, it split the country right down the middle. I checked the Ohio delegation in Congress and found Democrats supported the firing while Republicans generally opposed it.

JOHNSON: Were you in Congress when he gave that speech?

CULL: Yes, I was there that day in the press gallery when he concluded his farewell speech by saying, "Old soldiers never die, they just fade away." Yes. I'll tell you, this was a tough, tough blow for a lot of people who really thought that MacArthur had done a tremendous job both as the wartime commander in the Pacific and then as the postwar administrator of Japan.

JOHNSON: Governor Cox, you said, wasn't all that impressed.

CULL: No, Governor Cox didn't like him. I think he thought that he was too much of an egotist. Governor Cox at

[53]

the '52 Republican nominating convention kept on top of us to see how the MacArthur campaign was going. We had a group at the convention, of course. I tell you, when he finally had it figured out that MacArthur was not going to be a factor, he was happy, because he just couldn't take MacArthur. Taft picked MacArthur to keynote

the convention, you know, and MacArthur might have thought he could help himself with that speech. But he didn't.

JOHNSON: Then you say you were at the '48 convention?

CULL: Right.

JOHNSON: Were you there when Truman gave his acceptance speech about two or three in the morning?

CULL: Yes. It was a rousing speech that set the tone for his winning campaign. I also remember some kind of a fire, a small fire in the auditorium one night during the convention, and I think they stopped everything and everyone in the packed hall sang the "Star Spangled Banner." It was scary. Yes, I remember his speech.

JOHNSON: It roused them up, too, didn't it?

[54]

CULL: It certainly did, but that was a tough convention for the Democrats because of the renegade Progressive Party and the walkout of the states rights crowd, you know. As for that speech lambasting the "do-nothing 80th Congress" under Taft and the Republicans, it really energized the delegates, who had been pretty depressed about the chances of defeating Dewey., It was a master stroke by Truman to attack the Republicans because it meant he wouldn't play the traditional defense -- the defense of his own record in the White House from 1945 until 1948. So when the special session -- the Turnip Day session Truman called on July 26 -- failed to accomplish anything, Truman told the voters, "See, I told you so," and went on the attack from coast to coast on his whistle stop train tour. That's how Truman pulled the upset of the century

JOHNSON: You saw the Dixiecrats walk out, I suppose?

CULL: Yes, after Hubert Humphrey's strong speech to the convention on civil rights. The walkout cost Truman Democratic votes in some southern states but probably helped him in some northern states.

JOHNSON: Your newspaper, did it support Truman's election?

[55]

CULL: Yes, it supported Truman; they never failed to. We had a great editor, one of the great editors I think of all time, Walter Locke. He had come from Nebraska and he was a real strong Democrat, a liberal Democrat. I don't think Governor Cox ever interfered with him, and they always endorsed Democratic candidates.

Well, in 1950, Senator Taft ran for reelection to the Senate from Ohio and his Democratic opponent was a guy by the name of Joe Ferguson. Ferguson was not much of a guy; I mean he was pretty much of a lightweight. I asked him one day in the 1950 campaign in Columbus, in his office -- I think he was a state officeholder -- what he thought of the Marshall plan: "Well," he said, "John McSweeney's for it, and he's a pretty sensible guy." John McSweeney was a Democratic congressman from Canton in northern Ohio.

So I went back to the office and I said to the Governor, "I don't think this guy Ferguson is very bright." He said, "You didn't write that did you?" "No," I said, "I didn't." I think that the Governor favored Taft over a guy like Joe Ferguson, but the paper did not endorse Taft nor Ferguson. Taft was an honorable, able guy. You might have disagreed with

[56]

his politics as Cox and Truman did, but he was an able guy. As you know, in his book, Profiles in Courage, John F. Kennedy had a chapter on Taft.

After the election, when Taft just buried Ferguson and got his momentum to '52 when he got his heart broken by Ike, the Governor told me one day, "Dick," he said, "you know Bob Taft wanted to come and see me and thank me." Taft's home was in Cincinnati, 50, or 60 miles from Dayton. He said, "No, I don't think so, Senator, I don't think people would understand."

JOHNSON: You're saying by not coming out against Taft, that Taft appreciated that kind of indirect support.

CULL: Sure, indirect support by not endorsing Ferguson and it added to his big victory, which, as I say, gave him the momentum I think to '52.

JOHNSON: We're getting up to that '52 campaign. That is when you served as national correspondent.

CULL: Yes. This was probably my first opportunity to get away entirely from the regional Ohio coverage, and go on the train and do entirely the national campaign.

[57]

JOHNSON: Now was that because Lowry had . . .

CULL: He had gone; yes, he had gone. He had gone just a few months before, to the Ford Foundation.

JOHNSON: When did you get involved? When was the earliest that you got involved in covering the '52 campaign?

CULL: You know, they didn't start three or four years ahead of time as they do today--1986. The axiom always was don't start until after Labor Day, or you'll just bore the people to death. So, anytime after Labor Day.

JOHNSON: But now the convention, '52. Did you cover that?

CULL: Yes, I did.

JOHNSON: You were there. Were you at both conventions?

CULL: Yes, I was at both conventions.

JOHNSON: So you saw Eisenhower nominated?

CULL: Right, Eisenhower and Stevenson.

What I remember about the Republican Convention was that it was so much more intense and competitive than the Democratic Convention. It was Taft versus Eisenhower.

[58]

Now, Eisenhower was a great war hero and this country has always been "ga-ga" over war heroes, and Ike was a genuinely well-liked man. He was, of course, a leader of the Army that had won World War II. But he kind of dragged his feet on running for President, and Truman at one time supposedly wanted him to be the Democratic candidate. That may have stayed in Truman's craw, when Ike went to the Republican side. But when they got to

that Republican convention, everything focused on Taft versus Eisenhower. Taft had the heart of the regular Republicans; "Mr. Republican" he was. Eisenhower was, you know, the big war hero, the intruder. What really turned things upside down for Taft and killed him, if I recall it, was his loss of the Texas delegation. There was quite a dispute over who was to get the delegation. The figuring was that whoever got that delegation, Taft or Eisenhower, would be the nominee.

Well, it got down to a dirty, bitter fight and in the end, Eisenhower won the Texas delegation and went on to win the nomination. Taft took it like a soldier. I very well remember some few months after that, one of the highlights of my years in Washington, I got an invitation from Senator Taft and his wife, Martha,

[59]

who was a wheelchair case. She had been a vibrant woman, and she had all the personality he never had. She had had a stroke or something and she was wheelchair bound. Well, sir, one day at his home in Georgetown, Taft and Martha entertained Ike and wife Mamie at a party to try to heal up the wounds. It was one of the most memorable events of my 35 years in Washington -- the tender care of Taft towards his wife, and you know, the attention and the effort by Ike to be friendly with Taft. I don't think that was tough for Ike because Ike I think was basically a friendly guy. But it really was a very pleasant gesture by all the people involved. It was a reception; there were only a few people there. How do I know, maybe I got invited because of the memory of Taft for what he thought the Dayton News had done to get him reelected in 1950.

