

Oral History Interview

with

ADMIRAL ROBERT L. DENNISON

Graduate of U.S. Naval Academy, 1923; Assistant Chief of Naval Operations, 1945-47; Commander of the U.S.S. *Missouri*, 1947-48; Naval Aide to President Harry S. Truman, 1948-53; Commander in Chief of the Atlantic Command, Commander of the Atlantic Fleet, and Supreme Allied Commander, Atlantic, 1960-63.

Washington, D.C.

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By Jerry N. Hess, Harry S. Truman Library

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By Jerry N. Hess, Harry S. Truman Library

HESS: Admiral, to get under way, would you tell me a little about your personal background; where were you born, where were you educated and what are a few of the positions that you have held?

DENNISON: I was born in April, 1901, in Warren, Pennsylvania. That's a small town up in the northwestern part of the State. I went to grade school and then spent two years in the Kiski School, which is a preparatory school near Pittsburgh, and from there I went to the Naval Academy and graduated in 1923.

I have a bachelor's degree from the Naval Academy, a master's degree from Pennsylvania State, and a doctorate from Johns Hopkins. I've been in the Navy almost all of my life, 43 years, I think.

HESS: What is your doctorate in?

DENNISON: Engineering.

HESS: How valuable did you find that in your naval service?

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DENNISON: I found it tremendously valuable. Although I never actually practiced engineering I found engineering to be a way of analyzing and tackling problems and making decisions. I had some engineering duty, but not very much. I was director of the mechanical engineering laboratory at the Engineering Experiment Station while I went to Hopkins.

HESS: What were a few of the commands that you had in the Navy before your White House days?

DENNISON: Oh, I commanded a number of various type ships. A submarine-rescue vessel was my first command, and one of my most interesting ones, and I have commanded submarines, and destroyers, the USS *Missouri*, a cruiser division, commanded the First Fleet in the Pacific. Later I was Commander in Chief of the U.S. Naval Forces in Europe, then Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic for NATO, Commander in Chief of the Atlantic Command, and Commander in Chief of the Atlantic Fleet.

HESS: Can you tell me about your first meeting with President Truman?

DENNISON: The first meeting. I never asked him whether he remembered it, but Jim [James V.] Forrestal was supposed to go to Japan and China to look into the problem of reparations. Ed [Edwin W.] Pauley was to go out with

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him and meet with various authorities, including Chiang Kai-shek. For some reason or other, Forrestal at the last moment couldn't go, so he had Artemus Gates, who was the Under Secretary, go. I was going along because I was then Assistant Chief of Naval Operations for Political and Military Affairs, and adviser to Forrestal, then Secretary of the Navy.

Well, somebody told me that President Truman was very fond of maps, which was certainly true. So, when Gates and I returned from the trip, we had seen Chiang Kai-shek, we had gone to Chungking to see him, spent the night there, and had seen a good many other people as well. I had a full account of this trip written up and I had made a number of maps, or marked up a lot of them. So, Gates and I were sent to the White House (I suppose President Truman invited us), to report on this trip. And he truly was fascinated by the maps and spent quite a little time with us. That was the first time that I met him.

HESS: When did you meet him the next time? Was that when you were Commander of the *Missouri*?

DENNISON: The next time I met him was in Rio. I was in command of the *Missouri* and also in command of a small task force and my job was to go down to Rio to meet

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the President and bring him back. I had two or three destroyers and a supply ship, I believe.

I got there before the President, and soon after he arrived he sent for me. I went to his room where he was staying and my first impression of him (although I had seen him only a couple of years before), was to note the thickness of his glasses and the intensity of his eyes. He greeted me and said how glad he was to have the chance to go back with me. He was looking forward to it. So, we spent, as I recall, about eight days in Rio.

The occasion of his visit was the signing of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, called the Rio pact. It was signed on the second anniversary of the day that the surrender document was signed aboard the USS *Missouri*. We had a big reception on board, the President was there and President [General Eurico Gaspar] Dutra was there, and a lot of foreign dignitaries. And then I didn't see him again until he came aboard to sail. It was a perfectly marvelous voyage. I've never seen the ocean so calm.

HESS: I have heard that Mr. Truman enjoyed that voyage a great deal. Is that right? Do you think that he had a good time on the way back?

DENNISON: Well, I don't think it, I know it, because we

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did everything possible. The weather was just great. We had a very elaborate crossing-the-line ceremony, and he spoke to the crew, describing himself as a Democrat with a little "d" I think he said. We had a whole gang of reporters on board. They had sweat shirts with "Truman Athletic Club" on them, and went out for calisthenics every day and worked out with the crew. He had a chance to relax, play cards, and nobody could bother him.

All presidential radio traffic came through me. It came over a high level Navy circuit and was very highly classified. The only people who knew the contents of the incoming messages were my decoding officer and myself.

One evening I received a message that was of some importance, so I took it to the President who was in his cabin, sitting at a table surrounded by some of his staff. I believe they were playing poker. I've forgotten that detail. But at any rate, I handed the President a sheet of paper containing the message. He read it and didn't tell anybody at the table what it was. He simply handed the message back to me and said, "Tell the son of a bitch he'll have to shoot his way in."

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So I said, "Aye, aye, Sir," and left.

Well, the message was that Tito was reported to be massing a large number of troops on his northern border, apparently with the idea of moving into Trieste. We and the British, and I forget, perhaps some other allies, had forces in there, more for stabilization purposes than anything else. We had garrisons there, I forget the number of men, probably not over five thousand. But at any rate, this was the President's reaction to any possible move on Tito's part.

I've forgotten what I wrote and sent back, but I would imagine I probably sent back exactly what he said because there wasn't any way to paraphrase that. That said it. But whatever it was, I've forgotten. Nor did I know what the State Department did about it, how they got a message to Tito and what that said. But perhaps that's in the State Department records or files some place. But I do know that that was the end of any rumblings from Yugoslavia. Whatever message Tito got, he certainly understood it.

HESS: One further comment about Marshal Tito. Even though he is an avowed Communist, he is generally regarded as always having acted independently of Russia. He was one of the first major splits away from a monolithic

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Communist Party. Was it discussed in the early Truman days that perhaps if we could not necessarily work with such movements, we might encourage such movements? Even though it would be encouraging a Communist Party, it would be encouraging one that was splitting away from the Russians. Was that discussed?

DENNISON: Yes, because it was well recognized at the time that anything we could do to fragment the strength of Soviet communism was probably to our advantage. Tito had done well in Yugoslavia with some help from us. He's completely nationalistic. He's not under the control of Soviet Russia. He is a Communist and I guess if he has to be a Communist it is better for him to be our Communist than the Soviet's Communist. But he's completely nationalistic, of course, as I just said, and we can't look to him to use any influence in the Middle East or anywhere else. I think what we want him to do is to generally approve of what we're doing and to say so, which he has, and keep out of the way.

HESS: All right. Before we move on further with Mr. Truman, you have mentioned your position on Mr. Forrestal's staff. Let's discuss Mr. James Forrestal just for a few minutes. What are your earliest

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recollections of Secretary Forrestal?

DENNISON: My first real contact with him was when I became Assistant Chief of Naval Operations and Admiral [Chester W.] Nimitz was the Chief of Naval Operations at that time. I had done some work with the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the latter days of the war, and there were so many postwar problems appearing that involved the Navy and the Army, and the State Department. We didn't have any contacts with the State Department except for visas and things like that. So, I proposed to Admiral Nimitz that we organize a branch of his office to deal with the various committees and various people who were going to be handling some of these tremendously important problems.

So he said, "All right, draw up a charter and go ahead with it." He said, "You have my blessing."

Well, I had a hell of a time because in those days the word "diplomat" was a dirty word and the Navy didn't want anything to do with the State Department. I did draft what I thought this organization should be and what it should do, and got the charter cleared by all the top people in the Navy Department, all the ones that were senior to me, and there were a good many of them, and took it in to Admiral Nimitz.

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He read it and said, "This is fine, Dennison, just exactly what we ought to have."

And I said, "Admiral, I've completed my job. I want to go to sea,"

He said, "I don't want to hear another word out of you for a year about going to sea, and you're going to take this job."

I said, "Well, I'm only a Captain. It's written for a Rear Admiral. All the other services are going to have Generals on it to head their equivalent department."

But he said, "I want you to take it," which meant I'd better take it.

Well, then Forrestal heard about it. He thought it was a great idea. They were organizing what was called the State, War and Navy Coordinating Committee, and we had to have a staff, we had to have papers, we had to have somebody review these documents. So, I became his politico-military adviser. My office was on the floor above his in the old Navy Department. I was hooked up with him by a squawk box and attended a good many meetings with him and in his office and at briefings.

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I worked very closely with John Sullivan, who was his Under Secretary, and later Secretary. I went with him, Forrestal, to meetings of what was called the "Committee of Three." I'll tell you about it in a moment.

But to get back to my first impression of Forrestal. He never indicated what he was thinking and you had to guess it. He always asked a lot of questions. He'd never read a memorandum more than one page long, and I know of a great many memoranda he never read. He gave me the impression once he had a piece of paper that said something, he automatically knew all about it, put it in a drawer and forgot it, or put it in his files, which later became the Forrestal papers which I was also mixed up in.

So that was my first impression. He seemed to me to be very nervous and very unfeeling about his personal staff. He'd go out late in the afternoon and play golf, expect the men to stay there, and then he'd come back and work until all hours of the night without any regard for these people. But he had a broad knowledge of people, he knew a lot of people and put me in touch with a lot of people who were helpful to me in some of our problems. He wasn't without ability, but he was a very difficult man.

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And incidentally, a year to a day after my conversation with Nimitz, he sent for me. Then he said, "Go and pack your suitcase. You are going to sea."

I said, "Thank you very much, Admiral."

He said, "You're going to command the *Missouri*." It was the biggest and best command we had so it didn't take me long to get out of town. I can assure you of that. But this Committee of Three might be interesting to you.

This was the Secretary of State and the Secretary of War and the Secretary of the Navy. They met once a week in the State Department. There were never any minutes kept. Nobody was to be there except these three people. Oh, the strangest things would happen. I'd get a telephone call from one of my opposite numbers in the Army or State asking, "When is the Navy going to do so and so?"

And I'd say, "Well, I never heard of it."

And they'd say, "Well, our Secretary told us that Mr. Forrestal said that he was going to do it."

So, I finally convinced Forrestal this couldn't go on, and...

HESS: You couldn't be kept in the dark this way.

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DENNISON: No. It wasn't me. It was the whole Navy. And so he persuaded the others that each man ought to have somebody with him. The man with him wasn't to take any notes. They still didn't want any record of these meetings.

Another feature of these meetings was when they were through with this business they'd call on Admiral Leahy and immediately be transformed into the National Intelligence Agency, I believe it was called then, the forerunner of CIA.

But anyway Patterson had Howard Peterson who was Assistant Secretary of War, an attorney; Secretary of State had "Dot" [H. Freeman] Matthews most of the time and John D. Hickerson stood in for him occasionally; I was with Forrestal. Well, after the meeting of these three, Peterson, Matthews and I would get together to decide what these fellows should have said, who said what, who'd promised something, so that our own departments would know what had gone on. It was a lifesaver.

HESS: Were those men your opposite number on the State, War and Navy Coordinating Committee?

DENNISON: No.

HESS: They just happened to attend the meeting.

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DENNISON: The Secretaries themselves were members of this committee. Our Under secretary, Sullivan, really represented Forrestal. Forrestal didn't go to very many meetings. They had a lot of subcommittees. It was quite a complicated setup and they handled some very important problems. One of them that was of great interest to the Navy was what to do with the ex-Japanese mandate. The State Department wanted to give them back to the natives, practically the entire Navy, and certainly the War Department wanted to annex them. Well, neither one of those solutions was any good.

So, this was one of the problems thrown into this committee, and it turned out that the Navy took the lead in it and I actually drafted the trusteeship agreement myself with the help of a couple of young Reserve officers who were lawyers in my shop, establishing, if approved, a security trusteeship in the United Nations under the Security Council. This is the only such trusteeship in existence. It gave us what we wanted. It gave us authority to close off certain parts of the area if we wanted to, a number of privileges that wouldn't pertain under a trusteeship under the General Assembly. And in the end the Army sort of

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dropped out because we seemed to know what we were doing. The State Department, which had vigorously opposed this whole idea, was finally convinced and they changed course 180 degrees, and held briefings with newsmen and various groups. Ralph Bunche was one of the principal supporters. I was ordered, along with some of the State Department people, to go up and brief

Warren Austin and to attend the meeting of the Security Council where this was to be considered.

We'd expected a veto from Soviet Russia. Instead of that they supported the whole idea and our main problem came from the British, but Austin stood fast. He finally said that he'd like to remind the Council of one thing, and that was that we captured the islands, our flag was flying over them, and if they wouldn't accept our proposal, which was in full accord with the treaty, provided for in the charter, then we would consider annexing the islands. So they voted and it passed.

I went to sea and after a year the President accepted me as his Naval Aide.

HESS: Why was Mr. Forrestal chosen as Secretary of the Navy?

DENNISON: Well, I have no idea what element went into his selection. He was well-known and was a capable business man and he seemed to be a capable executive, and I don't

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know whether they picked his name out of a hat, or just how it came about. I never knew.

HESS: What does it take to be a good Secretary of the Navy?

DENNISON: Well, it takes somebody with courage, executive ability. Somebody who can appeal to people and get their cooperation. And remember, in those days we're talking about, before the National Security Act, the Secretary of the Navy was a member of the Cabinet, so it was an important Government position. Then, of course, we later had a Secretary of Defense. He and he alone was a member of the Cabinet. These three service secretaries were subordinate to him.

Some choices I happen to know about--the selection of Matthews for example.

HESS: Why was he selected?

DENNISON: Well, Sullivan resigned because Louis Johnson, without consulting him, cancelled a contract for a large aircraft carrier.

John was a Catholic so Johnson had the bright idea that politically it would be just great to get as Secretary a super Catholic, which Matthews was; in spite of the fact that he knew absolutely nothing about the Navy and never found out. There are a

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good many strange elements that go into selecting somebody, I suppose.

I remember one time, in the President's office, we were just discussing some man who was going to get an appointment to some government job. The President entered into the discussion and

Harry Vaughan had some uncomplimentary things to say about this fellow and said, "Who's for him?"

And I think it was Matt Connelly who spoke up and said, "The President."

And Vaughan said, "Gee, he's in good shape, isn't he?"

HESS: He's got all the votes on his side.

How would you rate the four men who served as Secretary of the Navy under Mr. Truman: James Forrestal, John L. Sullivan, Francis P. Matthews and Dan A. Kimball?

DENNISON: Well, remember they served in such different circumstances it's hard to tell how any one of the four would have performed in a different time frame. I think you would have to put them Forrestal, Sullivan, Kimball and Matthews, and Matthews was a distant fourth.

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HESS: Who was the best?

DENNISON: Oh, the best one for the times was obviously Forrestal, but Sullivan was a dynamo, a very able man, extremely capable, and he did a great deal of work for Forrestal.

HESS: Was the major reason that Mr. Sullivan left, the cancellation of the contract for the super carrier?

DENNISON: Yes.

HESS: Also unification of the armed services was a big subject during this entire period of time. Do you think that some of the Secretaries of the Navy had difficulty going along with the policies of unification?

DENNISON: No, I don't. Forrestal was very much for it. A good many of them could see that this was inevitable, but it got very emotional. Johnson was terrible. Anybody, he thought, who opposed the unification was just beyond the pale. He was just almost a criminal and the Unification Act, or the Defense Act, really didn't do as much unifying as it did establish things such as another service. The Army Air Corps was kicked around so badly by the Army itself that they had no place to go. The air arm of the Army was

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getting so big, and even when they were part of the Army, one of the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was General Arnold, a flier. A good many of us thought that if you can't lick them, join them, so I was for it. I wasn't for many of the things that people thought unification was going to accomplish.

HESS: Such as?

DENNISON: Well, in establishing a third department, this wasn't, it seemed to me, probably the best solution, but the business of the armed services got so tremendous. The original concept, the concept that President Truman had, was that the Secretary of Defense would have no deputy and a very, very small personal staff, and he and the three Service Secretaries would act as a sort of management committee over the armed services. But he never saw, none of us really saw, what was coming. But there was just too much to be done not to have a deputy, and Steve Early was appointed by President Truman. And then we got this tremendous intervening layer between the Secretary of Defense and the services--the

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tremendous staff in every field, and this became unworkable because they had too many subordinates who were really making policy decisions that were none of their business. The tendency was to make decisions for the services which should have been the job of those various services. But Johnson was the one who wanted a deputy, and he should have had one and he did.

HESS: Was Mr. Early effective as a deputy?

DENNISON: Well, I thought so. They had going in those days, and I think they still do, an annual gathering of top business people. They are briefed in the Pentagon and they go to Fort Benning, or go to sea, or do something, and then they discuss national defense matters. Then they all go home.

Well, this was going on one time when I was in Johnson's office. He couldn't decide who to recommend for Under Secretary. He showed me a list of names and none of them seemed to be qualified. And for some reason or another, which I've always regretted, I opened my mouth and said, "Well, you've got a man right here in the building who ought to meet your specifications."

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He said, "Who's that?"

"Steve Early."

Now he thought that was brilliant; a strong Democrat who had served Roosevelt, a very capable man.

HESS: Hadn't his background been mostly in press relations? What made you think that he would do well in this particular field?

DENNISON: Well, because he was a good executive and he knew people, and he knew Johnson, he knew the President. And when I realized what I had done, I went back to the White House and went in to see the President. And I said, "I've just done something terrible and I hope you will forgive me, but I opened my mouth when I should have kept it closed and suggested to Louie Johnson that he ask you to appoint Steve Early as his deputy."

And then the President said, "Well, I had other plans for Steve, but this sounds to me like a good idea, so just forget it."

HESS: Why was Mr. Forrestal chosen as Secretary of Defense?

DENNISON: Well, because he was the most valuable man around. He believed in unification and it seemed that if anybody could make it go, he could. He had

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plenty of experience in the Government, he had a very important job as Secretary of the Navy and a member of the Cabinet, he seemed like a natural.

HESS: At the time, there were several stories in the press, it was very widely reported that the Navy feared the loss of their air arm to the Air Force, and perhaps the loss of the Marine Corps. In other words, there were those in the Navy who did not look upon unification with favor. Correct?