JOHNSON: Had you interviewed Taft?

CULL: Yes, I interviewed Taft many times, especially on strikes and controls.

JOHNSON: Before 1952?

CULL: Yes. If you were accredited to the Senate Press

[60]

Gallery, you could call a Senator off the floor for an interview. I did that often.

JOHNSON: How about Eisenhower?

CULL: No, I never did interview Eisenhower. I did attend many of his White House press conferences. I remember that about 1960, Ike took a couple of busloads of Republican congressmen over to his home in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, near the Civil War battlefield, and then took them on a tour of the battlefield. Here was the soldier who led the greatest army in history in World War II recounting the story of the Civil War, all the way up to the climactic battle, point by point. And I wanted to ask him something. In 1941 when we were at Camp Shelby, Mississippi with the 37th Division, Third Army, we maneuvered all summer long down there at Lake Charles, Louisiana, against the Second Army at Shreveport. Ike came down afterwards for a critique. We had no Army at that time; this was before World War II. They had sent us out on old World War I weapons carriers with sticks and brooms to mark artillery duds, as I said before, because they said, "What the hell, we need the artillery shells back more than we need

[61]

the soldiers." I wanted to ask Ike what his opinion was of that, of those great maneuvers down there in '41, but I never did. I wanted to write a column about that era. I did like Ike as a person.

JOHNSON: How about your paper in '52? Did it support Stevenson?

CULL: Yes, it supported Stevenson, right, as did all the Cox newspapers in Ohio, Georgia and Florida.

JOHNSON: You're at the convention in: Chicago at the Democratic convention, and you saw Stevenson nominated. Did you cover any of the events leading up to his nomination, Truman's preconvention support, for instance, for Stevenson? It was Truman that finally talked him into running.

CULL: Yes. I don't remember that. My job was to cover the caucuses of state delegations. I do remember this: one of the great newsmen of this time was a fellow named Ralph McGill. Ralph was editor and columnist of the Atlanta Constitution, and when Cox bought both Atlanta papers he then had McGill as a columnist. Ralph was quite a liberal Democrat, and he fought hard

[62]

in this era against the Talmadge crowd. The Governor told me once that when he bought the Constitution the only thing he got was Ralph McGill. He was very fond of Ralph.

But anyhow, at the Democratic convention of '52 I'll never forget that what finally turned the convention to Stevenson was when the Michigan delegation caucused and voted for Stevenson. It had been touch and go up to that time, and I remember Ralph McGill dashing down Michigan Boulevard from that caucus of the Michigan delegation. I was coming from another state caucus and he said, "Dick, Stevenson's got it locked up, he's got it locked up." And that Michigan vote was the thing that put Stevenson over.

JOHNSON: His main competitor was Kefauver?

CULL: Kefauver, I'll tell you. Kefauver had been a competitor yes, but the southerners never liked Kefauver. The southern delegation in Congress -- they didn't like him. He was too liberal on civil rights. I had been with Kefauver in New Hampshire on the primaries, and you know, he dazzled them up there, "Coonskin Estes," "Folksy Estes." But in Washington many fellow southern

[63]

Democrats called him "Cow Fever" and sneered at "Silly Rights."

JOHNSON: He got more votes than Truman. Truman hadn't dropped out yet in New Hampshire. Truman was not very fond of Kefauver.

CULL: No. No. He also called him "Cow Fever."

JOHNSON: Did you ever hear why they were at odds so much?

CULL: I heard there was a lot of reasons. One was that Kefauver was so busy campaigning for President that he wasn't carrying his share of the Senate workload.

JOHNSON: That was the kick-off, so to speak, for the '52 campaign.

CULL: Yes.

JOHNSON: When you heard Truman was not going to run again, was that a surprise or did you expect that?

CULL: Well, it certainly was. The night in March, 1952, that Truman said he would not run again, I was sitting in the home of my sister Janet and her husband in Madison, Wisconsin. I was up there on the primary with Taft, the Republican primary. I said to my brother-in-

[64]

law, Norbert Christensen, "Let's turn the radio on because Truman is speaking tonight." So we turned it on and listened to the speech and when it was over, Truman said suddenly that he wasn't going to run again. Why, I almost fell out of the chair. I couldn't believe it. I didn't know this until a year or two later, but the only radio newsman there that evening was Ted Koop of CBS in Washington. Ted was not actually an announcer; he was the head man for CBS in Washington and he was a newsman, but he did a lot of other things. Ted told me some years later at the Press Club, "You know something, I was so surprised when that happened. I was the only newsman there, and they called me immediately from CBS and said, 'Get hold of anybody and everybody you can there and interview them.'" I remembered up in Wisconsin, of Ted doing that. He said, "You know, I got through, but I don't know how I did." He said, "I got home that night, and I just upchucked all over the place." It was just terrible tension that had caught up with him.

JOHNSON: Kefauver, for instance, had those crime hearings, and his focus only on cities where Democrat machines were in control may have upset Truman.

[65]

CULL: No question about it; I covered the crime hearings. Yes, I remember the Kefauver hearings. He had a guy named Rudy Halley who was his counsel. That's right, the Democrats didn't like him for that reason, because so much of this did focus on Democratic city machines.

JOHNSON: When was the first time that you interviewed Truman, or met Truman?

CULL: Well, I may have met him informally -- is that '47?

JOHNSON: The papers that you're leaving with us here?

CULL: Yes.

JOHNSON: This is May 5, 1952.

CULL: Well, there was one before that in 1947, I think, a reception at the White House. I think it was December of '47, and Mr. and Mrs. Truman had a reception and I met him there. I'll give the Library copies of my invitation to the reception, plus a story I wrote about it.

JOHNSON: In the White House living quarters.

CULL: The reception on May 5th, 1952, was also in the White

[66]

House. I don't think that I ever was inside the Blair House. Of course, that was the residence for visiting dignitaries.

JOHNSON: Yes. So on May 5, 1952 you were in the White House.

CULL: Yes. I was in the White House; there was a reception there for the press. I met him maybe on other occasions. I remember walking with him once in a while on his morning strolls down Connecticut Avenue. I wasn't assigned regularly to cover the White House. Most newspapers couldn't keep a man full-time at the White House while Congress and the burgeoning government agencies had to be covered. They needed that man all over town.