DENNISON: Oh, indeed there were, plenty.

HESS: Did you think that the Navy was in any danger of losing its air arm, there would be no more Naval Air Corps?

DENNISON: No, I never thought that, certainly not the Marine Corps, but the people who were opposed to it were responsible men. They had what were to them real good reasons.

Well, I remember the Navy Department resisted moving into the Pentagon in the very early days. If we hadn't, we would have been completely out of business.

HESS: Moving on just a little bit, why was Mr. Forrestal replaced? I have heard that he may have been on his

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way out, even if his health had not broken, due to a pro-Arab, pro-oil and anti-Jewish attitude that he may have had. Would you care to comment?

DENNISON: Well, I think that is rather exaggerated. I don't think he was on his way out, but he was very much interested in Middle East oil. And I remember once he asked me to write him a report on Middle East oil and I said, "Mr. Secretary, I'm running practically a one-man shop." And he said, "Well, get some people then."

But that was his principal interest--business.

HESS: What do you recall of the unfortunate mental breakdown that overtook Mr. Forrestal? Do you recall any early signs of that?

DENNISON: Yes, none of us thought it was so serious as it turned out to be. I remember one time the President asked me when I was in his office, "Do you know who the Secretary of Defense is?"

I played along with it and said, "Yes, sir, Jim Forrestal."

He said, "You're wrong. I'm the Secretary of Defense." He said, "Jim calls me up several times a day asking me to make a decision on matters that

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are completely within his competence, but he passes them on to me."

And then I was in his office the morning that Forrestal was to be relieved by Johnson at noon. The President got a call from Forrestal. I could only hear one end of the conversation and the President said, "Yes, Jim, and that's the way I want it," and so on. Then when he hung up he said, "That was Forrestal wanting to know whether I really wanted him to be relieved by Louie Johnson this noon."

And then he went to Hobe Sound and he was in a very bad shape and none of us realized how extremely serious this was. We thought it was just fatigue, a lot of hard work and so on. After he had been there a short time the President sent for me and said, "We've been besieged by telephone calls from Jim. He thinks that his phone is tapped, and he's worried about his papers, his private papers." He said, "Do you know anything about them?"

He said, "I have had the Secret Service check out his telephones and nothing is tapped, and what about these papers?"

And I said, "Well, I happen to know exactly

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what he is talking about because I wrote some of them myself. It's a file cabinet which contains a lot of his notes and memoranda that he collected and I'll take care of it. Don't think anything about it." So, I got some (this sounds like cloak and dagger business), but I got some Secret Service men, got a truck and I called Kate [Katharine S.] Foley, who had been Forrestal's secretary, and went over there, over to the Pentagon, and took the cabinet out of what was then Johnson's office and brought it to the White House. And I had Kate open the cabinet and examine it to see that it was in fact everything she could remember, and sealed it, and I didn't want access to it except in some emergency.

Well, then Forrestal came to Bethesda and I was with the President when the President went over to see him in his room. And then, of course, shortly after that he committed suicide, and there we were with the so-called Forrestal papers.

Are you interested in the Forrestal papers?

HESS: That's my next question.

DENNISON: Have you read the book?

HESS: Yes.

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DENNISON: Well, it was explained pretty well in the foreword that these are not papers, they are not a diary. Forrestal kept an appointment book. I remember one curious one. He opened up on my squawk box and said, "What about the Kurile Islands?" That was the end of the conversation. "What about the Kurile Islands?"

HESS: Somewhere north of Japan.

DENNISON: Well, there were a lot of problems. I remember...

HESS: That's right.

DENNISON: A hell of a lot of them.

HESS: With Russia...

DENNISON: That's right.

HESS: ...and the war.

DENNISON: So, in a case like that, I did what I always did, went down and looked at his appointment book to see whom he had been talking to on the phone, or whom he had seen, to get some kind of a clue as to what aspect of this problem he was interested in.

So, this cabinet was filled with some reports that I'd written and notes he'd made of conversations with people, but it wasn't coherent, it wasn't

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a chronological account except for this daybook idea. And it got built up to a big thing as an asset to his estate.

Helen Ogden Reid knew I had the papers. She loved Jim Forrestal, was a great friend, and she wanted to help his family. So, as I recall it, she paid Forrestal's estate for the papers (they were still in the White House), and I think that if the Government wished to do it they could have made a claim that they were Government papers.

Well, how are we going to handle it? She appointed a couple of people (one of them had been a Reserve officer, or was a Reserve officer), to do the writing, and they were capable people. So I

got a committee together. George Elsey helped me on that, and Adrian Fisher of the State Department, and I forget who we had from the Defense Department.

HESS: Marx Leva?

DENNISON: I can't remember whether it was Marx or not. He would have been a natural, I think. The idea was that we turn the papers over to these men with the understanding that when they were through with them

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they would come back to me, that when they wrote a chapter they would send it to us and we would review it for security, then they would accept any changes we wanted to make. Well, there was some pretty touchy stuff in that so-called diary, just off-the-cuff comments about people, and in the end it turned out we had practically no changes. I took some documents out of the file myself because they were Atomic Energy Commission papers which had no business in anybody's private file.

So everybody was happy about it, but Mrs. Reid didn't know what I was up to and quite naturally she was suspicious. She came down to see me, and invited me to have lunch with her, and I found her to be absolutely charming. I said, "Well, I don't have any interest in these papers except I took them, they're safe, and I want to see them kept together in one place. They certainly don't belong in the White House, and I'd like to see them in the Forrestal Library at Princeton."

And she said, "Well, that's exactly what I want. "

I said, "Well, then, if that's what you want, and

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that's what I want, I'm sure the President will agree." And he did. "Let's do it."

So about the very last day of President Truman's administration, again I got a truck and we sent those papers up to the library. The Defense Department had put some kind of restriction on access to them. I don't recall now whether by certain specified time or what it was, but they are intact and that's where they are. So it turned out everybody was happy.

HESS: Why was Louis Johnson chosen as the next Secretary of Defense?

DENNISON: Well, I don't really know. I think the principal reason was that he was a prominent, very active member of the Democratic Party. But he certainly wasn't a Secretary of Defense.

HESS: How would you rate him as a Secretary of Defense?

DENNISON: Just about as poor as you possibly could.

HESS: Why would you give him such a low rating? What did he do, or not do?

DENNISON: Well he nearly wrecked the armed services. And one thing he did, cutting down on money and running them downhill much too fast. Of course, he couldn't foresee Korea, but that's the kind of a situation

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we're supposed to be ready to handle.

HESS: In his reduction of the armed forces, do you think he was just carrying out the orders that had been handed him and had been formulated by others, or was he carrying this out with the zeal that might indicate that he felt the services should be cut back?

DENNISON: Oh, I think the latter is undoubtedly the case. I'm sure the President never--as a matter of fact, he embarrassed the President one time because of his closing of some service hospital in Long Beach, a Navy hospital. He got all mixed up with this problem of what to do with paraplegics, and they got to be quite emotional. And I remember one motion picture actress, I believe it was Frances Langford, who actually tried to get aboard the President's train at one point to talk to him about this. Of course the Secret Service wouldn't let her come anywhere near the President. Then the President sent for me on this matter and said, "I want you to head a committee to look into this whole problem of veterans hospitals, and particularly this paraplegic problem." And he said, "I'm going to ask Howard Rusk to serve, and Dr.

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[Howard] Abramson."Abramson himself was a paraplegic.

We went to work and we visited a hell of a lot of hospitals to survey the facilities and talk to the people who were running them, to find out whether they had enough beds or too many beds or what the problem was.

We held meetings in the White House, we listened to every conceivable organization; the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the American Legion, on and on and on, and the Disabled American Veterans. They all had a chance to speak. They were speaking to some sympathetic ears.

Well, it turned out that there are many, many problems. One was a bumbling around by Congress about to what degree or to what extent should the Government offer medical attention to veterans. The policy was, for example, that they'd be given care on a beds available basis.

Well, how do you estimate in building a hospital what this means in terms of extra beds? This is just one matter. But in any event, this rapidly expanded to get into a study of the whole VA system. We persuaded the VA to appoint Booz Allen Hamilton to submit

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a report leading to a reorganization of the VA. It was quite far-reaching, but it all came about through this arbitrary decision of Johnson's without any comprehension of what the impact might be. It involved the entire, not just the medical part of VA, but the whole system, and Johnson pulled this down on the President without the President knowing what was going on. Harry Vaughan described Johnson one time in what I thought very apt terms. He said, "He's the only bull I know who carries his own china shop around with him."

HESS: Just so he would have one to go smashing through?

DENNISON: Yes.

HESS: Now, General Vaughan had the title of Coordinator of Veterans Affairs. Was he also involved in this matter of the hospital and veterans hospitals?

DENNISON: Not a bit, no.

HESS: Why didn't he take part in that? Do you have any opinion on that?

DENNISON: You'd have to ask President Truman. I don't know because the President was the one that appointed me to get up this committee. I don't think he thought of it at the beginning, I know I didn't, as developing

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into such an involvement of Veterans Administration itself. It started out simply as a fairly limited medical problem about how to care for paraplegics and where to care for them. but it sure didn't stop there.

HESS: On the subject of the cutback of the armed forces, do you recall President Truman's views on the armed forces being cut back at this time?

DENNISON: Not specifically.

HESS: Another name that is often raised in this context is James Webb, who at the time was Director of the Bureau of the Budget. Do you recall his involvement in this area?

DENNISON: No, not specifically because I wasn't operating in that area myself. But I.knew Webb, and the Bureau of the Budget is one of the most powerful parts of our Government. They have all kinds of authority, and they had then and still do have extremely competent people. And I got a great deal of help from them on various things. One thing was this business I got into trying to coordinate the Federal Maritime Affairs. I have the highest regard for Webb.

HESS: Who did you work with the most in the Bureau of the

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Budget when you were working on maritime matters? Do you recall?

DENNISON: Roger Jones and some of his people. He's a fine man. He knows more about Government than any man I ever talked to, except President Truman.

HESS: What were your duties on the maritime matter? Do you recall the situation?

DENNISON: I sure do. It all started with the miserable performance of the Maritime Commission and it centered on, in this instance, the granting of very high construction subsidies to several companies; American Export, U.S. Line, the President Line. Porter Hardy, who was a chairman of a subcommittee of the House (right now I forget what parent committee it was), conducted hearings on this. And it was perfectly obvious that these subsidies were very high, to the point of actually straining the meaning of the Maritime Act, mainly in the field of interpretation of subsidies for so-called defense features, such as the speed of the *United States* and the troop carrying capacity. It was very apparent that something ought to be done to recover the overpayments.

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The first thing the President did was dissolve the commission by a Reorganization Act and create the Maritime Board and Maritime Administration in the Department of Commerce.

When you come to think of it, almost every department of government has some interest in maritime matters; the State Department, the Defense Department, Commerce, Labor, the Attorney General. All of them and others have minor interests.

There isn't in our Government any central office that can coordinate these departments. So that was my job, and it was a very difficult one, because all these people could see the problem from their own standpoint and were fighting with each other. We were having trouble getting any opinion out of the Attorney General.

In the meantime, Lindsay Warren, the Comptroller General, announced that he was going to take over the matter. Well, we didn't want that to happen, because surely the executive branch of the Government should handle it and to have Warren take over would put it in the hands of the legislative branch. He works for the Congress as you know. I knew Hardy. I didn't

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know Warren, so I asked Porter one day if he could arrange for me to meet Warren and said, "How would it be if you came down with Warren and had lunch with me on the *Williamsburg* to talk over this problem?"

They did, and I explained to the Comptroller General what it was we were trying to accomplish, how we intended to go about it, the people that I was dealing with, and by God I did convince him that we meant business. Here again I didn't have any staff, and that's where Webb and his people were a tremendous help. I got some pretty good legal help, too, out of the Department of Justice, and this went on until President Truman left office. I don't know how many hours, and how many meetings, and how people were involved in all of this.

You might be amused by how he picked the first man to head up the Maritime Administration. He asked me one day, "Bob, who are we going to get to be the Federal Maritime Administrator?"

I said, "Well, there's only one man and that's Admiral [Edward Lull] Cochrane."

And he said, "Fine, ask him."

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Cochrane had retired and gone up to MIT where he was having a great time--a place that he loved and he loved his work. But I got him on the phone and said, "Ned, how about being the first Federal Maritime Administrator?"

He said, "Oh, leave me alone. I'm up here and doing what I want to do and," he said, "I've done my job and I don't want it."

Well, I couldn't convince him. I said, "Well, damn it, it's your duty to take this. Can you think of anybody else?"

Well, he gave me a couple of names that both he and I knew wouldn't do at all. So I went back and told the President. He said, "Tell Admiral Cochrane that I'd like to see him sometime this week. You set up the appointment and tell him to come down here."

So I called Ned and said, "The President wants to see you."

And Ned said, "Well, I can't disobey orders so I'll be there."

So I set the appointment up for some morning, and the President told me, "I want you to be here when I talk to Cochrane."

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The three of us sat down in the President's office and the President said, "What's this I hear about your not wanting the position?"

Well, with that Cochrane started to talk. The President didn't say a word, just sat there and listened. He'd done his job, and he'd earned retirement, he was contributing to the country by the work he was doing, and on and on. Finally he said, "Besides, Mr. President, I'm too old to take all that responsibility."

And for the first time the President spoke. He said, "Admiral, how old are you?" The President was older than he was.

HESS: Had him there, didn't he?

DENNISON: Yes. Cochrane's jaw dropped and he said, "Okay, Mr. President, I'll take the job."

HESS: He had him.

DENNISON: Beautifully done.

HESS: You joined the White House staff in January of 1948. Why, in your opinion, were you chosen as the President's Naval Aide?

DENNISON: Well, I can tell you what I was told happened. I don't know why I was chosen, but the President

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wanted another Naval Aide. I don't know why, but he asked the Navy Department (I think actually he consulted Sullivan), to give him the name of the most capable captain they had who was suitable for this job. And I had at that time about the best Captain's job in the Navy, as Captain of the *Missouri*, and I loved every minute of it. And the President didn't ask for me, didn't suggest me, but when he saw my name he said, "That will be just fine. I'd like to have Captain Dennison."

So I got a call from the Chief of the Bureau of Naval Personnel saying, "When can you come to Washington?"

And I said, "Oh, I can come down tomorrow morning. What's the meeting about?"

He said, "Hell, there isn't any meeting. You're being detached."

And I said, "What? What am I being detached for?"

And he said, "Well, we are ordering you to be Naval Aide to the President."

I said, "Look, I've had duty in Washington. I love this command and I want to stay here and stay at sea and command something."

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He said, "Forget it."

I said, "Well, I can't walk off this ship. Who's going to relieve me?"

And he said, "Well, we haven't thought of anybody yet, but turn it over to your exec. You're in the navy yard for a couple of weeks."

I said, "What about my orders?"

And he said, "Well, we'll try to get you something."

Well, it turned out I wrote my own orders, because you're supposed to read these to the crew and when it came to where I was being ordered to I just put down "ordered to Washington for duty." Well, when I read it nobody paid any attention. Nobody was listening, I guess.

HESS: Thinking about shore leave.

DENNISON: Yes. So I went right down and reported to President Truman for duty, and then it came out on the news ticker, I guess, or something, where I actually was.

We almost had a hell of a flareup over that one, too, because not long after I'd been there Harry [Vaughan] held a press conference in the lobby, and

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announced to all of the press people there that he was going to be the Defense Aide and that [Robert B.] Landry and I were going to be his assistants.

Well, that just infuriated me, and so I talked to Charlie Ross and Matt Connelly and said, "I don't want to get the President upset, but I was ordered here as a Naval Aide and I reported as a Naval Aide, and nobody ever told me about any arrangement such as this, and if it goes through I'm going to ask to be detached."

Well, Ross got madder than hell about Harry having the nerve to hold a press conference, and Matt Connelly was real upset about it. So they went in to talk to the President and told him this was really going to raise hell. So he just said, "Well, forget the whole thing."

HESS: Do you think there was anything to that?

DENNISON: Yes.

HESS: There was?

DENNISON: Yes. They just forgot to tell me, that's all.

HESS: President Truman had intended for General Vaughan to become the Defense Aide?

DENNISON: I'm almost certain of it, yes.

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HESS: You say almost certain.

DENNISON: Well, he never told me. Other people have told me and I don't think that Harry would dream this up all by himself. And I think that Sullivan knew something about it too, but it was such a...

HESS: John Sullivan?

DENNISON: Yes. Such a hush-hush thing they forgot to tell me. Why I just got orders to report as Naval Aide, which I did.

HESS: What do you think is the main thing that threw the monkey wrench in the works, your attitude that you had reported there as a Naval Aide, or General Vaughan's announcement?

DENNISON: Well, I think it was a combination of both. Ross was really put out about it.

HESS: What was General Landry's attitude?

DENNISON: Well, he was just as upset as I was. I don't know whether he went as far as I did in saying what he was going to do. Maybe he was standing around waiting to see how much lightning I would draw.

HESS: All right, one other question about the gentleman you replaced, Admiral Foskett. Do you know if there

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was any dissatisfaction on the part of the President with Admiral Foskett?

DENNISON: I don't know. I only know that the President made up his mind awfully fast, and then Foskett was really quite taken aback when I showed up.

HESS: He did not know you were coming?

DENNISON: I don't think he did. It happened awfully damn fast. I mean I got a telephone call one morning and went down there the next.

HESS: Have you ever heard anything about why Mr. Truman might have been dissatisfied with him?

DENNISON: No, I never really investigated it because it wasn't any of my business. All I knew was that President Truman wanted another Naval Aide and I was it.

HESS: All right. Not long after you arrived, in June of 1948, Mr. Truman took his famous non-political trip, and according to the logs you went along. Correct?

DENNISON: That is correct.

HESS: What do you recall about that June trip of 1948?

DENNISON: It was a nightmare.

HESS: You didn't enjoy yourself?

DENNISON: It was nine thousand miles in a Pullman car,

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most of it, but it was a real eye opener to me in many, many ways. I was fortunate because I had known almost all the White House reporters. They were with me in Rio. They were great guys and they never bothered me. They knew it would be stupid to try to ask any questions about what the President was thinking or what he was doing or anything. Well, I never got any unpleasantness from them, and some of them through the years have developed into real friends, like Charles Collingwood, for example, and others, Merriman Smith, poor fellow, and Tony [Ernest B.] Vaccaro.