JOHNSON: How about the convention? Did you talk to Truman at the Democrat convention?

CULL: In '52?

JOHNSON: Yes.

CULL: I believe I did. I think I had a little chat with him. Margaret was there too, and Florence Mahoney asked me to have lunch with her and her friend, Margaret Truman.

[67]

Florence was the wife of Dan Mahoney, Sr., publisher of the Miami, Florida, News, one of the Cox newspapers. We had lunch in the Pump Room of the Palmer House Hotel. I wrote a column about Margaret for my paper. I'll try to find it for the Library.

Then, at the Blackstone Hotel in Chicago in a big swirling mob at a reception at that same convention, I ran into Mrs. Truman, and I said to her, "Mrs. Truman, will you miss the White House and Washington?" "No," she said, "I'll only miss my friends." Then I met the President two days before he was to leave Washington for good after his term was over. We had a press reception for him, and all of us were allowed to go and ask a question. Well I said, "Mr. President, you're retired now. Are you going fishing?" "No fishing for me," he said.

JOHNSON: In the meantime, apparently Stevenson did not encourage him to go out very early to speak for him because it wasn't until after Labor Day, toward the end of September, that Truman actually began a whistle stop tour. Were you on that train then that Truman used to whistle stop for Stevenson?

[68]

CULL: That's what this material is all about. That's right, I was on it from start to finish.

JOHNSON: September 29. But did you go to that Labor Day rally in Milwaukee?

CULL: No, I joined him when he left Washington on the train to go across country. We were on the train for, oh, fifteen or twenty days.

JOHNSON: You were on that whole trip?

CULL: Exactly. Every bit of it, and that's what all this is about.

JOHNSON: You've got a few clippings here?

CULL: Everything is right there.

JOHNSON: You're showing me the Atlanta Journal and Constitution of October 12, 1952. I see you've got a rather lengthy article here. Does that sum up your experiences?

CULL: Exactly.

JOHNSON: But I bet maybe there are some things that you remember that aren't written down there.

[69]

CULL: Well, let me say that, you know, the Washington press got a black eye in '48 from miscalling the election. A lot of their bosses on the newspapers blamed them for interviewing each other rather than following the crowd and seeing what people thought. So as I pointed out in the stories I wrote on the '52 trip, they were very careful to get mixed with the crowds and to try to interview others. Now, we had a press car on there and it was called the Carroll S. Linkins; it was named for Carroll Linkins, the Western Union man who was aboard. He was the guy that made the whole coverage possible, because he worked day and night and made sure that at every whistle stop at 2 a.m. or 4 a.m. our copy got off that train. We were speeding across and way up in the wastelands of the country, the Badlands, where there weren't many Western Union facilities, and he was able to get our stories off the train anyhow. They called this the Carroll S. Linkins Press Car, and we all worked out of there. Truman would frequently come into the press car. In fact, when we left Washington, the first thing he did as we left the station was come into the press car. It was right behind the Ferdinand Magellan and his sleeping car. He came in, he told us

[70]

how sorry he was that we were all going to have to be away from our families for a couple weeks, and signed autographs for everybody to send back to their kids.

The next day we got to Indiana, the first night out, and being a Baptist, he wouldn't say a word. I remember him standing up there on the platform.

JOHNSON: Maintained that principle, no politicking on Sunday?

CULL: No politicking on Sunday. So he never said a word; the crowd was all down there. The whistle stop crowd was out.

JOHNSON: Did he just talk informally?

CULL: Yes, he'd talk informally to friends and local politicians up on the platform, the back platform, but he never said anything to the crowd. Then, as we headed through West Virginia and on into Ohio and Illinois, and got later into the week, he began, of course, making stops every place. The formula was pat, as you find in some of these pictures I gave Dr. Zobrist this morning. The formula was: the train would stop, and the crowd would gather around the back platform and Truman would come out; they'd cheer, and on the sign right

[71]

there on the back of the Ferdinand Magellan car was "Stevenson and Sparkman." So Truman would make a little speech and then he would say, "And now I want you to say hello to my greatest asset." The drapes would part, and here would come Margaret out, very demurely, and she would make a little speech. This went on and on, and went on. Now, on the train, as I say, many of those news guys were very defensive about '48, having blown it. A lot of them, as I point out in this story, were guys who had been on that train. This time, 1952, they got out and mixed with the crowds.

One of our main questions concerned Truman's tactics, which was to tear the hide off of Ike at every stop. Was this productive or nonproductive? And it cut both ways. Some of the news guys thought that it was too much; others thought it would be effective. The point always was that you don't know what's in the mind of that guy

out there listening. If it was a friendly audience, maybe in a city, he'd say, "Give 'em hell, Harry," and Truman teed off on Ike.

But Ike was a very popular guy, you remember, and in other places there was dead silence when a guy said it. It was this way at many of these stops. But the

[72]

crowds -- again as I point out in that Atlanta Journal story -- the crowds according to the guys, the press on that train, were just as big as they were in '48. Truman still got the people out.

Well, anyhow, we got out to Hungry Horse, Montana, and Truman went to dedicate a new dam out there. Just as he got there to push a button, he said, "Take a good look at this dam because if those Republicans get elected, you'll never see another public dam built in this country." Then as we got into Kalispell and Glacier National Park and Idaho and up heading towards Washington State, a reporter for the Spokesman-Review newspaper in Spokane got aboard and said that he wanted to talk to Doris Fleeson, who was a great Democratic liberal columnist of her time and whose column was used in the Spokesman-Review. Joe Alsop and Mark Childs, other syndicated columnists were also there. He said the publisher wanted to entertain them at his home for dinner that night while Truman spoke at the Spokane armory. Well, I said I was going to go to downtown Spokane. I wasn't going to go to the Armory because I wanted to go see a friend of mine, Benny Stubeck, who had a little cigar store and a little beer bar in

[73]

downtown Spokane across from the Davenport Hotel, and say hello to him. I hadn't seen him for many years since I was stationed at Fort George Wright. Doris Fleeson was syndicated in many papers; she liked Truman and the Fair Deal, and her column, although liberal and Democratic, as I say, appeared in the Spokesman-Review, which dominated that heart of the inland empire up there. So she was in that paper; they used her even though they didn't agree with her. They were conservative Republicans. So this guy from the Spokesman-Review asked about Mr. Truman and how he was doing. He asked this just before he took them to dinner. Doris and the others said that he'd mellowed. He would never say what he said in 1948 on the whistle stop tour when he came to Spokane and held up that newspaper, and said, "I want to tell you something: This Spokesman-Review is the second worst newspaper in the country." Truman always said the Chicago Tribune was the worst. And so this guy says, "Oh."