But this was a non-political trip. I've told you what the President told me when I reported that day, that he wanted me to understand that I'd have nothing whatever to do with the Democratic National Committee. And I never did, and I never got a call from anybody in politics the whole time I was there. But this non-political trip--I read the papers, and I saw things like this edition of *Life* showing what would appear to be an empty amphitheater.

HESS: Omaha, Nebraska.

DENNISON: Yes, and it was all phoney. I never saw anything

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in my life like the enthusiasm with which the President was greeted at some of these what he called "whistlestops." There were more people there than the population of the whole damn county. They came for miles, sometimes at the most ungodly hours, 5:30, 6 a.m., something like that. And you could tell that they loved the President and loved his family.

HESS: Do you recall anything in particular about the day that started in Sun Valley, Idaho? That was the day of the dedication of the airfield in Carey, Idaho.

DENNISON: Well, I remember a day we left Sun Valley. I never knew a place called Carey. I never saw any town at all. Well, it happened this way. For some reason, I never knew why, the President got up early and decided he was going to leave. None of us had had any breakfast. Most of us were scarcely dressed. The Secret Service came around banging on everybody's door and said, "We've got to get going."

Well, one thing that happened was that Charlie Ross had intended to brief the President on what he was to expect on this trip, and didn't have a chance. Vaughan, Landry and I were in a car not far from

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the President. Two or three back, I guess. The Secret Service were, all over the place. We drove on a monotonous road and could see ahead a big banner across the road and a speaker's stand

and a band and all that, and the name of some field. The President didn't have a clue. We never heard of it. We couldn't brief him. We didn't know anything about it.

So we got out of the car and went up to the President and he got the idea quite naturally. He was going to dedicate an airfield. So he got up and made a sort of short speech about honoring this veteran of the war or something. Well, somebody whispered, "It's not a veteran. It's a girl." Well, he didn't know why he'd be dedicating an airport to a girl. So he started to say something and then somebody had to correct him on that, that she wasn't in the service, she died in some commercial or private plane crash. Oh, it was so--really it wasn't anything to laugh at, but it was awfully funny just the same, but...

HESS: One of those things that you can laugh at years later after it's all over.

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DENNISON: I asked Murphy one time about this trip. I said, "It seemed to me that the President was so well prepared everywhere he went to make his speech, and of course you remember the affair at the airfield, but that's the only one I know about."

Charlie said, "Well, there was another one." He said, "We went to some town in Nebraska and the President made a speech endorsing the Republican congressional candidate."

HESS: I'll bet he didn't like that when he found out about it.

DENNISON: I don't know what fell down on his briefing there.

HESS: That's pretty good.

Also on that trip, in Eugene, Oregon, Mr. Truman in speaking of Joseph Stalin, used the famous statement, "I like old Joe," do you recall that?

DENNISON: No. I don't recall it, and I know it's attributed to him, and maybe he did say it. He probably did.

HESS: Where he said Stalin was a prisoner of the Politburo, and by himself he would be all right, but he was a prisoner of the Politburo is more or less what he said. Do you recall anything else about that trip?

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DENNISON: Well, just endless speeches and endless crowds and a lot of discomfort. It was quite fast, not much chance to rest or get any laundry done or anything. The poor reporters were having a hell of a time, but the President seemed to be enjoying it. I told him one time that he was the hardest man I ever worked for or ever hoped to, most difficult. And he said, "Why?"

I said, "Well, I and the others know how fast you go and how hard you pound, but you never show it. You never look tired, and you never get impatient. You never scold us or anything. I

know damn well that we're not perfect. We do a lot of things that are not the way you want. Why don't you clue us in, or clue me in?"

He said, "Well, you're doing just fine, and I haven't got any criticism."

But it was true, as I wrote in that letter to Murphy that you read, he was able to surround himself with an almost impenetrable shell, and as I told Charlie, it took me two years before I felt, or knew, that I had his confidence, and when I did I had it completely.

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But he fooled a lot of people with this shell he had, because the shell was of a simple, poorly educated man trying to do a job. He wasn't a simple man. He was the most complex individual I ever knew. He was well educated. He read all of the time, remembered what he read. I got into a discussion with him about capitals of columns. I didn't know the difference between an Ionic and some other thing and he told me. And I said, "Mr. President, where did you latch onto that information?"

He said, "Well, I was studying to be a Mason, and I just remembered it." That's how he knew.

And I remember when he told me himself that before he took over this Truman Committee, with which he did such a smashing job, he read every volume of the committee's reports on the conduct of the war in Lincoln's administration. Imagine that! Not only did he read these things, but he remembered them, and anybody who was stupid enough to question anything he had to say about personalities or American history had better look out, because he knew.

HESS: You also mentioned in your letter to Mr. Murphy (which will be in your papers at the Truman Library so

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people can look it up and read it when they get to this point in the oral history interview and know just what we are talking about), that Mr. Truman had the ability to compartmentalize, to separate his political dealings, his political thinking from actions taken as President of all the people. Would you comment on that for just a moment?

DENNISON: This is a remarkable characteristic because he had the ability to make a very sharp distinction between the various roles that he had. When he took an action, he knew exactly what role he was fulfilling and there were three of them: Commander in Chief, the head of the Democratic Party, and the President of all the people. And in the various inscribed pictures I have, and even inscriptions in his books, he never refers to himself as the President. It's always "Your former Commander in Chief," or "Your Commander in Chief." Even in a simple thing like, that; and it's that simple, because you'd think he'd--here I was a trusted member of his staff, but I was, and he knew it and appreciated it, a professional naval officer. I wasn't a politician, had no aspiration to be one, although I learned that politics is a profession

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and it takes a lot of skill and a lot of honesty, too.

Now, here's something I just remembered. During the Korean war I was in his office late one afternoon around 6 o'clock. It had been a long, hard day. I was briefing him on something to do with Korea that he had to know that evening. Connelly came in and said, "Excuse me, Mr. President. I have four people out here who don't have an appointment. I told them to come around late in the day and maybe I could get them in, and they won't take very long."

The President said, "What do they want to see me about?"

Connelly said, "Well, about some road problem, or bridge problem out in Iowa."

So the President said, "Show them in."

I started to edge forward in my chair to get up and he motioned me back and said, "Don't bother. This won't take very long."

Well, there were three or four of these men. The most dejected looking people. You'd think that all the woes of the world were on their shoulders. The President asked them to sit down, and he got up and shook hands with them, and then he said, "What's

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the problem?"

Well, I forget what the problem was. Well, something like this: they are interested in some roads in their state, which were pretty horrible, and they had a bridge problem. One of the principal roads had to have a larger bridge, or a bridge, or something, and they didn't know how to raise the money. And the President would say, "Have you tried this, have you thought of this?" And then he got into more problems about roads, and finally they got up and left and thanked him, completely changed men. Not a damn thing had been decided--nothing. And it was all too much for me. and I said, "Mr. President, if you'll forgive me, I know what's on your mind. I know the decision you've got to make right now. How could you have the patience to listen to these people. This is not a problem that you can solve."

And he said, "Bob, I'll tell you something. Sure it's not a problem I can solve. It isn't a national problem, and maybe to you it isn't a problem, but believe me to these people it's a problem." He said, "I'm the President of the United States and I should listen to people like that who are in trouble,

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even if that's all I can do." So I just shut my mouth and learned something.

HESS: That's very good.

Do you recall anything in particular about the efforts that were made by some Democrats to get someone other than Mr. Truman to head the ticket in 1948?

DENNISON: No, because not only did I not get mixed up in politics, but I knew enough to know that I didn't know anything about politics. I'd be the last one to know anything like that, anyhow. As a matter of fact, I never even heard of it before.

HESS: Well, the ADA, Americans for Democratic Action, for one, tried to get General Eisenhower to run as a Democrat in 1948, or at least they put that proposal to him. Did you go to the convention in Philadelphia?

DENNISON: The President never took me to any political convention.

HESS: Was that pretty universal for the Military Aide and the Air Aide also? General Vaughan and General Landry?

DENNISON: Yes, but not to the same extent because--with

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General Landry, yes, but General Vaughan was not a Regular officer. He had been in politics all of his life. But I don't believe that Harry ever went with the President either on a political trip. I'm not sure, but I doubt it. My message traffic to the President was handled, on that kind of a trip, by Commander Bill Rigdon, who did go.

HESS: That's right. He was your assistant, the Assistant Naval Aide. What would be your evaluation of him? Was he helpful?

DENNISON: Well, I wouldn't say he was helpful. I would say he was indispensable. He was really a terrific man. He was quiet and self-effacing and extremely capable. He was at one time, I believe, a Yeoman or a Chief Yeoman, and he was discreet, absolutely trustworthy, and I don't think that the White House would have been the same without him around.

HESS: Did he handle most of the arrangements for the President's trips to Key West, or the arrangements while they were at Key West; the *Williamsburg*?

DENNISON: Yes, except such things as the Little White House. I was appalled when I saw that the first time.

HESS: The Little White House at Key West?

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DENNISON: Yes. It was dingy and uncomfortable, and needlessly so, but the Navy didn't have any money and Mrs. Truman and Margaret hated it. So I said to the President, "Do you mind if I stir up the animals here a little bit and redecorate the Little White House, not lavishly of course, but in a quiet, dignified manner that is fitting to that kind of an environment?"

And he said, "No, go ahead."

So I did. I got, through the Navy, a fine firm of decorators in Miami, and we just did everything to it. And in the end it was a beautiful job. It wasn't lavish. The colors were just exactly right. We had some very nice things in that house. The furniture was excellent. The room that Mrs. Truman and Margaret had was in white and had complete privacy. They had a porch there where nobody bothered them. The President's room was perfectly lovely, dark colors, dark blue, and the ceiling was painted a color of blue so that at night you had the impression you were looking up into the dark sky. It was just very cleverly done. And when Margaret and Mrs. Truman saw the rehabilitated Little White House they

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thought it was just great.

HESS: The President took a trip down there just after the election. I think the dates were November the 7th to the 21st, but to keep things in chronological order, what about that election? Did you think President Truman was going to win, going to beat Tom Dewey that year?

DENNISON: I certainly did, because he told me he was and...

HESS: Does that settle it?

DENNISON: As far as I was concerned it did.

But an interesting point there. When he came back after the campaign, before he went to Independence, he wanted to relax. Well, he wanted to go out in the *Williamsburg* alone, which meant me, and that's all. He was tired and we stood out on deck shortly after he got on board and I said, "Mr. President, how'd you make out in the campaign?"

And he said, "I'm elected."

And then I said, "How do you know that, Mr. President?"

He said, "Well, I'm a politician and I understand people and I can tell. I just know that I'm elected."

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I said, "Well, to me you're elected."

Anyway, I think when he did get to Independence he just went to sleep. Hell, he wasn't worried about whether he was going to be elected or not.

HESS: Was this just before the election?

DENNISON: Yes. But he went on to say, "Well, I'm not worried about being elected, but I am very-worried about the coming four years. They are going to be very rough."

HESS: We're almost through with this reel of tape. It's about 4:15. Want to knock off for today?

DENNISON: Yes.

HESS: Okay.

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Second Oral History Interview with Admiral Robert L. Dennison,
Washington, D.C., October 6, 1971. By Jerry N. Hess, Harry S. Truman Library.

HESS: All right, Admiral, before we continue on with where we left off last time, I have a couple of other items I would like to insert. One deals with an item in the *Forrestal Diaries*, and it's the events surrounding the resignation of Henry Wallace in September of 1946. In the *Diaries* there's a memo on page 207. It's from John L. Sullivan, who was Under Secretary of the Navy at the time, describing the events of a meeting at the office of the Acting Secretary of State Will [William L.] Clayton.

Now this was a meeting held on September 12th, the day of Wallace's speech in Madison Square Garden, and those at the meeting when it opened were Sullivan, Clayton, James W. Riddleberger (Acting Head of the Division of European Affairs), Loy Henderson (head of the Division of Near and Middle Eastern Affairs), and yourself as Assistant Chief of Naval Operations. Secretary [Robert P.] Patterson came in later in the evening at 6:20, but what do you recall of those events?

DENNISON: I don't remember how Secretary Sullivan and I learned about this speech. Perhaps we read the advance

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draft. The grouping in Clayton's office would suggest that Clayton thought this matter within the competence of the State, War and Navy Coordinating Committee. That would account for Sullivan's being there, and my being there as his adviser, and Patterson, and some of the State Department people such as Loy Henderson.

But in any event, Sullivan and I were the only ones who seemed to understand and appreciate how serious this matter was, because obviously if that speech were delivered it would represent a split between Wallace's views and the foreign policy of the United States. We expressed our views rather vigorously, Sullivan in particular. Patterson didn't seem to understand the

importance of this at all. He either didn't understand it, or didn't think anybody was going to pay any attention to what Wallace said.

So, it was Sullivan who called up Charlie Ross to find out if there would be some way to get hold of Wallace and ask him to modify his speech to the extent that it wouldn't contradict U.S. policy. It was late at night, or late in the evening, and time was

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running out. I believe that when all this hassle started we were almost up to the time when Wallace was going to speak. I forget what time he actually did speak, and indeed what he did say did represent a wide difference between his views and the views of the Administration.

President Truman had the speech in advance. He obviously had scanned it, probably very superficially, and, he told me, perhaps in the presence of others. I've forgotten. But having had the speech in his hand, he was responsible because he did approve it. His reason was that he trusted Henry Wallace. He couldn't imagine anybody would do the thing that Wallace had intended to do. Wallace felt that he had given it to the President, the President had approved it, so he had an open license. But in any event, I'm sure the President didn't read that speech.

HESS: I believe Wallace took that in to the President in person, did he not?

DENNISON: Yes, the President said that he took it in there and handed it to him and left it with him.

Do you want anything else on that particular

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point? I suggest you talk to Henderson on that.

HESS: All right. One other point of interest earlier on, before your White House days, was the nomination of Edwin W. Pauley to be Under Secretary of the Navy, and of course that nomination was withdrawn at Pauley's request in March of 1946. What's the story behind the nomination? Why was he nominated?

DENNISON: He was nominated because President Truman was carrying out the wishes of President Roosevelt. Roosevelt had made some kind of a promise to Pauley, or some kind of commitment, which he wasn't able to carry out because of his death. So President Truman looked on this as sort of a legacy, and he carried it out, or tried to. And then Mrs. Roosevelt had, as I recall in the hearings, said that her husband never would have made such a nomination. Roosevelt had written a memorandum addressed to Forrestal saying that he wanted, or intended, to appoint Pauley as some kind of an assistant to relieve, I believe it was [H] Struve Hansel, although I'm not sure that was who it was, with the idea of later moving him up to be Under Secretary. And Forrestal had said something to Pauley about this.

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An interesting point here is that at the time of Forrestal's death when I took the papers from the Defense Department that belonged to Forestal (at least they were his papers), Kate Foley and I went down to Forrestal's home in Georgetown. He had a large number of filing cabinets and in these filing cabinets (we could only take a sampling), were nothing but personal letters, people writing to congratulate him on something, and he'd write back and say, "Thanks very much," mostly trivia. But in the night table beside his bed (and this is all that was in the drawer that I can remember), was this memorandum from Franklin Roosevelt about Pauley. It must have weighed on his conscience. But in any event, he had that memorandum. He thought enough of it not to put it in his papers that he had in the Pentagon nor in his personal files. And I believe this was given to Ed Pauley. I think that he has that document.

And Pauley, being the kind of a man he was, was not about to contradict Mrs. Roosevelt or anybody else about whether or not her husband would have nominated him. And I think that Pauley, like many

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of us, wanted some position, not so much for himself as for his family, his children. He certainly behaved like a gentleman in this instance.

HESS: Some historians have said that he was being nominated for Under Secretary to be put in line to take over from Mr. Forrestal as Secretary of the Navy, and that the reason for the appointment was his service with the Democratic National Committee from 1941 to 1945. During that period of time he was Secretary of the Committee, Assistant Treasurer and Treasurer and was well-known for his fundraising activities. Do you think there is anything to that?

DENNISON: Not so far as I know. I mean there could be, but this was not part of President Roosevelt's written intention in any event. And I think President Truman, although he thought very highly of Pauley, never mentioned in my presence anything beyond this nomination to Under Secretary.

He did appoint Pauley to handle the reparations problems in Japan after the war, and in China. And maybe your records show that Artemus Gates and Pauley and I flew to Japan, and later into China, to Chungking, to see Chiang Kai-shek, and left

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Pauley out there to wrestle with these problems of reparations. Well, the President trusted him. I think his trust was well-founded, but I know nothing about this plan to make him Secretary of the Navy.

HESS: What were your impressions of conditions in Japan at that time? This was just after the war.

DENNISON: We were there, I believe, in October.

HESS: The month following the surrender?

DENNISON: Yes.

HESS: What were your impressions at the time, of the country, and of the people?

DENNISON: Well, in the first place, this was a trip that Forrestal was supposed to go on. We were to pick up Pauley in Honolulu, which we did; but at the last minute for some reason Forrestal withdrew and turned the job over to Artemus Gates. And we went to Japan. We went into China. We were in Peking, Chungking, Shanghai, and we talked to a great many people, including the Generalissimo.

In Japan we flew over and around Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This was a startling sight. Each of these cities was devastated. You could see the shadow cast by buildings in this atomic explosion, which was

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rather interesting. It hadn't knocked down some of the more substantial buildings, but the devastation in those two cities was not nearly so terrible as it was in Tokyo because of the fire bombings. There you could look for miles without seeing any chimneys or poles or anything where flimsy dwellings had been.