So he said, "Well, come on, we're going out to the publisher's house for dinner." So they went out to the publisher's house for dinner and I went down to Benny Stubeck's downtown, and Truman was at the Armory.

[74]

I got Truman's speech on the radio and Doris had it on the radio out there at the publisher's house. This was before TV. Truman began making a speech and half way through it he said, "I want to repeat what I said here in '48: this is still the second worst newspaper in the United States."

Down at Benny Stubeck's, I thought, "Oh, I wonder how Doris and Mark Childs and Joe Alsop are getting along with that."

Well, we got back on the train, and got back in the press room, and we were all talking about it. We were sitting in the seats right at the end of the press car and Truman, who had been up front and had just reboarded before we left for Grand Coulee, came back through the car and came right into where we were. He often came in to the press car. He came into the car and Doris Fleeson was sitting right next to me. He said to her; "Doris, I hope I didn't lose that newspaper for you again." Well, that was pure Truman.

JOHNSON: Do you remember his attitude toward Eisenhower, especially on the McCarthy issue?

CULL: Yes.

[75]

JOHNSON: What was the scuttlebutt? What do you recall about the feelings toward Eisenhower and McCarthyism?

CULL: Well, I think he thought Ike quibbled over it. As I recall, they said that Ike had chances to cut McCarthy down, when McCarthy took off on Ike's great friend General Marshall who had picked him for the top job in Europe. But he didn't do it. That, I think, really got Truman, because Truman was very fond of General Marshall. So Truman just took the hide off of him every time they stopped. He said he was a military man, and wasn't qualified to be President. I think, as I have said to you, I think it was Snohomish, Washington, that I got a telegram on the train. I don't think it was signed. I think it came from Atlanta, so it was from our Atlanta newspapers, and the telegram simply said, "Please give us more of the atmosphere on the train." In other words, don't keep writing the blasts at Ike, we've got enough of it.

JOHNSON: That didn't work so well for him in '52. In '48 he had the do-nothing 80th Congress.

CULL: That's right.

[76]

JOHNSON: He had a Democrat Congress in '52 so he couldn't lambast them.

CULL: No, he couldn't. The conservative Democrats and Republicans in Congress fought his Fair Deal program, and he wasn't running himself either. He didn't really have any great affection for Stevenson. And he was really angry after Stevenson agreed with a reporter he would try to clean up the "mess in Washington" if elected. The Republicans said that was Truman's mess.

JOHNSON: How about the attitude of the newspapermen?

CULL: It was divided. I think Adlai had great intellectual appeal to many newsmen, editorial writers especially. I think he was a pretty able guy, but he didn't play the kind of gut politics Truman liked, and Truman didn't think he had any appeal to the crowd. I think that Truman just probably found it difficult even to support him. But, you know, Truman just loved to campaign and so he went out and just took the hide off of Ike and the Republicans and forgot what he thought of Stevenson.

JOHNSON: He sort of took the hide off Stevenson in his memoirs.

[77]

CULL: Yes, he did. Yes, he did. So maybe it was just delayed reaction. A lot of people thought Adlai had trouble making up his mind. One reason people liked Truman was that he could make up his mind, as in the case of dropping the atomic bomb on Japan, and then sleep on the decision, right or wrong. I'll tell you this story: A friend of mine, a syndicated columnist, told me he took Adlai for an overnight stay at the home of a prominent couple where the wife was for Adlai and the husband was for Eisenhower. The wife was hoping to convert her husband to vote for Stevenson. But my friend said Adlai vacillated so much on the issues discussed, had so much trouble making up his mind, that it was a wasted trip for the wife.

I remember one day going through a receiving line and shaking hands with him. Ralph McGill who, as I said, was our columnist, and a fine guy and very able newsman, said, "This is Dick Cull of the Cox newspapers." Adlai turned to me and said, "Oh, friendly country, friendly country." Which, of course, it was. But he wasn't a good campaigner. I was on trips with him where he would rather sit in the train and discuss issues with the newsmen than get out and mix with the crowd. But you know

[78]

that was just his style.

JOHNSON: Were you with Stevenson in the last weeks of the campaign? Did you alternate between Truman and Stevenson?

CULL: Sure. We usually did that, yes. But, you know, this trip was the big trip, the Truman trip, and . . .

JOHNSON: That one that went out West?

CULL: Right.

JOHNSON: Then in late October he began his last trip with a talk in Willard, Ohio. Were you on that one -- Truman's last tour?

CULL: No. I was in the Lake Erie area of Ohio with Stevenson, but I wasn't with Truman.

JOHNSON: You were with Stevenson in the last weeks?

CULL: Yes, I was with Stevenson and watched his campaign style. Stevenson appealed to your mind, you know, and Truman was just a guy that liked to appeal to the gut. As he said, you know, "The pocketbook nerve is the most sensitive nerve in the human body," and he went right for that.

[79]

JOHNSON: You're acquainted with Ken Hechler?

CULL: I knew Ken Hechler vaguely. I remember Ken Hechler around. He was a registered Republican. He was a congressman from West Virginia one time wasn't he?

JOHNSON: Later on.

CULL: Later on, yes.

JOHNSON: He did a lot of research for the speeches that Truman gave in '52, and in '50.

CULL: There's a fellow that you may know from Kansas City, who is now in Washington with AP. What's this fellow's name, is it Rosenthal?

JOHNSON: Yes, Rosenthal.

CULL: Yes. He had been with AP in Kansas City. I wrote a year ago and told him about some 1952 whistle stop things, and he wrote back and asked me if I remembered Ken Hechler. I remember him vaguely. I know he was with Truman on our cross-country whistle stop tour.

JOHNSON: Anybody on the White House staff that was especially helpful to you in '52?

[80]

CULL: Oh, gee, that is so long ago. But if you mean to ask who the reporters in Washington dealt with at the White House, well, it was Roger Tubby, the very able press secretary and also a Republican from Vermont.

JOHNSON: Did you meet Charlie Murphy?

CULL: I remember Murphy, but Mac Lowry dealt with Murphy in Washington often. On the 1952 campaign trip I dealt with the traveling press office. Clark Clifford was also a close friend of Mac Lowry. Here at the Truman Library in Independence, in 1968 or 1969, Mac Lowry told me that at the request, I think of Clark Clifford, he did an oral history of the 1948 campaign. So you may have it there.

JOHNSON: Yes, we have an oral history with him.

So, you didn't get closely acquainted with any of the White House aides of Truman in that '52 campaign?

CULL: Well, if you refer to the 1952 campaign year as far as Washington itself is concerned, the answer is no; if you mean the 1952 campaign on the fall whistle stop campaign train, the answer is also no. We had only casual contact with the Truman staff on the train.

[81]

Let me explain at this point that the wire services and the major newspapers -- the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Chicago Tribune -- were the only ones to keep a man at the White House all the time. Other newspapers, including our Cox papers, paid AP and UP, for instance, for this round-the-clock coverage while their own reporters in Washington covered the rest of Washington. We had all of Washington to cover for our papers, not just the White House.

JOHNSON: The press car, which was really in front of the Ferdinand Magellan on the 1952 whistle stop campaign train was the second car from the end, wasn't it?

CULL: Let's see here.

JOHNSON: You have an article here on the train.

CULL: Yes, I thought that would be very useful to you.

JOHNSON: Yes, we're always after more information.

CULL: That's the original. I tried to give you as many originals as I could.

So there's the press car. It was the second or third down. The Ferdinand Magellan was the end car, the

[82]

caboose. And Carroll S. Linkins, as I say, was the guy that made the whole press operation go.

JOHNSON: Do you have any idea what happened to that car? Was it ever saved?

CULL: Did I ever hear what happened to that press car? Let me see. No, I don't believe I do know what happened to it. I certainly remember though that it was the nerve center. As I think Jim Warner of the New York Herald Tribune writes in there at one point (in the story I just gave you), we came into Portland, Oregon one day, and you know you always had to jump off those cars, get back as fast as you could to the end of the train where the crowd had gathered and where Truman and Margaret were greeting the whistle stop crowd. As we slowed down very slowly to get into this Portland station, we saw nothing but blocks of ice, and we went sailing over every one of those things, Carroll Linkins and others. You know, it was crazy; you had to dash back there and get the crowd reaction. Again, the heart of the thing is how sensitive the press people were. They couldn't forget 1948. It was as much a test, as I said to Dr. Zobrist, of the press in '52 as it was of the politicians,

[83]

because the press had gotten an awful black eye for allegedly interviewing only themselves in '48 and ignoring the voters.

Now, here's 1986, today as we talk, and the press is accused of being so over-aggressive, so nosey and everything and that they are invading people's privacy. Well, in 1948 to 1950 the press was accused of being armchair correspondents in Washington, who never got off their duffs and did anything. In fact, Harper's magazine carried a story one year that really shook them up. This was in 1950, I think two years after Truman confounded the press pundits. The Harper's magazine story was called "Washington's Armchair Correspondents, by One of Them." Well, "the one of them" turned out to be a friend of mine, a bright young woman by the name of Joan Marble who worked for United Press radio. She just couldn't stand — she was a young reporter — she couldn't stand the sight of these pundits sitting around the House and Senate press galleries and elsewhere and interviewing each other. Now here today, thirty-five years later, its exactly the opposite; we're too aggressive, and think

[84]

too little of other people's feelings. This is the way things change.

JOHNSON: Did you interview people in the crowd at the whistle stops?

CULL: Yes, we would try to interview people in the crowd, right. You know, you didn't especially care for a name, but you'd try to find out what they thought.

JOHNSON: What kind of a sense were you getting from interviews with the newsmen on the train with you?

CULL: Well, now in there, in that story I gave you, I quote people by name. By the way, before I forget it, Truman's favorite man for years was an Associated Press man by the name of Tony Vaccaro. Did you ever hear that name? If you remember, Tony was standing right outside the front door to Truman's apartment on upper Connecticut Avenue in Washington the morning after Truman was sworn in as President after FDR died. Truman recognized Tony there at the door and said to him, "Let's go, Tony." After that, the AP sent Tony to the White House as its correspondent.

JOHNSON: Yes, I remember Vaccaro.

[85]

CULL: Tony Vaccaro was not on the train but Tony Leveiro of the New York Times was and I asked his reactions and I asked Joe Fox who was with the Washington Star and had been on the '48 campaign trip, and Larry Bird, of the Chicago Tribune, and many others, such as Francis Stevenson of the New York Daily News, and it cut both ways. Some of them thought Truman was effective in going after Ike and others thought he

overdid it, that you know, it was overkill. But the point is, it was the only tactic he knew. Boy, he just let Ike and the Republicans have it, and

JOHNSON: Of course, he wasn't the candidate; Stevenson was.

CULL: Exactly.

JOHNSON: We don't know for sure how it would have turned out if it had been Eisenhower versus Truman, but did you get the feeling that Americans were ready for a different party, or for a return to a Republican President after all those years?

CULL: I had a feeling that they liked Ike. If you mean by that that Ike represented a return to normalcy after those tumultuous years of readjustment after World War II, the sort of things that defeated Governor Cox

[86]

when Harding beat him soon after World War I, maybe so. I think you said something about the Korean war and its impact. You know, it was more of "vote for Ike." In fact, when Eisenhower said he would go to Korea to try to end the war that had divided the country, well, I think that doomed Stevenson for good.

JOHNSON: In other words, if Eisenhower had run as a Democrat, do you think he would have won as a Democrat?

CULL: I think so. I do think so.

JOHNSON: He was accused of being a "me-too," wasn't he, by the Taft people.

CULL: Oh, sure. That was the cry of the Taft organization Republicans.

JOHNSON: He would continue the New Deal programs, and so on?

CULL: That's right, and if you will recall, the Scripps-Howard newspapers that had encouraged Eisenhower to run really got after him about September of '52 after he had been nominated a month or two earlier and wasn't campaigning. They wrote a lead editorial in their papers all over the country saying, "Ike, you're running

[87]

like a dry creek." But the Eisenhower nomination was a terrible blow to the Taft people. Remember, they thought that Taft was a cinch because he had been Mr. Republican of his era and he deserved it. And here was a guy coming in that they weren't sure was even a Republican. But the disputed Texas delegation -- one favored Taft, the other Eisenhower -- built that whole thing up. The campaign manager for Senator Taft was a Congressman, Clarence Brown of Ohio, a conservative like Taft. He made the case for Taft, and the other side made the case for Eisenhower, and when it came to a showdown, the convention seated the more liberal Eisenhower delegation. And that was it for Taft.

JOHNSON: Now, if Taft had been nominated, what do you think?

CULL: Well, you know, I think Taft was a very capable guy, but I just don't think Taft could have been elected.

JOHNSON: You think Stevenson would have beaten Taft?

CULL: Yes, I think so. I think Stevenson could have beaten him, yes. I think people who voted for Ike against Stevenson would have voted for Stevenson against Taft.

[88]

JOHNSON: No charisma; is that one way to put it?