We landed in some airfield, I've forgotten the name of it, outside of Tokyo. The runways were filled with bomb holes and very few lights. Captain Vosler and I (I don't know what had happened to Gates), were in one car with a driver, a U.S. sailor, who was supposed to drive us to the railway station so we could go into Tokyo. Admiral [J. J.] Ballentine, an old friend of mine, was in Tokyo in charge of some mission or activity. But on the way in from the airfield to the railroad station it became clear that the driver was completely incompetent. He wasn't drunk but he drove as if he were. We went down a little dirt road which was only wide enough for a cart really. He sideswiped some poor Japanese's cart and drove on. On the right was a pretty considerable slope, and he went off the road, the right front wheel first, and then the car started to turn over. I was sitting

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on the right hand of the rear seat, the door opened, the car checked, you see, when it hit the mud, and I was thrown out and down the hill. The others were held in the car. It was just dusk, or almost dark, and I looked up (I was not unconscious but I was stunned), to see this damn car turning over and coming down on me. Fortunately, it didn't hit my face. My chin was out. I was too stunned to raise my hand and arms to try to check the car. So I was pinned under the damn thing, fortunately in soft mud, and then the gasoline cap came off of the tank. And I thought, "What a hell of a way to die," after having gone all through the whole war and to have a damn automobile fall on me outside of Tokyo.

The people inside the car had been knocked out. I yelled and started to wriggle out and I said, "For God's sake, stay where you are, because if this thing rolls another few inches why it's going to crush me." And because the ground was soft I was able to squirm out of it.

Well, there we were. We all had 45's and a little bit of luggage and had to find our way to the railroad station. This was so soon after the war we had no

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idea what the temper of the people would be. We got to the railway station and we expected almost anything. The Japanese train, of course; was completely surrounded by Japs. Everybody recognized the U.S. uniform, obviously. We didn't know what was going to happen.

Well, what happened was that they realized we didn't know where we were and all we wanted to do was to get to Tokyo, and they couldn't have been more courteous or more helpful. They made sure we got on the right train and the right car and tried to explain to us where to get off, and it was almost beyond belief. There wasn't a trace of animosity or resentment. And it was true in our brief stay in Japan that there didn't seem to be any ill feeling at all. It's their idea that whoever wins is automatically great. But this went beyond just the feeling of you're right and I'm wrong. It was acceptance, graceful acceptance, of the fact that we did win the war, whatever winning meant then, and we were there.

In China it seemed almost unreal. When we flew into Chungking--no, first Peking--(I had been

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there a couple of times before the war), the place was a shambles, mainly because the Japanese had let it go to hell, had taken all of the plumbing out of the hotels and things to make shells and weapons. The economy was completely shot. Everything was run down, most of the shops were closed and they were just getting back into business.

I went around to the British tennis club, a very old one that had been very exclusive, typical of British policy (which unfortunately we copied in the Philippines), of not admitting anybody but white people to the club. Japanese, of course, or Chinese, were completely excluded. Well, I thought I'd find this club burned to the ground. Instead of that, nothing had been touched. It was in beautiful condition. You'd think that somebody had used it just the day before. The only thing that was different in that club was in the lobby. There was a plaque that listed through the years the names of the presidents of the club, all, of course, English names. The last name on the plaque was a Japanese name.

HESS: They had moved in.

DENNISON: And hadn't touched a thing.

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HESS: Well, they didn't want to ruin a good thing, I guess.

DENNISON: And I went around to a shop where I had purchased some stuff before the war, just before the war broke out. I hadn't dealt before with this particular Chinese who was called "Old Friend," but a lot of Navy people had. He had the ability that many Chinese did of taking a catalog of pictures, for example, silver, and duplicating whatever you wanted, a pitcher, flatware or platters or whatnot, in sterling. The workmanship was superb.

So I said, "Well, how much is it?" And he told me. It didn't amount to very much money so I said, "Well, I'll pay you half of it and you send this order to Manila and I'll send you a check for the balance," which I think was \$80. The exchange at that time was around twenty Chinese dollars to one U.S. dollar, which was quite high, relatively high, and I said, "What will we do if the rate of exchange changes?"

Old Friend said, "Well, you pay me in Chinese dollars and you take a chance and I take a chance, and we forget about the rate of exchange."

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So I said, "All right."

I sent him a check, I got the silver, and then the check never cleared because the war broke out.

So I went around to see Old Friend to pay my debt. The place was all shuttered up, dusty, looked as if nobody was there. I hammered on the door and Old Friend, who lived over his shop, came down, was glad to see me, and asked me up to have a cup of tea. I said, "I've come to pay my bill. How much is it?"

He said, "You'll have to wait for a minute." And pretty soon one of his men came in with a big ledger, all covered with dirt.

I said, "What happened?"

He said, "Well, I had to bury all my records because they had so many American names in them that I thought the Japanese might think I was a spy." And he said, "I am just opening up for business."

I said, "Well, look up my account." Well, I owed him sixteen hundred Chinese dollars, something like that. And the exchange then, there wasn't any, you know it was thousands to one. Chinese money was absolutely worthless. I had a lot of

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Chinese dollars in my pocket and I was about to pay him (so he thought), sixteen hundred dollars, which was nothing. And when I saw that he was taking me seriously, that he intended to live up to his word, I said, "Now this is ridiculous. Neither one of us could foresee this kind of a catastrophe. So I'll pay in U.S. dollars what I would have paid you before the war."

Well, that was real riches to have U.S. dollars. But I owed him that much money and I insisted he take it, and then I said, "I'd like to buy something. How about some carved ivory?"

He said, "Well, I don't know how much ivory is. I'll have to send somebody out to find out how much it would cost me to replace this ivory."

A man went out and came back in a little while and told Old Friend something, and then Old Friend told me, "I can't sell you anything, because it isn't worth what I would have to ask for it, and furthermore I don't have any silversmiths or ivory carvers any more. They are all out pulling rickshaws. I don't know what I'm going to do."

And I said, "I don't care what it costs."

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I said, "Obviously whatever it costs is a good value. I'm willing to pay it."

No, he wouldn't let me do it. So then he gave me a beautiful carved rose quartz flask about three or four inches high.

But all this hasn't very much to do with what went on after the war, except to give you some idea of a few little facets of what life was like in China and Japan.

We did go to Chungking. This really was unreal. The idea was to talk to Chiang Kai-shek and some of his officials about reparations, mainly. We stayed at the palace compound. Chiang Kai-shek was living in what had been Sun Yat-sen's summer residence, but he had built in the compound several other buildings to house guests and his staff. We were all distributed among the two or three buildings around the palace. I was assigned a Chinese general as an escort. He had been in our country and spoke fluent English. The place where I stayed was absolutely crazy. It was two stories. The big central part of it had a fireplace at one end and a balcony all the way around it, with very narrow stairs going up

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to it. Then off of this balcony were bedrooms and bathrooms. Back of the fireplace was a library. This central hall was tremendous. The library was about as large as this table we're sitting at. The stairs going up to the balcony were extremely narrow. So was the balcony. The bedrooms were minute and the bathrooms were tremendous. I said to the General, "What kind of a crazy design is this?"

He said, "Well, Chiang Kai-shek pulled out a pad and drew a sketch of the way he wanted these buildings, and the architects took their rules and laid this out exactly to scale."

HESS: To scale.

DENNISON: To scale, and that's what he got.

Well, he had a banquet with some of his cabinet and Pauley and Gates and me, and then we met with Chiang Kai-shek and Madame, and an interpreter. The conversation got pretty deep and went into other things besides reparations. Finally Chiang Kai-shek threw the interpreter out and then Madame Chiang Kai-shek took over. She spoke with a great deal of eloquence and emotion. She was really extremely impressive. And looking back, it may have been a touch

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of theater, but it really came through. She quoted facts and figures and one thing and another. Even Chiang Kai-shek was entranced by this performance. In the middle of the recital of some of these figures he broke in and corrected her. Of course, we knew that he must understand English, but he wasn't about to admit it.

She said one thing that was quite touching. She said, "China can never be compensated for its lost youth," which of course is true, tragically true, in a good many countries.

HESS: What was their view on reparations? Did they want exorbitantly high reparations from the Japanese?

DENNISON: I don't--I got the impression--I mean it's been so long ago and I don't have a record of that, Pauley's papers must show it. They really didn't know what they wanted in anywhere near precise terms, because they didn't know, had no way of knowing, what any kind of compensation should be. They didn't know how much damage the country had suffered or what they needed. So I really don't know exactly what they were after, except that this was too soon after the war really to know, particularly sitting up at

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Chungking, for heaven's sake.

HESS: Briefly, what were your recommendations on reparations? Do you recall?

DENNISON: Well, this was not the responsibility of Gates or me. This was entirely up to Pauley. We left Pauley there. He hadn't had time to really get down to pencil and paper and find out, number one, what was Japan's capability to pay anything. Remember Japan had been beaten to her knees, so her economy was absolutely shot. And some of us, including me, had felt that she was beaten well before the dropping of the atomic bomb and that certainly there would be no need for invasion. But it could also be shown that there was a loss of acreage in Japan, that she couldn't possibly raise enough rice to feed the people, let alone develop any kind of an economy. They depended for fuel on countries outside of Japan, notably Southeast Asia. That's why they started out for Southeast Asia in the first place.

So the ability to pay, before we got into this massive aid business, was almost negligible. To my mind, discussing reparations at that particular stage of the game was almost an academic exercise,

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no matter what China needed or wanted. Even to talk about figures would be really dreaming. Now what Pauley finally reported I have no idea. But I'm sure that must be a matter of record someplace.

HESS: What was the nature of the charts that you took in to the President?

DENNISON: Well, they had to do with disposition of Chiang Kai-shek's troops and tried to give the President a picture of what North China looked like, the relative distances between say Tientsin and Peking. It was crazy--I mean that part of the world--because when we went by train up to Peking in the various stations we found Japanese soldiers, Chinese soldiers, in some places U.S. Marines, all in the same group in these various important points. They weren't doing anything. They certainly weren't fighting each other. Everybody had quit fighting, and here they were all getting along just like pals.

Then later, of course, and not too long later, there was a great clamor because our Marines were riding trains down from Chinwantao to Tientsin, I believe, and they were shot at. I don't think they were shot at because they were U.S. Marines. I just

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think there were a lot of bandits around that were shooting at anything like a train.

We were in the Shantung Peninsula. That was the Marine headquarters, and we could have stayed there until hell froze over. Nobody could possibly have thrown us out because we had a considerable naval force there and the position was such that they could only reach us by going over a long, narrow-necked peninsula. The whole course of history would have been changed had we just maintained a presence there. But remember, this was the time of the formation of the United Nations and our State Department was leaning over backwards to do nothing that would indicate that we were walking away from the Atlantic Charter. So it was a tragic mistake. But this was one of the things that we showed the President--where our forces were--and gave him some explanation about the feasibility of maintaining this position.

HESS: What did he say?

DENNISON: As I remember, he didn't comment very much at all. He may have asked a few questions but I wasn't sure that we had really gotten through to him on this

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point about policy. I mean, obviously, as far as I was concerned I was talking as a professional military man. And when I bore down as heavily as I could on providing him with enough background so that if there were a policy decision to stay there it could be made with the belief that strategically and militarily it was completely sound.

HESS: In your opinion, what was Mr. Truman's level of understanding of strategic international politics about this time in his career?

DENNISON: Well, at that particular juncture, remember this was still back in 1945, and this is a long look backwards, I think he was learning and I think it was very much like the same situation that faced President Kennedy when he took over the terrible Bay of Pigs responsibility. He had inherited, or thought he had, a lot of things from the previous administration, not necessarily political commitments, but strategic commitments. You see, Potsdam was President Truman's first appearance in this particular arena, and here was Roosevelt going through this whole string of conferences. Admiral Leahy was invaluable to President Truman because he had been there at

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these various meetings.

And about the invasion of Japan, for example, one of Roosevelt's great concerns was how many casualties we would suffer. I was then, as you know, on the Joint War Plans Committee, and sat through some sessions of the Joint Chiefs of Staff where this was discussed. Leahy would transmit this kind of a question to the Chiefs. Well, the estimates ranged from a complete slaughter of our forces to no problems at all. The invasion of Japan had to be done within a very narrow bracket of dates on account of weather. Either we did it then or we didn't do it for months. I forget the critical dates. I think they were some time in October.

HESS: The code name for that proposed invasion was Olympic Coronet, if I recall correctly.

DENNISON: Well, I had forgotten that. But it started with an invasion of Kyushu, as you remember.

HESS: And then the Honshu Plain.

DENNISON: Yes. And as it turned out it was completely unnecessary. But the orders were to mount this operation whether we were going to do it or not, because if you weren't ready you couldn't just decide

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at the last minute to do it. It was a tremendous undertaking and thankfully it never came off.

But to get back to when the war was on, and this may be a Navy viewpoint, but Leahy believed firmly, and so did a good many of us, that Japan was on her knees because she had no oil. She was completely cut off. The food problem was acute and they had to cave in. We didn't have to bomb them. We didn't have to invade them.

HESS: Do you think it was a mistake to drop those bombs?

DENNISON: No, I don't, but perhaps for a different reason than you may be thinking. It probably had a long term effect that would never have occurred if other means had been used to give dramatic evidence of how overwhelming this weapon was. And remember we're only talking about 18 thousand kilotons, not megatons. But had we not done it, no amount of test

firing, pictures and what not, could ever have driven home the lesson of how devastating a weapon this was and the great need to control it, or maybe someday eliminate it.

So, for that reason, I think that it was a wise decision. I think also this was a case where there had been so much momentum built up that President Truman

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felt that this decision was almost inevitable. Now I wasn't with him when he made that decision so I don't know. I never asked him what led up to it. I was with him when he made the decision to proceed with the development of the H-bomb, which was a different matter, but an extremely courageous and wise decision.

I don't know, but the dropping of these bombs, although militarily unnecessary, turned into a demonstration that the world damn well had to have and maybe he was farsighted enough to see this.

HESS: You mentioned the H-bomb. There were quite a few people against that. Several of the people on the Atomic Energy Commission themselves did not think the bomb should be developed. Some of them on the Atomic Energy Commission, I believe Admiral Strauss for one, thought that it should be. What do you recall about that decision and the pressures on both sides?

DENNISON: Well, there was a great deal of discussion on this point, and the President had some competent advisers on opposite sides. This may be over-simplification, but the people who said we shouldn't

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go ahead with it were saying that it would take a baggage car to carry the damn thing, that you couldn't deliver it, it had to be too big, we didn't have any idea of building any delivery vehicle because you couldn't with such a massive thing, it was just impractical and probably wouldn't work anyhow.

There were no arguments on the strategic side that the thing was not desirable. It was all based on infeasibility. The thing wouldn't work, or you couldn't deliver it, or it's too big, too heavy, or too something. The other side pointed out, and this was just one of the reasonings that President Truman followed, that if we didn't do this, and they felt it could be done, we were going to lose the race before it began because the Soviets surely would develop it.

And again he did some real soul-searching on this one. He held a press conference, released a statement, and explained why he did it, in very simple but very clear terms. I got a copy of this statement and it had this one paragraph typed out where he gave his reasons for doing it, based entirely on national security, and it appeared to be a gamble

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because here were these eminent scientists saying it's ridiculous. But it wasn't a capricious decision, believe me. I took this in to the President and said, "Mr. President, I have never done this before, and I promise you never to do it again, but I think this is so significant, would you mind signing this?" And he did and gave it back to me. I gave it to the Naval Academy museum, I think. But this was an extremely courageous decision because the people who had views didn't base them on political reasons at all. They were basing them on scientific background and beliefs, and these were all reputable people. Nobody had any axe to grind or selfish interests anywhere.

The A-bomb decision, of course, was made, as I recall, aboard the *Augusta*, at sea.

The other decision was made in his office at the White House. But Bohlen, who was an Ambassador and is now retired, was at many of these conferences, including Potsdam. And I've heard the President and others tell so often about a discussion that came up where Churchill or somebody was pointing out the tremendous influence of the Catholic Church on some of

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the strategies we might wish to adopt. Stalin, according to President Truman and others, was supposed to have said, "How many divisions has the Pope?" Well, I asked Bohlen once, "Please tell me, I've heard this so often, exactly what was the context, why was it said, and all about it."

And Bohlen said, "Well, Bob, it never happened." He said, "I was there every minute of every conversation and it just never happened."

HESS: He just didn't say that. Is that right?

DENNISON: Yes. It was a hell of a good story anyhow, but I don't know where the President picked it up.

HESS: You mentioned there was some discussion as to whether the bomb would work. I believe Admiral Leahy didn't think the atomic bomb would work. Have you ever heard that?

DENNISON: Oh yes, I know that. No, he didn't think it would because--as he said in his own book, *I Was There*--he was basing this opinion on his experience in ordnance.

HESS: As an explosives expert.

DENNISON: Yes. But this was a different field and it wasn't the kind of explosives that he knew much about. No, he was convinced that this thing was a dream. It

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couldn't possibly work. But he wasn't wrong very often.

HESS: All right. At the conclusion of our last session we were discussing Mr. Truman's victory in 1948. What was the atmosphere around the White House in the few days following that

election? Mr. Truman went down to Key West and he was at Key West from the 7th to the 21st. Were you back at the White House between the election and the time that you left for Key West, do you recall? I think that the election was on the 2nd.

DENNISON: Oh, I think I had to be. There wouldn't be any other place because I was with the President when he went to Key West, and I was in Washington when the election occurred. As a matter of fact, I had lunch the day after at the Carlton Club. The members of that club are practically one hundred percent Republican.

HESS: What was their attitude? One of disbelief?

DENNISON: Well, if I had wanted to bet and make money, I could have gotten odds of a hundred to one that President Truman wasn't going to be elected.

HESS: You could be a wealthy man.

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DENNISON: I could certainly tell these men were wealthy. I didn't have any money, but I could have bet maybe a couple of hundred dollars. But I just didn't like to bet because I really knew that he was going to be elected. I felt I would be betting on a sure thing. But when I went into the lobby of the hotel where the club met, here was this edition of the *Chicago Tribune*.

HESS: That "Dewey Defeats Truman" issue.

DENNISON: Yes, and I got one and took it up to the club. Well, God, they couldn't believe that Truman had won. By that time it was certain. I mean he had been elected.

HESS: Showing them an issue like that was more or less like rubbing salt in the wounds, was it not?

DENNISON: Oh, kind of a dirty trick, but they had been picking on me for so long about my being a Democrat. Hell, I'd never voted while I was in the Navy. But I was sure when I did vote I would vote for the Democratic Party because of President Truman.

HESS: What was the atmosphere in Key West when you arrived down there? Was it any different from any of the other trips? Was Mr. Truman more elated, more relaxed?

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DENNISON: No. I told you about this talk we had aboard the *Williamsburg*, I think, before he went back to vote.

HESS: When he was sure, that he would be elected?