CULL: Yes, that's about the extent of it. Taft really was colorless. But he had integrity, so much so that John F. Kennedy included him in his book, Profiles in Courage. And although Harry Truman fought Taft in many legislative battles, I think he respected his intellect and integrity, just the way James M. Cox did.

You know, they used to say about him, that Taft was a great guy until he made up his mind. The idea was that he made up his mind the wrong way. As you know, in the early 1950's the United States Senate was called "the South's revenge for Gettysburg" because it was dominated by the southern Democrats. Of course, they were pretty conservative -- the Richard Russells and the Walter Georges and the rest of them -- but they dominated the Taft Republicans in the Senate.

JOHNSON: Four southern states, I believe it was, went for Eisenhower; broke that solid south.

CULL: Oh, yes. You know, the southerners, especially the Georgians, were in such control on Capitol Hill in 1952 that I used to say that when a Georgian died he didn't want to go to Heaven, he wanted to go to Washington

[89]

because all his friends were there.

JOHNSON: Did you sense then before the election that Eisenhower had it?

CULL: Yes, I did. I thought that Eisenhower would win it.

JOHNSON: But you weren't on the Eisenhower train?

CULL: I campaigned with Eisenhower. It's kind of vague in my mind now; I'd have to go back though some things. This trip was about three weeks, and . . .

JOHNSON: Did the Cox newspapers have a man with Eisenhower?

CULL: Yes, we would have had people on the train.

JOHNSON: Who would have covered him, do you know?

CULL: Well, I'm sure I did some of the coverage after I came back, but my guess is that it was either Bill Wyant of the Atlanta Journal in Washington or Jake Carlton of the Miami, Florida News.

JOHNSON: So you finished up with the Stevenson train in the campaign and then you wrote up the election results, I suppose.

[90]

CULL: Yes.

JOHNSON: Was the size of the victory a surprise to you?

CULL: Well, I don't think so, really. I just thought that Ike had the appeal, you know. I think of Ike, I think of JFK, I think of Reagan, I think of Truman and I think of FDR; they all had great personal appeal. You know, Truman had a gut appeal. But Stevenson's appeal was intellectual, not visceral.

JOHNSON: They're in the minority.

CULL: That's right; they're in the minority.

JOHNSON: How about the transition? Did you cover the transition efforts? You know, for the first time ever, an outgoing President set up a meeting with the incoming President, not long after the election, to brief him on policies and facts about the world situation, and so on. Did you cover that at all?

CULL: I remember that. In fact, in one of my Sunday newspaper columns that I left with Dr. Zobrist today, I mention the Ike-Truman rift, and I think the transition.

A very capable guy by the name of Jim Hagerty became

[91]

Ike's press man. Ike had a lot of problems, physical and everything. I remember going to Gettysburg when he had one of his attacks and coming back and calling the newspaper in Dayton and saying, "Geez, I think he looks terrible." But you know, he came back after that and was fine. Jim Hagerty always made sure that he kept Ike busy by putting out press releases and things, even though Ike was on the golf course. One year we went to Thomasville, Georgia, with George Humphrey who was Secretary of the Treasury. It's down in quail hunting country. It's famous in Ohio because in the early part of the century, Mark Hanna and his crowd used to go there. And George Humphrey used to go with Ike down there, quail hunting. And Hagerty made it look like they were working around the clock every day, you know. We weren't allowed to get to them; we were 20 miles away back in the hotel in Thomasville, Georgia. Jim did a great job for him and Jim was popular with the press.

JOHNSON: You went to press conferences under Eisenhower too?

CULL: Yes.

JOHNSON: How about Truman's and Eisenhower's style at press conferences?

[92]

CULL: Well, you know, Truman was kind of outspoken and feisty and Ike did scramble the English language and get tangled in his answers. Then you remember the day he was asked about Vice President Nixon's contributions, and he said, "Well, if you give me a week or two I can think of something."

JOHNSON: His syntax was supposed to be a little bit convoluted.

CULL: Yes, it was. It was. Poor Ike, when he'd get started with a sentence, you never knew where it was going to end. But here again, you liked Ike and it was an era where people wanted to be let alone for a while. But remember, it was in Eisenhower's administration that we got a new national highway network.

JOHNSON: And he was cooperative I suppose with the press.

CULL: Yes, he was, and Jim Hagerty was a great help to him.

JOHNSON: Did the newsmen like him just about like they did Truman?

CULL: I think that, on the whole, the newsmen and newswomen who dealt with both Ike and Truman would have chosen

[93]
Truman in a popularity contest. Ike was always a bit aloof while Truman loved to mix it up with the working newsmen, even though you wouldn't know it from some of his diaries I've read.

JOHNSON: But how about Nixon? What was your attitude towards Nixon?

CULL: Nixon was a loner. Nixon was a strange guy. I traveled with Nixon on one of his long train trips in 1960, when he was against Kennedy. I traveled with him a long time and never saw him once. He and Pat never came out in the car, in the press car, a part of the train.

JOHNSON: Was it "The Magellan" that they were using?

CULL: Now, I don't remember.

JOHNSON: But you were in the car just next to .them.

CULL: We were in the press car, you know . . .

JOHNSON: That's right next to the Presidential car?

CULL: That was right near the end.

JOHNSON: He never came through?

[94]
CULL: He never came into the car, no. You know, he just had a kind of personality problem.

JOHNSON: Truman referred to him as "Tricky Dicky?"

CULL: Yes, well, that goes back to the Douglas affair. You remember, Helen Gahagan Douglas, and you know that Democrats never forgave him for that, and . . .

JOHNSON: But Nixon was not popular with the press; was that true?

CULL: Well, true; I don't think he was popular. No, I think Nixon was just a little difficult and he was remote and well, you know, when push became shove at the time of Watergate, he didn't have anybody.

JOHNSON: In the '56 campaign, were you in that?

CULL: Yes.

JOHNSON: Truman was at the Democratic convention, and he was well received up there.

CULL: Yes. Yes.

JOHNSON: But Truman was supporting Harriman in '56 instead

[95]
of Stevenson, and of course, Stevenson got it anyway. So he had to go out and support Stevenson. He did a whistle stop as I recall, for Stevenson in '56.

CULL: Yes.

JOHNSON: Were you on the Truman train in '56?

CULL: Don't remember that one. I remember being on a trip in '56 with "Soapie" [G. Mennen] Williams, the Governor of Michigan was on. Now I wonder if Truman was on that trip; I don't remember.

JOHNSON: The last time that you were on a campaign train with Truman was in '52?

CULL: '52, right.

JOHNSON: In '60 you weren't with Truman at all?

CULL: No, I wasn't with Truman. I remember vividly the convention of '60 because we, the press crowd, still couldn't believe that Kennedy would pick Lyndon Johnson, but he did. I can remember what I thought was a pivotal thing of the convention and that was that afternoon, before the nomination, when Jack and

[96]
Bobby went to the Texas delegation and had a debate with Lyndon. Lyndon absolutely thought that he was going to win the thing -- I mean the nomination. And these two cool customers went into that and stuck their heads into the mouth of that Texas delegation, the day before the nomination, and did very well by themselves. They got Jack Kennedy nominated and there were many in the press row that never thought even in 1960 they would ever nominate a Catholic for President.

JOHNSON: Did you ever meet Truman again after that '52 campaign?

CULL: I don't think that I saw much of him until he was about getting ready to leave and then we saw him a couple of times at parties.

JOHNSON: In Washington?

CULL: In Washington, yes. I never met him any other place. I understand that once in a while in the early forties he would come into the Kansas City Star Washington bureau office in the Albee Building and talk to people like Duke Shoop, the bureau chief, and Jack Williams. That's when he was still a U.S. Senator from Missouri.

[97]
JOHNSON: You say you saw him at a couple of parties before he left office?

CULL: That's right, I don't remember really any other connection with Truman after he left office, although he would come to the National Press Club, where he was a very popular member on special occasions.

Well, I think as I have said to you; once in a while I'd see him walking on Connecticut Avenue in the morning when he was still in Washington. But then he came back to Independence here, didn't he, soon after?

JOHNSON: On the day of the inaugural in '53, as soon as he finished his role there. You were there, I suppose, when Ike was sworn in. Truman had been sitting up there, stoically.

CULL: That's right, yes.

A lot of people thought it was too bad that he and Ike had the rift.

JOHNSON: Were you down at the train station when they left and they had this big sign about all the things that Truman had done for the country?

[98]

CULL: I don't believe so. I don't believe so.

JOHNSON: They had a good crowd down there.

CULL: No, I think we said good-bye to him at that party we had where I asked him if he was going to go fishing. He said, "Not me, I don't fish."

JOHNSON: Didn't have the patience, is that it?

CULL: That may be what he had in mind, but I know he certainly said to me, "No, I'm not going fishing." But don't I remember seeing pictures of Truman as a fisherman? Maybe it was like General Arnold on the day he retired. They asked him what he was going to do in retirement. This was "Hap" Arnold, you know, the head of the U.S. Army Air Corps in World War II. I remember him telling this. I was there that day in Congress when he testified. He said, "Well, I'll tell you; I'm going to sit on the front porch for six months in my rocking chair." He didn't say anything further. The committee chairman finally said, "Well, General, what are you going to do after that?" "Then," he said, "I'm going to start rocking."

[99]

JOHNSON: You covered the '56 campaign and the '60 campaign, but not with Truman. In 1962 Truman did involve himself, as I recall, in the California Governor's campaign, Brown against Nixon.

CULL: I had gone into government by that time, so I really wasn't in touch with that.

JOHNSON: So you were Washington correspondent until . . .

CULL: Early 1962.

JOHNSON: About the time Kennedy came in?

CULL: Well, after Kennedy was elected, a friend of mine who was a career man in the Department of Justice, was appointed by Kennedy to be the Commissioner of Immigration; his name was Ray Farrell. And Ray asked

me if I would come with him as his press information man. He had this press office. So I went there in early 1962 and stayed there until '75 and . . .

JOHNSON: The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) in the Department of Justice.

CULL: I was head of the press office. In 1962 in the White

[100]

House President Kennedy gave me the job of handling the return of the Bay of Pigs prisoners; they had been put in jails in Cuba in 1961 when the Bay of Pigs invasion failed. And in December of '62 we got them all out and brought them back to Florida. I handled the press and TV coverage of the whole thing.

JOHNSON: Wasn't there some ceremony in a stadium?

CULL: Sure, that is where Kennedy went and presented a flag to the Bay of Pigs veterans. Right, that was a few days after we brought them back in through south Florida. It was one of the few real accomplishments of the Kennedy Presidency, getting these prisoners back because the Bay of Pigs itself had been a disaster, you know.

JOHNSON: So you had to handle the TV and newspaper coverage of that.

CULL: I handled the whole coverage of that for the White House.

JOHNSON: Of the Bay of Pigs . . .

CULL: The prisoners' return, bringing them back to the

[101]

United States from their jails.

JOHNSON: As part of your immigration job.

CULL: That's right.

JOHNSON: And you were in that job for how long?

CULL: I was there until '75.

JOHNSON: So you were there under Nixon as well.

CULL: Yes, I was, and under Lyndon. I do want to say one thing, though, before closing and that is that I am happy to say that in 1960 I was the only one in the National Press Club voting poll of several thousand who correctly called the electoral vote in the very close contest between Kennedy and Nixon. It was 303. I was still in the Cox bureau then. It was especially important because there was almost \$1,000 in the pool and I had to wait about a week or two before Nixon admitted that he had lost Hawaii, and they finally settled on the 303. I'll give the Library a copy of the news story announcing the winner.

JOHNSON: Oh, so you had that pegged.

[102]

CULL: I called it right on the nose and it was a great satisfaction. But I think my greatest satisfaction of 35 working years in Washington came in 1973 when the UPI wire service voted me the number one press information officer in government.

JOHNSON: So, you were kind of a bureaucrat, if we can use the term, after '62.

CULL: Well, I guess, sure I was a bureaucrat. I've got to tell you though that I think I would have felt cheated if I hadn't had a chance in Washington, which I say is the news capital of the world, to both help make the news and the policy on the news as well as to be on the other side and report it. It's much more difficult answering questions in Washington as a newsman in the government than asking questions as a reporter. But you know, Washington is a place where your laws are made, and I just happen to think that if you can help make the laws better, that you're making a contribution. I think that in the years in immigration I was helpful in maybe making things a little less secretive in the news policies and . . .

[103]

JOHNSON: At least involving immigration matters.

CULL: Yes, everything involving immigration which means world-wide. I think the illegal aliens issue started in '64, after the end of the Bracero law, and it went on for 10 years and then you know they just got everywhere, and now we've got illegal aliens everywhere. You know, if the laws had been as restrictive when the ancestors of you and me wanted to come over here as immigrants, we might not be talking here today in the Truman Library.

JOHNSON: You say yours are Irish?

CULL: Mine are Irish; what are yours?

JOHNSON: Swedish. What decade did yours come?

CULL: 1825.

JOHNSON: Before the potato famine?

CULL: Yes. A widow with. something like four or five kids.

JOHNSON: What was her name?

CULL: Her name was Cull and they all settled in South Central Ohio in Chillicothe.

JOHNSON: From what part of Ireland?