DENNISON: Yes. As he said, "I'm elected." And he told me then, too, just to refresh your memory, that he wasn't concerned about being elected. He was concerned about the terrible four

years ahead. So he didn't feel jubilant or relaxed. He had been working like hell. It was no surprise to him that he was elected. It wasn't, "Oh, gee," I mean, "All of a sudden I'm President of the United States." I don't know what the rest of the staff thought, but I think they must have thought very much as I did, that this was inevitable. It wasn't some startling present out of the blue. So far as I can remember there was no difference in that particular trip than any other he made.

HESS: We have Commander William Rigdon's logs and among the people who came down later were the new Vice President [Alben] Barkley, Leslie Biffle, J. Howard McGrath, William Boyle and Mon Walgren. Do you

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recall those people down there on this visit?

DENNISON: Oh, yes. And remember it was an interesting list because it was pretty heavily loaded on the political side. All of them were political friends of Truman.

HESS: All right. About Key West in general, just how was business conducted when you were at Key West, not only on this trip but on all trips? What was the procedure in Key West?

DENNISON: Our visits at Key West really followed a pattern. The President was quite methodical. He wanted a routine. He wanted the same thing done every time--the same time every day...

HESS: Every day and every time.

DENNISON: So that's why it is difficult to recall these individual visits because they were all in the same pattern. I think I have told you, maybe I haven't, about the illusion he had that this was a great holiday. Have I gone into that with you?

HESS: I don't think so. We may have off the tape, but I don't believe we have it on tape.

DENNISON: Well, here we were, in the Little White House.

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We couldn't see the water because of the administration building in front of it. The grounds were fairly large. We weren't hemmed in, but we were completely protected, or he was, being in a naval base. Access was completely controlled and the press were housed some distance away. He wanted to put on a sport shirt the minute he got there. He was on a vacation. He didn't bring down any personal secretaries. Rose [Conway] never went. My Chief Yeoman, who in the end was with me something like thirteen years, took all his dictation, did all his work for him. He was completely trustworthy and, of course, the President knew that. He wasn't ever going to open his mouth, not even to me. I'd have shot him if he ever tried. I don't think he ever would try.

HESS: Who was he?

DENNISON: His name was Bernace L. Winkler, Chief Yeoman. He's now retired and working in Saigon for Standard of New Jersey. He is a fine man. Except for me, with Winkler, nobody had any secretaries down there so we didn't have instant communications anywhere. We had our own switchboard. A lot of business had to be done by telephone and we had to work like hell

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and still not give the appearance of working, because the President didn't want that. So it really was hell for all of us but we had our reward in knowing that he was really having a great time.

I remember one trip that we made by sea in the *Williamsburg*. As soon as we got aboard, the President's holiday began. He was a hell of a poor sailor, but the weather was good. It had been predicted good and was good. So we cruised down to Key West. One time the President came out on the afterdeck and saw Wallace Graham with a table full of papers and books, working like hell, writing things in longhand. And the President did something that really shocked everybody. It was, it seemed to us, so uncharacteristic. He walked over to the table, picked up this load of papers and threw the whole thing over the rail. I wish I had a picture of Graham's face.

HESS: What did Dr. Graham say? Anything at all?

DENNISON: He just gasped. I think he finally came out with, "Oh, Mr. President!" But if we needed any further instruction that gave us the word that by God as far as he was concerned this was a vacation. But it was an illusion, and it's one that we tried

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to create and were successful in creating.

Just to show you the pattern, every morning at whatever time it was, I think 10:30, everybody would walk down to the beach to go swimming. And our meals were exactly at the same time every day. It was a military routine. Well, of course, my whole life has been in that pattern and it doesn't bother me a bit. I prefer it that way myself. And then he loved to play cards, and I don't know how many thousands of dollars passed across that poker table.

In fact, the game we played was a strange one. In the first place, the President never won. He didn't want to take money from his staff. He was an excellent poker player, but he never played that way. He always stayed until the last card. He always wanted to be in on every hand. When we went down there we'd each put \$50 or \$75 in the pot and we'd get chips. We'd play a \$2 limit so you could lose your stack pretty fast. But when you lost your initial stake the banker (we took turns being banker), who had been taking chips out of the pot every hand, would give you \$10. If you lost that you'd get another \$10 which you didn't have to pay back. So all the

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amount of money that went back and forth across the table in the end represented only \$50 or \$75 per person. Well, at the end of these games, maybe two weeks or ten days or whatever, I

don't think anybody ever won or lost more than \$30, except the President. Maybe he had \$10 when he ended up because everybody got that when they lost everything.

HESS: I believe that you've been instrumental in the last few weeks in obtaining that table for the Truman Library. Is that right?

DENNISON: Well, I hope so. I have the promise that it's on its way, but I haven't checked into it lately.

HESS: Is the commander of the base down there a friend of yours?

DENNISON: Yes. But the thing that makes it possible, I imagine, is because, as I understand it, they're closing that base. But I haven't checked into it lately. I hope it's on its way because the President got so much pleasure around that table. And it wasn't playing cards for money. It was a friendly session. Everybody played as if they were playing for a hell of a lot of money, except the President, and he didn't throw money away. He just stayed on foolish hands and

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then in stud games he always wanted to see the last card unless the hand was hopeless.

HESS: Did you go with the President on his trips to Shangri-La and also aboard the *Williamsburg* usually?

DENNISON: Yes, always, because--and remember, obviously the *Williamsburg* was part of the Navy installation and so was Shangri-La run by the Navy and both were really command posts.

HESS: I understand one time Commander Rigdon had to get his boys to cut down some of the trees up there and, as he told me, it was a rather odd task for sailors, but he had them do it anyway.

DENNISON: Well, the reason back of it was that Roosevelt had had this setup and it is an odd place for sailors. Sailors are pretty talented--some of them, most of them--and they can do anything.

HESS: Versatile people.

DENNISON: You're so right. Incidentally, Shangri-La is not just one place. It's a series of small cabins and they are related to some project of Roosevelt's having to do with national parks or something like that. The main cabin was three or four of these smaller ones put together to make a galley, a

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living room and, as I recall it, four bedrooms and two or three baths, not large. The elevation is somewhere around 1800 feet so it was cooler than the valley floor. We had a pool but it wasn't heated and the water was icy cold. But the cabin was a miserable place because there was no

outside terrace. The trees were grown up so you couldn't see anything. You looked into a dense bank of foliage. You couldn't breathe in it. So I asked the President if he would mind if I changed it a little bit.

And, as usual, he said, "Sure, go ahead." so I had them strip out all the underbrush and open the place up. We put in a terrace so you could sit out there and look over this beautiful valley, and we opened up the front of the property so we had quite a large lawn down to the edge of trees that you could look over from where you sat. It was delightful. We did quite a bit of, you wouldn't call it landscaping, but clearing out underbrush and all that kind of stuff to open it up.

The President didn't use Shangri-La nearly as much as he did the *Williamsburg*, but quite a bit. He was extremely generous and if any of the staff

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wanted to use it for a weekend or something, they'd come and tell me. The President had already told me that anybody who wanted to use it (any of the staff, not anybody), it would be fine with him.

HESS: Did President Truman also like to play cards at Shangri-La and aboard the *Williamsburg*?

DENNISON: Oh, he played aboard the *Williamsburg* a great deal.

HESS: Did he ever play cards in the White House?

DENNISON: Not to my knowledge. I doubt very much if he did. He didn't play golf. He had no interests whatever except playing cards and walking. He was a terrible swimmer and, of course, he wore his trifocals in the water, which just shook me the first time I saw that. He loved to get in the water. We used to go down the Potomac and anchor at the mouth and everybody went swimming. We did that many times. He did a great deal of reading (I forgot to say that's another interest he had). I never saw a man who read more than he did and I certainly never saw anybody who remembered more of what he read than he did.

Poker and the White House didn't quite match,

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but he took me on trips in the *Williamsburg* when he did play poker for high stakes. He wouldn't let me play because he said I couldn't afford it, and he was so right. He played a really stupid game. It wasn't terribly stupid, but he never won. I'd scold him a little bit and say, "You're really such a good poker player, why don't you win occasionally?"

He said, "Well, how can I invite my friends down to play cards with me and then take their money?" He said, "I can't do that."

I said, "Well, for God's sake, don't make it so apparent that you're not trying."

HESS: That you're throwing the game.

DENNISON: But I was allowed to participate in one thing and I made quite a bit of money on that. Before they played, everybody made out a list of the order in which he thought people would finish. It was who was the greatest winner and who was the greatest loser. Symington and Clark Clifford (usually those two were tops), really played a wonderful game of poker. They were great people to play with, but they really knew that game and played it very well. Vinson played almost as bad a game as President Truman,

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and Clinton Anderson, and a few others in between. Well, invariably all these men, when they put in their list, would put down the President as number one, two or three. Well, he never was anyplace near that.

So I'd be more realistic and figure out which one was going to be worse, Vinson or President Truman, and put them down at the bottom, and then the only other choice I'd have to make was which was going to be better that night, Clifford or Symington. So I'd make out my list and I knew--I'd watched these people play so often that I knew pretty much how they were going to come out and I don't think I ever lost. We each put in \$10. The President liked to have seven in the game. I think five or six is better, but he didn't, and it was his game. So I'd win \$70 every trip.

But he did this on weekends and this was an illusion too. The reason that I was along was not to play cards, but again, to stand between him and communications. The *Williamsburg* was really a floating command post and somebody had to be there, somebody trusted, to handle matters. Of course, he knew that

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we had this communications facility and that it was a good one. It had to be, and it was tied in to part of our emergency planning of "where does the Government go in case of an atomic attack?"

I had to do with the Executive Office, or Executive Department plans, related to the President. Dave Stowe was the head man in arranging for all the other departments. We had places all over the countryside for various parts of our Government to go. Greenbriar, for example, tied into where Congress would go, not the executive branch, obviously, and we had a very sophisticated, for that time, microwave communications link all over the place. There was a bomb shelter in the White House and I had to do with that.

HESS: Were you also in charge of what records would be removed from the White House and taken to wherever the President was going to go?

DENNISON: Oh, I suppose I was because there was nobody else to do it. The problem in any of these temporary command posts was to have facilities for the President to communicate on some

kind of a broadcasting system--television if you could do it--and radio certainly. The laying of cables and all of these

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matters was a very, very complicated problem, and also the interconnection between the President, the Vice President and the Cabinet. This had to be pretty secure and pretty good. But we had the *Williamsburg*. We had railway trains on either side of the river and plenty of automobiles. We had a number of different options for evacuation. I was appointed by the President to handle this end of it. We had as sophisticated a plan as we could conceive, and I worked quite closely with Stowe, of course, and on paper our plans looked pretty good. We never had a drill because it would have thrown the country into a complete uproar if the whole damn Government had moved out of Washington.

But one day the President told me something which is so characteristic of him. He said, "Of course, you've got to go ahead with all of this planning and all of these arrangements, but I want to tell you one thing. If a situation ever develops where execution seems to be indicated, I don't intend to leave the White House." He said, "I am going to be right here."

And then I said, "Well, I expected that, knowing you. "

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He said, "I would like to be as sure as I can that there's some way that I can get on the air to talk to the people of the United States, to assure them that I am here, that I'm not up in the hills some place, and to tell them what I can of the situation." Of course, I never told anybody that because we had to take this planning seriously.

HESS: Was it ever discussed with President Truman that it might have been the best thing for him to leave town?

DENNISON: Look, I knew President Truman better than that. Actually, there was no point in my ever bringing up that subject, to say, "I believe that you, as Commander in Chief, ought to be protected." In his mind, and I'm not one to say that he's wrong, the primary requirement was for the people of this country to realize that he was not going to run any place, that he was doing business so long as he could, right where he always had. If he survived the first attack, fine. If he didn't, the whole thing was academic anyhow, but if he did the chances were that there wouldn't be a recurring attack, at least so we thought in those days. Even now I doubt, if this horrible thing ever came to pass,

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that there would be waves of attack on the same target. I don't think it would be necessary. The lethal radius of these hydrogen bombs is tremendous.

But at any rate, that's the way he believed, and by God, you had better believe along with him.

HESS: Where were the points out of town that had been selected for him to move to?

DENNISON: Well, Shangri-La was one. The *Williamsburg*, of course, was another. Those are the only two in this area. We had other places. I've forgotten now where they were, probably the Homestead, or some place like that. But it was a very complete plan, and of course, if you're interested in that, the whole executive branch part of it, Dave Stowe has it.

I had a tape, which I think I sent to the Truman Library, of a briefing that Stowe gave, and if I recall it's based in part on my part of this plan. I was there anyhow, and I think that's in the Truman Library. It's a seven inch reel or whatever the standard size is.

But all these plans of moving by train or by car, or by ship, or whatever, really didn't appeal

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to the President. He wanted everybody else the hell out of there obviously.

Well, nobody was going to leave him in the White House, but he wanted to be sure that somewhere, somehow, the Government was going to continue. But as far as he was concerned, he looked on himself as being expendable, provided the machinery for operating the Government still existed somewhere.

HESS: In several of the interviews I have had, I've heard something like the following: "Even though Admiral Dennison was the President's Naval Aide, he did not confine himself to merely the duties of that office, but was very helpful to Mr. Truman as an all around adviser, particularly in the field of foreign affairs." Do you think that's a fair appraisal?

DENNISON: I find a couple of things wrong with it. In the first place, you mentioned my confining myself or not confining myself. I never volunteered anything. Any lack of confinement was doing exactly what the President wanted. When Admiral Leahy left and I took over the receipt of all of the papers he was getting from the Atomic Energy Commission, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Department of State, and other agencies,

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I didn't assume his principal role as adviser to the President. After all, he was Chief of Staff. I wasn't. So I looked on myself more as a means of communication than anything else. Obviously the President couldn't get this mass of stuff that came into the White House every day and make any sense out of it. So I'd have to select those things that I realized were important enough to be brought to his attention to keep him informed.

Now, other than that he would ask me occasionally for my views on something, and advising the President is a pretty touchy thing because everybody, including myself, is bound to be influenced by personal prejudices or feelings. And when you talk to a President you had better know what you're talking about or say you don't, if you don't. I never had anything to do with politics, number one. And in the field of foreign affairs he had people who were real experts whom he

trusted, such as Acheson, who was very close. So it would be presumptuous of me to ever volunteer anything. I never looked on myself as an adviser to the President in these matters.

Now maritime matters are something else again.

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I'm supposed to be an expert in that field, and I have, in that field and related fields, been consulted by him and he acted in almost every instance in accordance with my recommendations to him. But foreign affairs are a different matter. Sure, I know something about foreign affairs, or did. That's not to say I was an authority like Acheson.

So, number one, I never volunteered in fields I had no expertise in, and never looked on myself as being an adviser. A friend, yes. I feel that the President and I worked closely. It took me two years before he really trusted me, not that he distrusted me, but he just didn't know me well enough, nor did I know him. He had this impenetrable shell that he put around himself that was almost impossible to break through. You couldn't break through it. I mean he had to take you into his confidence. You couldn't break in. It would have been stupid to try.

HESS: Did he often ask your advice on matters of foreign policy, foreign affairs?

DENNISON: Rarely. Sometimes he'd pull my leg when we were talking on political matters with other people by asking me for my non-political advice on the matters

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we were discussing.

HESS: You told me one time about an incident involving General Bradley and the morning reports, the morning security reports.

DENNISON: Now this is typical of two things; one, General Bradley's attitude, and two, the President's. Shortly before Admiral Leahy left the President called both of us in and explained exactly what he wanted; namely, that all the letters, dispatches, documents, anything that Admiral Leahy had been getting from all sources, some of them very, very highly classified, were to come to me. General Bradley had become, by law, first Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He didn't know me. I certainly didn't know him. We were in different theaters during the war. He wondered why a naval officer would be put in this position of briefing the President on what the Joint Chiefs of Staff were doing--not only a naval officer, but a very junior one. Naturally he didn't think it was a good idea.

So he came to see the President and the President sent for me. The General pointed out that he was the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, it was his responsibility to keep the President informed, and

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this he would do, with the President's permission. Well, the President said, "Well, fine. Why don't you and Bob go into the Cabinet Room and come to some kind of an agreement and come back and tell me what it is?"

We did and it turned out that Bradley would see to it that I got all the politico-military information, and all the intelligence and things like that, but on military matters he and he alone would advise the President, or inform him.

So the President said, "Fine, let's do it that way."

So things went along for a couple of weeks. He sent for me one day, and he didn't scold me, but as always he was very, very gentle--too gentle. He had read something in the morning newspaper about Korea, on what was going on, and said, "How does it happen that I didn't know about this?"

And I said, "Well, I didn't know about it either until I read about it in the paper." I said, "Don't you remember the agreement that we had with General Bradley?"

And he said, "Oh, yes. I'm sure it won't happen again."

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Well, of course it did. This time he sent for me and said, "Please call General Bradley and come in here with him when he comes."

So we went in and sat down. Bradley knew what was coming and he apologized. Well, it turned out exactly as anybody could have foreseen. You just can't drop in and talk to the President. You've got to have an appointment and all that. I could get in any time between appointments, or if it was a matter of urgency even if he had one. But if you're over in the Pentagon you can't do that. Not only was the President extremely busy, but so was General Bradley. There was so much going on and information just fell by the wayside. The President said, "Well, why don't we go back to the system we had before we had this arrangement?" In the meantime Bradley had found out that I wasn't motivated by anything except serving the President, and he readily agreed, so we fell out and fell back in where we were when we started the whole thing.

HESS: Earlier, before we started, you told me an interesting incident about the time that Louis Johnson took over as Secretary of Defense, cancelled the

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contract for the U.S.S. *United States*, and John Sullivan resigned. Would you repeat that again for the tape, about John Sullivan's resignation?

DENNISON: Well, when this announcement was made by Secretary Johnson that the contract to build the U.S.S. *United States*, which was going to be a large aircraft carrier, was cancelled, Sullivan hadn't been consulted about it. He was in Texas making a speech when he learned about it, I think through the press. He came back to Washington and was absolutely infuriated. He

called me at the White House and asked me to come down to his office. As I recall, it was about 6 o'clock or so in the evening. Several other people were in his office. I've forgotten who they were. Perhaps Marx Leva was one. He had been waiting to dictate to Kate Foley, and the minute I came in and sat down he started. Well, this was a letter of resignation addressed to the President, and it was a pretty strong letter.