[104]

CULL: Roscommon. Oh, I don't know; it's around the middle.

JOHNSON: The middle of Ireland.

Okay, so you never met Truman again?

CULL: No, that ended it because I would have had no other contact with him. I think I saw him at the Press Club in Washington in 1958 and around 1961. I'm going to give you a special side story of the love affair between Truman and the National Press Club in Washington.

JOHNSON: Do you think, being a newspaperman, that we're getting as much news as we should nowadays, or as we did, about White House policy as we did in the Truman years?

CULL: Well, I think that the reporting is more aggressive now, which is to the good. I think that every President, both Democrat or Republican, always wants to control things as much as possible to make him look good. It's always a difficult role for a press man, and the harder you dig, maybe the more the chance you have of getting something.

See, in my era in Washington, it was mostly press, but now it's radio and TV. It's just huge coverage everywhere.

[105]

JOHNSON: The frequency of press conferences is so much less now. It was every week, or twice a week, in the Truman years.

CULL: Well, it seems to me that what Reagan may be doing more of, though, than ever before is talking to individual groups of reporters, rather than the whole mass press conferences.

JOHNSON: Inviting . . .

CULL: That's right, inviting a group of editors from different areas of the country and saying, "Look, I want to talk to you about the things that interest your area of the country." But I'd have to say to you I don't know of any President since Truman who was as well informed about the policies of government as he was. And I think a big reason he was so well informed was the experience he accumulated as a hard-working Senator from Missouri.

JOHNSON: Then Reagan can be selective. He can eliminate those who might be very critical, that way.

CULL: Yes, he can do it. He can pick and choose who is

[106]

invited to a regional press conference, unlike the general White House press conference you see on national TV. But when they bring in individual groups they may have more of a chance to ask follow-up questions, you know. But, yes, I think it's tough, even today, to get information. Whether it was easier in the Truman years, I don't know.

JOHNSON: They talk about management of news. Do you think there's more or less management of the news now than there was in your day at the White House?

CULL: I don't think there's any more management or any less management. I think it all depends on the reporter, and I do think the reporters are better informed and more knowledgeable today. They're better educated and better traveled, and that makes them better reporters.

JOHNSON: Do you think that press conferences are as frequent as they ought to be?

CULL: I think there could be more, but really the press conference has become just a forum for that guy giving the press conference. He schedules it when he figures

[107]

it will do him the most good. It has always been that way and always will.

JOHNSON: Thank you for your time, and your cooperation.

CULL: I've enjoyed the shoe being on the other foot. Usually I have done the interviewing; this time it has been the other way around. I'll supplement this oral history with some more information the sort of information you said a few minutes ago the Library is always interested in -- on the Truman era from my vantage point, not as a Washington political columnist or as wire service reporter marooned day to day at the White House, but as a working reporter on the city, state and national scene following the problems that confronted Truman in those hectic years of readjustment from war to peace after World War II .[See Papers of Richard Cull, Jr. in the manuscript collections of the Truman Library.] Thank you.

[108]

INDEX

Albee Building (Washington, D.C.), 39-40

Arnold, Henry H. ("Hap"), 98

Assassination attempt on President Truman, 49-51

Atomic bomb, use of, 21-23

Bricker amendment, 33

Camp Shelby (Mississippi), 13-17, 60

Christensen, Kim, 39

Christensen, Norbert, 23, 64

Cox, James M., 2, 4-5, 36, 45-47

Cull, Richard, Sr., 1-3

Cull., Richard, Jr.:

and Cox, James M., 45-47

selection by UPI as number one press officer in Federal government,
102

and Truman, Harry S., meetings with, 65-67

Dayton Daily News, 1-4, 5, 12

Democratic national convention of 1948, 53-54

Democratic national convention of 1960, 95-96

Eisenhower, Dwight D.:

and Nixon, Richard M., 92

and Presidential campaign of 1952, 85-87

and press conferences, 92-93

and Republican convention of 1952, 58-59, 60

Election (Congressional) of 1946, 27

"Ferdinand Magellan" campaign car, in 1952, 70, 71

Ferguson, Joe, 55, 56
Ferrell, Ray, 99
Fleeson, Doris, 72
Fort George Wright (Washington), 18-20

Greene, Jerry, 6

Hagerty, James, 90-91
Humphrey, George, 91

Kefauver, Estes, 62-63, 64-65
Kennedy, John F., and Bay of Pigs prisoners, return of, 100
Koop, Ted, 64

Lausche, Frank, 27, 32
Lawrence, William, 6
Linkins, Carroll S., 69
Locke, Walter, 55

[109]

Lowry, McNeill, 28, 30-31, 33, 80

MacArthur, Douglas A., and Cox, James, 52-53
Mahoney, Florence, 66-67
Marble, Joan, 83
McGill, Ralph, 61-62
McSweeney, John, 55

National Press Club, and Truman, Harry S., 97
Neunam, Peyte, 43
Newspaper reporters, career paths in 1930s and '40s, 9-10
Newspapers, and the influence of television, 6-7
Nixon, Richard M., as a campaigner in 1960, 93-94

O'Ibonnell, John, 11
Ohio, as factor in 1948 election, 31-32

"Potomac fever," 37
Presidential campaign of 1948, 30-33
Presidential campaign of 1952, 57-59, 69-74, 83
 press car (railroad car), 81-82
 press coverage of, 69-74, 82, 83-85
 "whistlestop" tour by President Truman, 69-74
Press, and "news management," 106
Press competition, 41
Press conferences, President Truman's, 28-30, 44, 47-49
Press coverage of Federal government activities in Washington, D.C.,
 typical day's work, 41-43
Press offices, in Washington, D.C., 39-40

Reagan, President Ronald, and press, 105-106
Reinsch, Leonard, 8

Sawyer, Charles, 26

Shoop, Duke, 40

Short, Joseph, 50

Spokane Spokesman-Review (newspaper), 72-74

Stevenson, Adlai:

as campaigner in 1952, 76-78, 90

and Democratic national convention of 1952, 61-62

Taft, Robert A.:

and Republican national convention of 1952, 58-59, 87-88

and Senatorial campaign of 1950, 55-56

Truman, Harry S.:

and Eisenhower, Dwight D., comments on, in 1952 campaign, 75

and "fishing," comment on, 67, 98

and Fleeson, Doris, 74

and Presidential campaign of 1952, 69-74, 84, 85

and press, 92, 93

and Stevenson, Adlai, 76-77

[110]

Truman Committee, and procurement scandal at Wright Field, 34-35

Tubby, Roger, 80

Vaccaro, Tony (Anthony), 84

Whitesell, Glenn, 71

Wright Field, procurement scandal in World War II, 34