The President had no part in this decision of Johnson's. I don't know exactly why Johnson made it. Perhaps it was because of budgetary considerations, but whatever the reason, Sullivan hadn't been informed

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or consulted. There was something wrong with all of this, it seemed to me. I went into his outer office and called up Ross, and I forget whether Charlie came down or whether he talked to Sullivan on the phone. At any rate, he told Sullivan that he should not, or could not, send such a letter to the President, that if he was going to resign he should send a letter to Louie Johnson. Sullivan pointed out that Johnson hadn't appointed him. He was appointed by the President, which was certainly true.

Well, he was finally convinced that regardless of the legality of it, he could not send this to the President because, as Ross and I both pointed out, the President and Sullivan were good friends and nothing should happen to interfere with their personal relationship. This letter was bound to become public, and would represent a split between Sullivan and the President the way it was phrased. So Sullivan did resign to Johnson and then, of course, he must have had some kind of personal communication with the President. I didn't see whatever letter he wrote to him. But anyway the thing was irreversible. He

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couldn't stay on. He didn't impair any relationship he had with the administration. He came out of it about as well as he could expect to, except of course we didn't get the U.S.S. *United States*.

HESS: How much responsibility should be borne by Louis Johnson for the reduction in the armed forces at this time, and for the cancellation of the aircraft carrier? Was that his action, or was it just something that was inescapable for him because of the budget limitations (and the Director of the Bureau of the Budget at that time, I believe, was James Webb), because of the limitations of the money and the finances that were given to the Pentagon?

DENNISON: Well, remember I was in the White House. I wasn't in the Pentagon, so I don't know what the budget figures were or whether this was indeed a factor. But it appeared from the way Johnson made these decisions, for example this one we've just been talking about, that if the decision were indicated by financial pressure of some kind, Sullivan should have been told about it. I just can't believe that the budget all of a sudden appeared and there wasn't enough money for the carrier. Obviously the preparation of the budget is a pretty tough operation. But

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in these decisions that Johnson made he gave me the impression of being arbitrary. He was the one who was doing this. The damned armed forces were too greedy and he was very much opposed to the Navy. The Navy was really a terrible outfit because they were anti-unification, the whole damn Navy. His prejudices were very strong.

Well, I don't know how much he was influenced by considerations other than his own judgment, but without knowing in detail exactly what these prejudices were, I certainly had the impression that they were 99.99 percent Louis Johnson.

The case about the veterans hospital, or the naval hospital, is a similar kind of a decision where he decided to close down a hospital without any regard for the impact it would have on anything else except that one particular hospital. The impact, of course, was tremendous. We discussed this earlier.

HESS: We're just about down to the end of this reel of tape; do you have anything else you would like to cover this afternoon?

DENNISON: When our son, Robert, was christened in

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February of 1949 we were living in the Westchester Apartments in Washington. We invited a small group of friends, including President and Mrs. Truman and Margaret. There were no photographers or reporters present and I had deliberately not advised the management that the President would attend. Quite understandably they were thrown into complete confusion when the advance guard of Secret Service showed up before the ceremony and when the President and his family left quite a crowd had gathered just to see him.

Our son's Godmother was Jane [Mrs. John B.] Veach. She was born in Pennsylvania, as was her husband. John and I grew up together until our ways parted when he went to Yale and I to the Naval Academy.

Jane Veach and Mrs. Truman had worked together side by side in the USO here in Washington, washing dishes and doing similar jobs. They became friends in spite of the fact that Jane was a dyed-in-the-wool Republican.

After the simple but dignified Episcopalian ceremony by a Naval Chaplain, Mrs. Truman drew me aside to ask why Jane Veach was Robert's Godmother.

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I knew exactly what she had in mind so I told her that Jane's father had taken my mother to her first dance. Mrs. Truman's typical response was, "Well, I guess that takes care of that."

Mrs. Truman was one of the most honest and most kind persons I ever knew. She was strictly a no-nonsense type although she had a good sense of humor. Several times after a large reception the Trumans and the Aides who assisted would go up to the President's library for a sandwich

and a cup of coffee. Mrs. Truman's hand was so swollen she would have to keep it immersed in warm water, but she never complained. She never seemed to master the President's technique of shaking hands to avoid crushing handclasps of people he was greeting. His technique was to push his hand in as far as possible and grip first. In this position it was impossible for the other person to grip hard.

I also remember one particularly trying day in Missouri in mid-summer. This was an occasion at an open air ceremony under the blazing sun in a dead calm. The ceremony seemed endless and was almost unbearable. I was sitting next to Mrs. Truman and

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apparently she sensed my distress and whispered to me not to think ahead but to think only of what was happening at this particular moment. This was her formula for enduring almost anything.

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Third Oral History Interview with Admiral Robert L. Dennison,
Washington, D.C., November 2, 1971. By Jerry N. Hess, Harry S. Truman Library.

HESS: Admiral, let's discuss the Korean conflict. Now that started in June of 1950. Where were you when you first learned of the invasion?

DENNISON: Well, it turned out that that weekend was one in which the President had accepted an engagement to open Friendship Airport, which at that time was quite a few miles from nowhere.

HESS: There are those that say it still is.

DENNISON: I think the problem now is that a lot of nowhere has moved right next door to us, it is harder to get to.

HESS: I guess so.

DENNISON: But we went. As I recall, it was either Friday or Saturday, probably Saturday. At any rate, since we were so near to Annapolis I asked the President if he minded if I spent the next day or two in Annapolis and, as usual, he said, "Why, certainly, anything you want."

So that's where I was. I was in Carvel Hall Hotel when I got the word about Korea and, of course,

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I returned to Washington immediately and went to the White House. By that time...

HESS: President Truman had flown on to his home in Independence, Missouri right after the dedication of Friendship Airport.

DENNISON: Oh, he had?

HESS: Yes.

DENNISON: Well, when did he return to Washington, do you remember?

HESS: Sunday evening.

DENNISON: Well, that's when I got there. But things had moved pretty fast, as you know. He had already made up his mind what had to be done, and he did it. I wasn't with him when he made that decision, but I'm sure he followed the same formula that he had told me about, and I've told you, about how he did make a decision.

I've never heard him express an opinion as to whether Dean Acheson's remarks about our defense perimeter (not including Korea), had anything to do with what happened there, nor, of course, could we know or have planned on the fortuitous absence of the Soviets from the Security Council at that time. The President realized that he couldn't delay on this one.

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HESS: When did you first see President Truman after he arrived? Did you see him that Sunday evening?

DENNISON: It's been so many years ago. I believe I did, because there wouldn't have been any point in my coming back to Washington to just go on home.

HESS: There was a meeting at the Blair House on Sunday evening which several people attended; Dean Acheson, Secretary of Defense Johnson, the service secretaries, Frank Pace, Matthews, Finletter; the Joint Chiefs of Staff, [Omar N.] Bradley, [T. Lawton] Collins, [Hoyt S.] Vandenberg and [Forrest P.] Sherman, and Dean Rusk and John Hickerson, and Ambassador-at-Large Philip Jessup. They met on Sunday evening and they met again on Monday evening. Do you recall if there were there any advisers, that you heard about, who thought it best not to enter into such a conflict?

DENNISON: No, I don't. It's not very likely that anyone would have had any very strong views on our not getting in because this was clearly a danger and a threat, and if it hadn't been met

forcefully and promptly it would have gotten completely out of hand. God knows it got far enough out of hand as it was.

The thing about Korea that is also true about

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Vietnam (and it's going to be true in other places as well, I'm afraid), is that this was a limited war, limited in the sense that our objectives were limited, which people seem to have forgotten. That kind of a war isn't settled on the battlefield. It can't be. We're not fighting wars where we demand unconditional surrender, as we mistakenly did in World War II. We didn't even get an unconditional surrender there. It might have been a good policy at the time Roosevelt enunciated it, but only to satisfy our allies that we weren't going to make an independent deal for peace. But even there, in a battlefield war, it didn't work. And it would work even less now because we're not about to devastate countries and put in our own governments and that sort of thing. So it means that we've got to end up at a negotiating table. And, of course, the best way, the best position to have at the negotiating table is a position of strength. And here we are in Korea, no peace, still talking, and there isn't much hope of any successful negotiations in Vietnam, which is somewhat of a parallel I believe.

But to get back to your question. I don't recall, but I would seriously doubt, knowing these

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people whom you mentioned, that anybody in that group would voice any objection, or voice anything except approval and support. I have no idea whether any record or any minutes were kept, but some of these people I knew extremely well, Forrest Sherman and Hickerson, for example, and others.

HESS: Our troops actually went into Korea under the U.N. banner. Do you think that if U.N. backing could not have been arranged we would have gone into Korea unilaterally?

DENNISON: Oh, I'm sure we would. It was much better to have the blessing of the United Nations Organization if only to avoid having the organization, or parts of it, aligned against us, not militarily, but in disapproving of our policy, just as in the Cuban missile crisis where the Organization of American States underwrote our actions. Not only that, but several Latin American nations turned over ships to my command, so it made a token military contribution as well. But a deliberate, unilateral action, without an attempt to recognize our responsibilities to these world organizations, I think is unthinkable. It was then and I think it is now.

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HESS: Do you recall if you ever heard President Truman make a statement to the effect that if the United Nations had not gone along he would have recommended our going in by ourselves?

DENNISON: Oh, in the first place, the answer to that is no. But in the second place: I can't imagine that they ever would because he was not going to recommend anything. He was

Commander in Chief. He could order, it done, and I'm sure--as sure as I can be--that our going in was not contingent upon the United Nations action.

Suppose, for example, if it had not been for this circumstance of the Soviets being absent, we probably would have run into a Security Council veto. But our allies would have known, the world would have known, that we came clean on it. We felt that this was something we had to face. We asked for the United Nations participation and didn't get it because of the intransigence of one of the permanent members of the Council.

But I can't imagine that the President would ever have considered recommending going in there. He didn't operate that way. And this is one of the reasons today,

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to get back to what I said about limited wars, that we are in this gray area of fighting without a declaration of war.

HESS: If we were ill-prepared to meet the situation that arose at the time of the Korean invasion, how did that condition come about?

DENNISON: It came about mainly through a belief on the part of some that World War II had pretty well settled everything and that things were going to be stable for a long time. And following World War II, as is true after so many wars, military strength seemed to be expensive and we really didn't need all the force we had. So Johnson really cut the heart out of the services in many ways. It was false economy, of course. Fortunately this happened so closely on the heels of World War II that we did have a lot of military strength that couldn't really be dismantled. But economy was the watchword and Johnson, of course, I think was motivated very largely by political rather than military considerations.

HESS: Did you ever hear any discussion about Secretary Johnson having political ambitions of running on the ticket for the presidential spot?

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DENNISON: No, I never did, but if he ever had such an aspiration it would have been absolutely ridiculous.

HESS: Do you think that was a little above him?

DENNISON: Oh, not even within sight, let alone reach.

HESS: At the same time that we sent forces into Korea references were made as to what we should do about Indochina, and just before the time, on May the 1st of 1950, President Truman approved the allocation of ten million dollars for the Defense Department to cover early shipment of military assistance items for the French in Indochina.

Now, according to the Pentagon Papers that came out recently, that was the first crucial decision regarding U.S. military involvement in Indochina, May the 1st of 1950. They may be wrong, but that's what they have said. And then on June the 27th of 1950, shortly after the invasion of Korea, President Truman issued a statement on a situation in which he had the following paragraph:

I have similarly directed an acceleration of the furnishing of military assistance to the forces of France and the Associated States in Indochina and the dispatch of a military mission to provide close working relations with those forces.

What was the view at this time? What was the

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President's view? What was the view of the people on the White House staff around him and of his advisers on the advisability of concerning ourselves with matters in Indochina?

DENNISON: Well, I couldn't read the President's mind. I do know the general atmosphere. There was one school of thought that believed very strongly that we should provide active support, militarily, to the French.

HESS: Who were the main backers of that school of thought?

DENNISON: Oh, I think Admiral Bradford was one. I wouldn't go along with the idea that this was a crucial decision leading to our further involvement. I think this was taking out insurance that didn't have to lead to the kind of involvement we later found ourselves in, and that this was in general line with his policies in other places. How about aid to Greece and Turkey? It took us into Greece but not "X" numbers of Army divisions plus military support, economic support. It didn't turn out that way in Vietnam, but this didn't really place any blame on President Truman. He didn't start anything. He was trying to stop something from growing.

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HESS: Did you ever hear the President make any observations on whether we should or should not assist the French in regaining Indochina after World War II?

DENNISON: Not specifically, but his whole attitude was that this was a lost cause. I mean this debacle at Dien Bien Phu and all that was stupid military action, and...

HESS: Yes, that battle came during the Eisenhower administration, correct?

DENNISON: Yes.

HESS: Things weren't going well, even back in those days, however.

DENNISON: No. The French really didn't have anything to contribute in the Far East, just rescuing Indochina or strengthening them so they would be able to hold on. It seemed to a good many of us this would be a dead end. And then...

HESS: Well, one further question on that matter. This was a French colony, this was not France. The indigenous people of that area (whatever they called themselves at that time, the Vietnamese or what), were the natives of the area. Was it discussed that perhaps instead of dealing with a colonial power we

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should go in and try to find a citizen, or a group of citizens, indigenous to the country and try to work with them?

DENNISON: I never heard that. Of course, this is exactly what President Truman wanted to do in China. That's why he sent George Marshall there and that's where Marshall was when the President asked him to be Secretary of State. That was the hope there, and if it didn't work there, it couldn't really work anywhere else. In the first place it was too idealistic. We couldn't find a man that was acceptable to the people. We could never have found one in Vietnam and it was hopeless to try. But I never heard any suggestion like that.

HESS: Just a general question about any influence that George Kennan may have had on your thinking, on the thinking of the people around Mr. Truman. His so-called "long telegram" to the State Department when he was stationed in Russia came in February of '46. His "Article by X" appeared in the July 1947 issue of the *Foreign Affairs*, and, of course, as you know, that was the article on the containment of communism...

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DENNISON: That's right.

HESS: I'm not sure that was the first time he used the word containment, but...

DENNISON: I remember it well.

HESS: What do you recall about George Kennan's views and did they have any influence on your thinking, either at this time or later, when you were in the White House?

DENNISON: Well, unfortunately, I never liked Kennan (not that likes or dislikes have much to do with it), but I didn't agree with some of the things that he was putting forward. I don't remember Kennan having any influence in my time in the White House. As a matter of fact, I don't even know where he was most of the time. Kennan was a peculiar individual. I sat with him on one occasion on a panel of the Foreign Policy Council or the Foreign Affairs Council of New York. I can't think of the name of it.

HESS: He headed the State Department Policy Planning staff from May '47 to late '49, for one thing.

DENNISON: I remember this one meeting that I'm talking about in New York. This was a panel and a number of knowledgeable and able people attended. Kennan was

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one of them, and the idea was to discuss some of our problems in foreign affairs. This was kind of a stormy meeting. I was also present on a previous occasion when [Henry] Kissinger was the rapporteur, and I was ordered away from Washington after, I think, the second meeting.

But nobody told me, and I'm sure the rest of the panel didn't understand either, at that time, that any book was coming out like Kissinger's *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*. So at this second one--Kennan as I recall wasn't in on the first one, although he might have been--again we went around the table and I said that this time I hoped that there would be no book or paper published unless the members of the panel approved it and cleared it. And everybody thought that was a good idea. Then they asked people to express their views in general on anything to get started. It came around to Kennan and he implied very strongly that he didn't think that military people really were qualified in this field.

So, not liking Kennan to begin with, this sort of infuriated me and...

HESS: Being a military person.

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DENNISON: So I said, "Well, Mr. Kennan, if you want to go around the table and question the qualifications of each one of our members, I think it would be a great idea, and we might start with you." After all everybody there was qualified in some way. I'd been up to my neck in political-military affairs, actively. Somebody stepped in and got things calmed down a little bit. I came back to Washington and ran into Dean Acheson at the Metropolitan Club, and I was still put out and I said, "I've just in the last day or two had a very unfortunate experience with Kennan."

And he said, "Oh God, what has George been up to now?" Then I told him, of course. There wasn't anything we could do about it. It was just typically Kennan.

But no, to get back, I don't really remember his having any influence, certainly not with President Truman.

HESS: Do you recall if you agreed then, or agree now, with his basic doctrine of the article of containment of the Communist menace, that's ever pressing . . .

DENNISON: Well, I...

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HESS: ...probing, looking for weaknesses?

DENNISON: I'd have to go back and review that "X" article. All I can do is recall what I thought at the time, that this, if it was any good at all, it was probably a very short-term solution. That's an attractive catchword, "containment," just like a lot of other words we've got.

But the real solution, I thought then and I still do, is an improvement in communications. You can't build a wall around anybody anymore, if you ever could. And our communication with Soviet Russia is either absent or pathetically weak. People should see people of other countries, and get an idea of each one's way of life, and what capitalism or free enterprise has to offer against what communism has to offer.

HESS: Well, to bring that up to date, that's extremely current at this time because last week Communist China was voted into the United Nations. Do you think it is a good idea to bring them in?

DENNISON: Well, it's pretty hard to say.

HESS: And to have better communications?

DENNISON: I think it was inevitable, at some time, because realistically here's a government that controls a

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large percentage of the population of the earth.

HESS: They say one-fourth, is that about right?

DENNISON: I don't know. I've heard that figure, but it's beside the point.

HESS: Sounds high.

DENNISON: Yes, it does. So, it was inevitable, but I do think that we took a beating through ineptitude and through a misreading of our allies and a complete disregard on everybody's part for the terms of the United Nations charter.

Just for one example, the charter itself, referring to the permanent members of the Security Council, names the Republic of China. They are one of the five original founding members having a right of veto. China, Communist China, I think, was legally excluded under the provisions of the charter because of her policies. But we laid our reputation on the line and got kicked around. There are only three NATO allies that were on our side, Luxembourg, Portugal and Greece. The rest of them were looking out the window.

Now, why we had Kissinger in Peking at the time

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it was debated is just completely beyond my understanding.

HESS: That weakened their argument just a little bit, didn't it?

DENNISON: Just a little bit. It pulled the rug out from under Bush completely.

HESS: All right. Anything to add to that general subject?

DENNISON: No, unless you have something you want to ask.

HESS: No.

All right, now moving on into the summer of 1950, there was a rather light moment there that was thought to be serious at the time. Do you recall the flap that arose in the summer when the President wrote to Congressman Gordon McDonough that the Marine Corps was the Navy's police force and that the Marines "have a propaganda machine that is almost equal to Stalin's?" Do you recall that flap?

DENNISON: I certainly do, and do you know that that one incident, up to that time, drew more telegrams, telephone calls, mail, into the White House than any single incident? Of course, something like the

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Taft-Hartley Act, which just goes on for years, over the years has totaled more, but this really inundated the White House.

HESS: It shook up the Marines.

DENNISON: Oh God! And I was on the receiving end good deal of it because, being the President's Naval Aide, the good old mail room or somebody would dump most of this stuff on me. It was incredible to read some of it, but it represented a really bitter, emotional reaction.

This is an example of what we all were terrified about, of the President getting up early in the morning and going down and writing his own correspondence. I never asked him how he happened to write this character, but Bill Hassett, or somebody, told me that he thought that this man was an Army acquaintance of his. Whether this was true or not, or how he happened to pick him, I never knew. But the man released this letter and then all hell broke loose.

The President got enough of it and he sent for me and Charlie Ross. He said, "You've got to get me out of this."

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I was reminded of something that I didn't tell him, but I think it was good. Roosevelt had made a very unfortunate speech in Pittsburgh about labor in some way or another and he asked Sam [Samuel I.] Rosenman the same thing President Truman was asking me, and Rosenman was

supposed to have told Roosevelt, "Mr. President, it's very simple. All you've got to do is deny you made the speech."

HESS: Just deny you ever said it.

DENNISON: Yes. But President Truman was really in trouble. He didn't mean to offend the Marines. With an Army background and so on, naturally, with...

HESS: That sounds like an old soldier talking.

DENNISON: Sure. Well, that's exactly what he was doing, and he never thought that what he took to be a personal letter was going to appear in the newspapers.

Well, I said, "Well, Mr. President, I can see only one thing to do, and that is to write a letter to Cliff [Clifton B.] Cates, the Commandant, and explain what you were trying to say, or why you said what you did, and in effect apologize."

Ross was horrified. He said, "Well, the President can't do that. He can't apologize."

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And the President said, "Well, I'm not so sure about that." And he turned to me and said, "Go out into the Cabinet Room, send for Winkler, anybody, and draft a letter."

I did, and that's a matter of record, but it did explain what it was all about. In the letter Cates was asked to give this wide distribution among the Marine Corps, or to anybody else.

Well, the President got the draft and whatever happened to the draft I don't know. He changed two or three words or made some minor correction in the first part of it, and out it went. At any rate, he signed it and it went on its way to Cates. So that was that.

A little bit later I got another call from the President to come over and see him, again with Ross, also the Secret Service. There may have been somebody else there, but Ross and I were the only ones really involved in it. The President said, "It seems to me that I was invited to a Marine reunion here in Washington. Is that correct?"

I said, "Yes, and also in accordance with your policy of not being able to attend all these things, you regretted. It's at the Statler Hotel."

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The President said, "Well, I'm going." It was to be the next morning.

Even I thought this unwise, but I didn't say so and I let the Secret Service take care of that. They had all the reasons why he shouldn't do it; that emotions were so high that somebody might throw a beer bottle at him or embarrass him or something. And he said, "Well, I don't care about that. I'm going to go."

Then he turned to me and said, "What time is this meeting?"

"Oh," I said, "I don't know, I think it is 9 o'clock."

"Call up General Cates and ask him to stop by the White House and pick me up."

Well, I was used to that kind of stuff, so I didn't deliver that one literally.

Cates was pleased, of course, and he appeared at the White House and Charlie Ross, the Secret Service and Cates and I went on to the Statler.

It all happened so fast that nobody had any idea that the President was anywhere around. We waited outside of the place where they had the

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gathering. Cates walked out on the stage and of course the Marines nearly tore the place down. They expected him to give a rally-around-the-flag sort of speech, you know, but instead of that

Cates said, "Gentlemen, the President of the United States," and there was absolute dead silence.

HESS: Took them by surprise.

DENNISON: Completely! Here they were all ready for a hell of a speech and the President walked out. I thought the place was going to fall down. Hell, nobody threw anything at him. They admired his guts which they all could well recognize. And he got up--not got up, he was up, he never sat down--and really told the Marines what he thought about the Marine Corps and all fooling aside. He certainly didn't overdo it, but it really came through. It wasn't very long. He didn't have any prepared speech. Nobody could write that one for him.

I thought the hotel was coming down before he spoke and I was sure it was after he spoke. And the chairman, I forget what rank he was, but anyway a Marine, took a medal off his own chest and pinned

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it on the President. We left as soon as the President could get out of the place. Everybody wanted to shake hands with him. If that wasn't a personal triumph I never saw one. What guts he had.

HESS: He knew how to handle it. He knew what had to be done.

All right, moving on, in the next month, September of 1950, Louis Johnson resigned and was replaced by General Marshall as Secretary of Defense. Why was that resignation deemed necessary? Why was that replacement made?

DENNISON: Well, President Truman is the only one who can answer that one, but I do know that there had been a number of incidents, some of which I was involved in, that made the President pretty unhappy, and it probably got to a point where it was just too much. But what the key item in this was, I don't know. I don't know why the timing, or what really brought it on.

I can give you one incident. The President was very jealous, and rightly so, of his appointive power, which also applied to the power to remove. Navy promotion was based on a selection system. A Board of

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Officers would convene. They operated under oath. It was a very tough job. Their job, for example, is to pick a limited number of flag officers out of a large number of captains. That was in this particular board that I'm about to tell about.

The law has it that this board's report doesn't go to the Secretary of the Navy, or the Secretary of Defense, or Secretary of anything. It goes to the President. If he doesn't like somebody's selection, he strikes the name and sends it back to the board for reconsideration in sending up another name. He never did that with a Navy Selection Board. I've seen him do it with the Army. He had a hell of a time one time about nominations for the Chief of the Corps of Engineers.

Well, we were down at Key West when this board convened, this particular one, and the report came to me. I don't think that either Johnson or Matthews thought this was going to happen, but it did because papers like that always came to me. When I took things like that in to the President he never asked me anything but one question, "Has any injustice been done?"

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The report came, and much to my horror Johnson and Matthews had struck Burke's name (Admiral Arleigh A. Burke), because they thought he was subversive and he was opposed to unification and God knows what all. They had reconvened the board and had selected another officer.

This upset me, of course, because it was unjust. So I got a lot of material together on Burke and went in early the next morning before anybody was up. The President was alone and I said, "Mr. President I have a report of the Navy Selection Board here and I want to do some special pleading so would you please permit me to step out of my job as Naval Aide a minute?" I was dead serious and he looked up at me and said, "Bob, take the stuffing out of your shirt and sit down and tell me what it's all about."

So I told him and I said, "I want you to understand, Mr. President, that Burke is a friend of mine, which you must take into account. I have no axe to grind here. He's senior to me and wouldn't be if this thing stood."

So he said, "Well, wasn't Burke Chief of Staff to Admiral Marc Mitscher?"

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I said, "Yes, sir."

And he said, "Well, you know, I spent a day aboard Mitscher's flag ship. I was very much impressed with Mitscher." He said, "If he thought Burke was good enough to be Chief of Staff I'm sure he was a damn good man, besides what you tell me. So," he said, "let me have the papers."

We came back to Washington and nothing happened. I thought he had forgotten about it and, like everything else, he hadn't, but there was a great big uproar about all this, about Burke being passed over and who had done it.

So the President added a little fuel to that particular fire. Johnson and Matthews came up to see the President and I was with the President. The President told me they were coming up and said, "I want you to get out of the room while they are here and go sit in the Cabinet Room and I'll call you in."

Well, when I came back in the room they had left and the President was all smiles and he said, "I want to tell you what happened." He said, "Burke's name has been replaced on the list for Rear Admiral and this other officer they selected was also retained."

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And the great part of it is that Matthews and Johnson think they thought it up all by themselves." But after this, he said, "You know," this is, as a matter of fact, the second time he told me something like this, "I don't wish to fire Johnson or Matthews now." They didn't have sense enough to realize that their action was not only in conflict with the law but it was assuming the presidential prerogatives of appointment. He didn't like that sort of thing a damn bit.

So I think again (to get back to your original question, I'm sorry to deviate here), that it probably was more in part an accumulation of ineptness and--well, like this veterans hospital business that I talked to you about. Another one was that when [Admiral Lewis E.] Denfeld was dismissed over this B-36 business, Matthews had asked me to help Denfeld with his statement. Denfeld and I were old friends and we had quite a few people writing this thing for him. The reason that Matthews wanted me to sit in on this was to be sure, if I could, that Denfeld didn't say anything in opposition to the President's policy.

Well, unfortunately, Denfeld, when he made this statement, threw in something on his own, and that

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was a remark to the effect that he endorsed completely everything that Arthur Radford had said. So instead of everybody getting mad at Radford, they got mad at Denfeld. And I heard that he had been relieved some time in midafternoon. I don't know whether the President heard about it or not. I don't think he had any part in this.

I went in to see the President and said, "I've just learned what Johnson and Matthews have done," and I said, "You know, Mr. President, Denfeld is a friend of mine and would you mind if I went up to the observatory and talked with him and Mrs. Denfeld?"

He said, "Well, of course not. I want you to go. Of course he's an old friend of yours and he shouldn't be left alone at a time like this."

So I did go up and talk with him, and sure enough there wasn't anybody there except me. Admiral Denfeld wasn't resentful. I think he was really relieved because of the intolerable situation that he'd been in with both Johnson and Matthews.

The next day I got a call from Matthews wanting to know if I would be kind enough to come down and see him. I said, "Certainly."

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When I got in his office he was absolutely livid. He said, "Did you write Admiral Denfeld's speech?"

I said, "I certainly did not, but I was in on the drafting sessions because you asked me to be there. But I didn't see his speech."

He said, "Well, I understand you went up to Denfeld's quarters yesterday."

And I said, "Yes, I did."

He said, "That's the most disloyal act I ever heard of." And he went on and made a couple of other remarks.

Then I said, "Well; Mr. Secretary, I can tell you one person who doesn't think it's disloyal."

He said, "Who's that?"

I said, "The Commander in Chief," and his face fell a mile. Johnson had been in on this one too, and the President again said that this wasn't the time. He did plan to get Matthews out by sending him as Ambassador to Ireland, but he wasn't getting along with Matthews or Johnson. I mean they'd go off on a tangent like this and really do things that could have been done, if they had to be done, in other ways.

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HESS: Do you recall the incident that finally tipped the scales against Secretary Matthews? I believe he made a speech either in New York or Boston criticizing the way the war was being carried out in Korea. Is that correct?

DENNISON: I've forgotten. I remember there was something like that, but I'm afraid I've really forgotten what it was that pulled down the house.

HESS: It was shortly thereafter that he was Ambassador to Ireland.

DENNISON: Yes, that's right.

HESS: Now back to Mr. Johnson. Some historians have said that perhaps one of the reasons for his departure was a serious lack of rapport with Dean Acheson, the Secretary of State.

DENNISON: Johnson?

HESS: Johnson.

DENNISON: Well, the lack of rapport is certainly true, because they were completely different people. Johnson was a political animal and Acheson was anything but. But that needn't have been a handicap because you can hardly imagine more dissimilar backgrounds than Acheson and Truman.

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HESS: Why do you think that those two men got along so well? It's well-known that they did. Why in your opinion did they?

DENNISON: Well, when Dean Acheson wrote a book, or wrote a series of articles, he had been writing about his experiences--not this *Present at the Creation* book, before that--I asked him one time, "Dean, I know what you think of President Truman and what he thinks of you. Why in the world don't you write about it?"

He said, "Well, the reason is that I'm so emotionally involved, I admire him so deeply, that I just feel that as of now I simply cannot be objective."

And then of course--you've read *Present at the Creation*--he finally did. But the reason they got along so well was that each one had a deep admiration for the other. They each recognized honesty, integrity and ability, and the President thought that Acheson was great. Well, he was great, and Acheson admired the incisiveness and the decisionmaking ability of the President. Not only were they in a close official relationship, but their families were the closest of friends, and background be damned. I mean that's a completely secondary consideration and had nothing

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to do with their relationship. But on the surface, it certainly would appear strange that two apparently dissimilar types, but each one able to recognize the real qualities of the other, could be so close. I think it was wonderful.

HESS: Secretary Marshall was asked to replace Secretary Johnson. Do you know why Secretary Marshall was chosen?

DENNISON: Well, because he was available and he had the kind of firmness and sense that was needed to get the pieces back together again. When he was Secretary of State, the President had an extremely high regard for his ability as Secretary, which I didn't completely share, mainly because I didn't really know him well enough, and certainly not as well as I knew Acheson, but he was a strong man and not stubborn and the type that could really move into a collapsing situation and get it back together again.

HESS: Did he get it back together? Did he do a pretty good job?

DENNISON: I think he did, yes.

HESS: He was there for one year, September of '50 until September of '51.

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DENNISON: Yes, a very short time.

HESS: All right, in the...

DENNISON: Didn't Lovett succeed him?

HESS: That's right. That's quite right. Lovett was his assistant. He was Deputy Secretary during the time that General Marshall was there and then when he left Mr. Lovett took over.

Secretary Johnson's resignation was requested before September the 15th, but it was delayed until September the 19th. September the 15th was the Inchon landing, which has generally been regarded as a stroke of genius by General MacArthur, and things started going our way. Things had not been going our way, and then they changed. Do you think that if the Inchon landing had come before the decision was made to replace Secretary Johnson that might have changed it, might have delayed the decision, or made it unnecessary to request his resignation?

DENNISON: Oh, I don't think so, no.

HESS: There were just too many things.

DENNISON: Yes, too many.

HESS: Okay.

DENNISON: Let me comment a little bit about Lovett, because

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this throws an interesting sidelight on President Truman.

Lovett had been reported to have said (and knowing Lovett I doubt if he ever did), but, at any rate, it came to the President's ear that he had said the President was simply an unsuccessful

haberdasher. It didn't make a damn bit of difference to the President. Lovett was a Republican. He was doing a great job. And this was so characteristic of President Truman. He didn't care what anybody said about him politically. He expected it, and he couldn't have cared less what Lovett said as long as Lovett was doing a great job as Secretary of Defense, which he was.

HESS: And in the following month, October the 15th, 1950, is a red letter day in the Truman administration. It was the conference at Wake Island between President Truman and General MacArthur. According to the logs you did not make that trip, is that correct?

DENNISON: No, because I was in the hospital, otherwise I would have.

HESS: When did you go into the hospital?

DENNISON: Oh, I've forgotten, it's been so long ago, but

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not too long before, I guess.

HESS: Here is a copy of a letter you wrote to the President two or three days after the assassination attempt on November the 1st, and from your correspondence I took it that you had been in the hospital for some time, but how long I did not know.

DENNISON: Well, I mean, it couldn't have been more than a couple of weeks or so. But this was from Key West. The President wanted me to go down there to recuperate.

HESS: And I noticed in your letter you refer to the fact that you had been in Bethesda for a period of time, correct?

DENNISON: It couldn't have been very long. It was an illness that I completely recovered from. It was a kidney infection.

HESS: Do you know why the President decided to fly half way around the world, more or less, to confer with General MacArthur rather than having him come somewhat closer?

DENNISON: Yes, I can tell you that, because the President told me about it. The President's reasoning was that here was a field commander who shouldn't be too far away from his post, and it never occurred to the

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President to get him to come all the way back to Washington. So his idea was to meet in this God forsaken Wake Island, which is not too far away from Korea, but it wasn't kowtowing to MacArthur a damn bit. It was just a practical matter. I never felt that MacArthur took it that way. I might not be just in what I thought at the time and still do.

HESS: Did President Truman ever tell you about that meeting, about what MacArthur may have said, or how things went?

DENNISON: Yes, he did, and this was one of the things that really disturbed him, the statement of MacArthur's that the Chinese Communists would never come into the conflict and that the 8th Army would be out of there before Christmas, or something, some such impossible date.

The President got a much rosier picture of the situation from MacArthur than was the actual case, as it turned out to be, and he didn't like that.

There are some conflicting accounts of who said what. Acheson didn't want any part of this meeting and said so, but he also goes on to say quite a bit about what happened. Jessup's secretary's account may

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or may not be too accurate, and...

HESS: Miss Vernice Anderson.

DENNISON: Yes. And the President's own record of it, certainly what he told me (and I have no reason to believe that he didn't hear things the way he wrote them), but those two things about having the 8th Army out and having the Communists stay out of the picture, completely misrepresented the situation.

HESS: Did President Truman say anything to you about MacArthur's attitude, or how he may have treated President Truman? Did you ever hear anything on that subject?

DENNISON: No. He did think that MacArthur was overly pompous. Of course, when MacArthur started publicly quarreling with some of our foreign policies that was just too much. But of course MacArthur was relieved. He wasn't discharged or fired. It's maybe a fine distinction, but worth remembering. The President didn't have him court-martialed or take his uniform away from him or anything.

HESS: He just relieved him of his duties.

DENNISON: Yes, but--and this is another decision that he made painstakingly. He consulted Marshall and

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Bradley and a lot of people, and he didn't take it lightly at all. I mean they went back and reviewed the record, and I think it was Marshall who told him that he was surprised, having reviewed all this stuff, that the President hadn't relieved MacArthur long before.

HESS: According to the "Substance of Statements Made at Wake Island Conference," this is the one that Miss Vernice Anderson worked on, General MacArthur did make the statement that the

Chinese Communists would probably not come into the fighting, and then either in late October or early November, there's some question there, the Chinese Communists did start to come in. What was President Truman's attitude at the time? Were you back from Key West?

DENNISON: What was the date?

HESS: It's either late October or early November. There are conflicting reports as to when the first Communist Chinese soldiers were picked up by patrols.

DENNISON: Oh, in late October I was obviously in Key West because that's where I wrote this letter on the 2nd of November.

HESS: And then in November--do you recall anything about

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President Truman's attitude when you returned, about the invasion of the Chinese Communists when things had definitely taken a turn for the worse?

DENNISON: Well, one view that was held by the President and a good many people, was that we shouldn't move into Manchuria, nor should we destroy the power supplies on the Yalu river. It would have been beyond our means to try to hold any part of Manchuria. And then I don't think that the magnitude of this Communist effort was generally recognized.

HESS: All right, then winter came and we were pushed out of the area of Seoul.

DENNISON: Yes, things were pretty grim there for a while.

HESS: Things were pretty grim, and then things along toward March started going our way a little bit, the troops started moving back up the peninsula, and then in April, I believe on April the 11th of 1951, it became necessary for the President to dismiss General MacArthur. Can you tell me the background of that? This, of course, is an extremely important topic. What was the background that we have not covered? We've discussed part of it.

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DENNISON: Well, the principal item on this background was this letter that he wrote, as I recall, to some veterans organization, wasn't it?

HESS: It was the VFW.

DENNISON: And this just wouldn't do. I think this was the immediate cause and, of course, other things grew out of this VFW letter as well.

HESS: I think the VFW letter was fairly early. If I'm not mistaken that was in August.

DENNISON: Yes, but there was something that happened.

HESS: And then there was the letter to Congressman Joe Martin, just a little later.

DENNISON: Yes.

HESS: And that was much closer to the time of his dismissal.

DENNISON: But the President had it under consideration for a reasonable length of time, because I do know the pains he went to to consult these men who knew MacArthur. The President didn't want to let any personal pique enter into this at all. That's not the way he was. I never knew whether he liked or disliked MacArthur. He probably didn't like him because there are different kinds of military people. But

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it must have taken him, well my guess would be, I really don't recall, maybe a matter of one or two weeks to finally come to a decision. And of course Bradley and Marshall knew MacArthur, knew his background, his whole history. I served with MacArthur briefly too, and I sure can't claim to know him.

I asked General Bradley one time about MacArthur because he had a lot of great qualities. And Bradley, among other things, told me that MacArthur just missed being a great general. He had a flaw in his character, perhaps personal aggrandizement. That's the way Bradley looked at it anyhow. But for that, and other reasons, he really didn't have it. He was certainly a fatalist, but he did have a great deal of ability. There is no question about it. He made some terrible mistakes. His idea of how to take Japan would have been good in the 19th century, maybe, or even a little later, but working our way step by step up through the islands and up through Mindanao and up into Luzon, hell, we would have been fighting that war for years.

I think his "I will return" was mainly responsible for our going into the Philippines on the way back. I think that was militarily completely stupid. It

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took time and men, but in any event that, rightly or wrongly, would be my idea of one of the reasons why he wasn't great. "I will return" was his keynote of this whole damn policy to get back to beat Japan. But the President did make up his mind, which again was certainly a thoroughly researched decision. MacArthur came back, landed in San Francisco, had a big welcoming ceremony and obviously had some political aspirations. The President told me that MacArthur had made a great mistake. He should have come back to report to the Commander in Chief. And he said, "If he wanted to get into politics I would have been able to perhaps give him a bit of advice." But instead here he was having this triumphal processional home. The President said, "He's going to be at a ceremony here in the monument grounds and I want you to go and represent me." He said, "You know MacArthur and his family and I'd appreciate it if you would go." He would appreciate it! My God, if he'd said jump off the roof I'd have jumped.

So I did go to his ceremony and of course was welcomed by the General and his wife, but the President never could understand why in the world he didn't act

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like a soldier and come back to report to the Commander in Chief before he did any of this stuff, which simply was further evidence, if any was needed, that the President was right in the first place.

HESS: Do you recall anything in particular about who the President may have conferred with before the dismissal decision was made?

DENNISON: Well, the two I remember were Marshall and Bradley. I'm sure there must have been others.

HESS: Did he request your views?

DENNISON: No, because my contact with MacArthur was superficial. I certainly never knew him in his younger days. I didn't know what his contemporaries thought of him. My view wouldn't have been worth the time it would take the President to hear it compared with Marshall's, for example. But he knew pretty well what I thought. He knew about what happened in the Philippines and the way I saw it in the Southwest Pacific. But this return of MacArthur was completely different from the return of Eisenhower. Would you like to hear about that?

HESS: Yes.

DENNISON: Well, the President, of course, persuaded General

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Eisenhower to become Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, and got him away from Columbia. I won't go into all that went on while people were trying to find out whether General Eisenhower was Republican or Democrat, or whether he was going to run or what not. It all became pretty clear that he was.

But at any rate when Eisenhower came back from Europe he landed in uniform and the President again, knowing that I had known Eisenhower, asked me to go to the airport to meet him. The Republicans had organized a welcoming committee with a band and all the rest of it. I was alone in the President's car. After the ceremony, which wasn't very long, we were to drive back to the White House. The President in the meantime had invited General Eisenhower's family and some close friends to his office where he was going to confer the Distinguished Service Medal on General Eisenhower.

Well, about noon, we found ourselves around the Lincoln Memorial on the way back, and there were a lot of people who recognized the General and waved at him and he waved back, obviously enjoying it. In a little bit of a lull he turned to me and said,

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"You know, Bob, you and I were brought up in a profession where we learned that the best way to keep out of trouble is to keep your mouth shut." He said, "Now I find myself in trouble for trying to do just that." The President liked General Eisenhower and respected him and admired him until they had their unfortunate falling out later. But this was the kind of performance he would expect from MacArthur. Eisenhower didn't land in civilian clothes and go and make a speech at a monument ground or something. He came to the White House.

HESS: Do you recall why General Eisenhower had been appointed as Supreme Commander, Allied Commander, in Europe?

DENNISON: Yes, because he was certainly the logical man to do it. They needed an able man, a strong man, and who did we have in the military who could possibly touch Eisenhower? In the early days of the Alliance we needed strength. We needed prestige. I believe he was asked for by NATO.

HESS: Some historians have said that appointment was an effort by Mr. Truman to build up Eisenhower politically, hoping that he would run on a Democratic ticket later

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on. Do you think there was anything to that? .

DENNISON: No, there's nothing to it. That's the last thing the President was thinking of.

HESS: Did President Truman ever say, anything about having offered to assist General Eisenhower if indeed he did want to run on-the Democratic ticket?

DENNISON: Yes, but only in passing and very casually, just as he would with MacArthur, with help and advice. I don't remember the Democratic ticket part of it. I don't think the President knew until late in the game just what Eisenhower's politics were and I don't think General Eisenhower himself did.

HESS: In Cabell Phillips' book, *The Truman Presidency*, which has been out for several years, he states that there was a time before the 1948 campaign when President Truman offered to even take second place on the Democratic ticket that year if General Eisenhower would take the first place. Have you ever heard anything on that?

DENNISON: I certainly never did, and that doesn't sound right, because President Truman, when he ran was, among other things, I'm sure, trying to vindicate himself, his record, and that's why he ran in the

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first place. I'm as sure as I can be that this was the main consideration.

HESS: What caused the falling out between President Truman and General Eisenhower?

DENNISON: Why, I thought we covered that, but if we haven't I guess you and I just talked about it.

The President put a very high premium on loyalty and when Eisenhower appeared on the same platform as [Senator Joseph R.] McCarthy and [Senator William E.] Jenner and changed his speech to remove the complimentary references to General Marshall, these were two things that hit the President right between the eyes. One was that he would do such a thing, to appear on the platform with these people. You have to remember the political context of time. Jenner, I believe, had said that Marshall was a living lie. And the other one is that Eisenhower would not say what he had intended to say about Marshall, whom the President thought was one of the greatest people that ever lived, and certainly Marshall had made Eisenhower. If it hadn't been for Marshall his career would have been completely different. So this was just more than the President could take and that's why he just wrote

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him off.

The President told me something that happened when they were driving from the White House down to the Capitol for the inauguration. Eisenhower never came in the White House. I remember the President met him outside and went down to the Capitol. On the way down, with President Truman, General Eisenhower turned to him and said, "I wonder what s.o.b. ordered my son back, just to embarrass me." I think John at that time was in Germany or someplace.

The President said, "I did." Of course it was with the idea that here was the greatest day in Eisenhower's life and certainly his family ought to be there. That ended that conversation.

HESS: After General MacArthur was dismissed did President Truman in the next few weeks or months give any indication or express any viewpoints on how good a general he thought MacArthur had been?

DENNISON: No. No, that was a closed issue. I mean he made up his mind. It wasn't like the President to reminisce about things like that.

HESS: All right, one other MacArthur item. On April the 21st of 1951, Anthony Leviero, writing in

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the *New York Times*, had an article concerning the conference held at Wake Island in October which included some minutes of the conference that had been kept under a top secret classification until that time. Do you know where Mr. Leviero got his information?

DENNISON: I haven't the faintest idea.

HESS: All right.

DENNISON: I didn't realize there was any such document in existence. Are you using the word "minutes" correctly? Was there a set of minutes?

HESS: Well, what it was, what it boiled down to, was Miss Anderson's minutes that she had taken outside the room. They weren't really minutes, but shorthand notes.

DENNISON: Well, of course, nobody authorized her to do it, and they weren't accepted as being official and she wasn't supposed to do it anyhow. The accuracy of those notes I think has been questioned by others.

HESS: Well, Anthony Leviero wrote that article later in the same month that General MacArthur was dismissed, and won a Pulitzer Prize for writing the article, just because he was given access to material that

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had been under top secret classification.

What do you recall of the assassination attempt? You were in the hospital at the time, of course.

DENNISON: I was at Key West.

HESS: After this time did you ever hear President Truman speak of that incident?

DENNISON: Yes. He was saddened by the policeman's death.

HESS: Leslie Coffelt.

DENNISON: Yes. It was so unnecessary and the act of mad men as the President saw it, and this was his principal reaction. I mean he couldn't have cared less about being attacked. He told me many times that assassinating a President was a simple job, provided the assassin was willing to trade his own life. He said, "There's no way that the President can be protected from that kind of attack," so this was part of being in public life.

HESS: One bit of security that was tightened up concerns the cars that had been delivered a year before. The Lincoln Cosmopolitan, the one that was assigned for the President's use, was taken back and armor-plated at that time. Do you recall if there were other measures taken to increase the security and surveillance

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protection of the President after the assassination attempt?

DENNISON: No. I think [James J.] Rowley would be the authority on that. Of course there was a tightening up perhaps in numbers of guards and the Secret Service was tremendously thorough.

I remember when my wife and I got back from Key West after this assassination attempt. We had left our two young children in our Westchester apartment and when we returned we found that the Secret Service had instructed everybody at the desk not to admit that I lived there, and they had taken our nameplate down and actually stationed a guard.

But no, speaking of the Secret Service, I am going to back up a little bit to another experience of George Marshall and President Truman.

The President, Harry Vaughan and I went down to the Capitol, one Sunday I guess it was. The President wanted to pay his respects. General Pershing's body was lying in the rotunda. We went in and stood there with bowed heads for a few minutes then came out and got in the car to go back down Constitution Avenue to the White House.

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Well, we weren't escorted. The White House limousine had a Secret Service driver. The President was in the right rear seat. Vaughan and I were next to him and a Secret Service man in the right front seat. All of a sudden there was a blast of screaming sirens. A car, plus a flying wedge of motorcycles went by, and the man in the back seat of the car was half standing and yelling at the driver. Of course, what he was yelling was, "For goodness sakes stop," but they didn't stop. The police, a wing man, waved the President's car into the curb.

Well, they don't stop with the President in the car. They never do. This guy put his motorcycle up on the standard (whatever holds the motorcycle up), and blocked the car. He pulled out his ticket book and walked back to raise hell with the driver and give him a ticket.

Well, all of us were just waiting for what was going to happen. The policeman looked over the shoulder of the driver and saw the President of the United States in the back seat. I never before saw anybody literally turn white. He turned around

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and got on his motorcycle and got the hell out of there. When we got to the White House and rolled into the south grounds who should be standing there but General George Marshall. He said, "Mr. President, my deepest apology. This was a horrible thing to do and I'm..."

HESS: He was the man with the motorcycle escort.

DENNISON: Yes, not the President. And the President...

HESS: The President was going to get a ticket.

DENNISON: The President laughed and said, "Well, George, this will teach you a lesson, something I've been trying to get across to you, never have a motorcycle escort if you can help it."

HESS: All right, now since we have mentioned the so-called revolt of the Admirals (I'll use the expression, you didn't use it, but I'll use it), when Admiral Denfeld was replaced by Forrest Sherman, that was what was known as the revolt of the Admirals, true? Do you recall that expression?

DENNISON: Yes. I also recall General Bradley's testimony before Congress when he called admirals "Fancy Dans."

HESS: One of the things that was upsetting the admirals at that time, of course, was the B-36 matter, the

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fear that the Air Force was going to take over part of the Navy's role. During all this time it seemed that the Navy was worried about the continuation of their role in the national defense. One of the things that they were particularly concerned with was that the air wing might be transferred to the Air Force. Did this concern you? Did you think the Navy's role in the defense of our nation might be diminished by unification?

DENNISON: Well, it wasn't quite the way I looked at it. I think the basic difficulty with the Navy was the lack of understanding of what unification was all about. It hadn't been defined. It was another one of those words that was a great favorite of Johnson's. You were either for unification or you weren't. But what the hell was it? Was it a merger? Did it mean the loss of service identity? This was what the Navy was fearful of, a loss of identity. We didn't want to merge with any service, obviously, because they have different roles and different missions. We have different instruments and a different uniform, and for a good reason.

So it wasn't that the Navy was opposed to the concept of a Department of Defense because it was

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apparent to everybody that the armed forces had gotten so big that something had to be done if only for management, let alone for command. But this revolt of the admirals was another emotional expression. It was really an honest difference of opinion and a questioning of what this was all about, and had Johnson not been so terribly extreme, it might have been different.

I remember down in Miami (this was before he became Secretary, I think), at some convention, American Legion I guess it was, the Navy had a fly-over of some of their planes. It just infuriated Johnson. Maybe he was Secretary because I remember he just swore and raised his voice and claimed the Goddamn Navy was trying to propagandize the convention and it was just incredible. Well, with a wild man like that, who knew what was going to happen?

And of course the President's idea of the structure turned out to be not what finally came out of the National Security Act. I thought his concept was a little naive where he was just going to have a sort of a management board of the service secretaries and the Secretary of Defense, with none

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of this echelon of faceless people between the Secretary and the service secretaries.

But this revolt of the admirals, it wasn't a revolt and it wasn't just the admirals. The whole Navy was questioning what the future held, what were the policies, why? So it was a disturbing time.

I personally felt that this had to come. The way I saw it--not the way some people saw it--you'd just have a complete conglomerate mass of people in the armed services, and certainly we couldn't have merged our air arm with the Air Force because they don't operate in the same kind of an environment, in the same type of airplanes, and the same type of training. An Air Force pilot, God knows, has got enough to do without learning how to land on a carrier, for example.

I think healthy rivalry is a good thing. You can't just sit back and be complacent and have nobody to compete with.

But for all these reasons, and many others that are pretty obvious, it was a difficult time and it would have been a lot different without Johnson and

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with a better definition of just where we were going and why.

Now we did have some emotional reactions. For example, the Navy in general was opposed to moving out of the Navy Building on Constitution Avenue and moving into the Pentagon. Well, this was ridiculous and it took a bit of doing to get people to go along with it. Of course we had to be in the Pentagon. This is a small point, but rather significant. We should have taken the attitude that I felt was the only practical one and that is, "If you can't lick them, join them." This is the approach that we should have tried. We should have gone in there and tried to control the course of events earlier than we did.

Well, as it turned out, many of our fears were groundless. This wasn't what the President had in mind at all, and it didn't turn out that way. Sure, we had gone through some tough fights. For example, not only the absorption of our air arm, but even later about who was going to control the Polaris submarine. This came up under Tom Gates and there was a pretty strong case put up by the Air Force and

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the Strategic Air Command that this was an atomic weapons delivery capability and obviously it ought to be combined with the bombing delivery capability that the Air Force had in the Strategic Air Command.

Well, this was knocked down and the first Polaris submarines were assigned to me as Commander in Chief, Atlantic, a unified command. I did command them directly, not through intervening echelons of command.

So this was a right decision and it was a right decision to leave the Navy air arm alone. But a lot of this emotional business could have been--in the first place it should never have started--but it could have been dispelled with a little more intelligence and understanding on the part of Johnson.

HESS: Do you think the emotionalism was fed by Secretary Sullivan at the time of his resignation when they would not build the super carrier, the U.S.S. *United States*?

DENNISON: Well, we were unified then. Johnson was the Secretary of Defense and made the decision to cancel that contract. It made no sense to the Navy that this could have been done so offhandedly and without consultation and without adequate explanation.

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HESS: Because at the time that Mr. Sullivan resigned there was this exchange in a press conference; President Truman's press conference April the 28th, 1949:

“Mr. President, there seems to be a considerable apprehension in the Navy over one, losing all the Navy air to the Air Force and, two, transfer of all Marine Corps air activity to the Air Force.”

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think there was any foundation to either one of those.

QUESTION: That wasn't a columnist's prognostication, that was Secretary Sullivan's letter.

THE PRESIDENT: I didn't read Secretary Sullivan's letter to the Secretary of Defense. I only read the letter he wrote to me, and I replied to that.

That was something that we mentioned last week. Secretary Sullivan wrote two letters, one that he sent to the President and then the two-page letter that he sent to the Secretary of Defense, and they were quite different in tone.

DENNISON: Well, didn't we go into all of that?

HESS: Why I brought this up today was that last time when we spoke I did not have copies of the letters. I just thought you might like to see copies of those letters and I have them with me today.

DENNISON: I certainly would.

HESS: And you said that you sat in on the session that

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convinced Secretary Sullivan that he should tone down the letter that went to the President, correct?

DENNISON: No, what happened at that meeting was to dissuade Sullivan from sending the letter that he did send to the Secretary of Defense to the President because--Charlie Ross had the major share in convincing him that had he done this it would represent a real split between Sullivan and the President. They were friends and certainly both strong Democrats and it was completely unnecessary.

And remember, too, this unification resulted in removal of the service secretaries from the Cabinet, and really the unification was completely the wrong term because what it did was to create still another branch of the armed forces. It didn't unify anything except the top administrative structure.

HESS: It created a Department of Defense.

DENNISON: Yes, but it also created the Air Force. This is a long story about how that came about. Stupidity on the part of the Army in the handling of its Army Air Corps was the main reason.

HESS: What had they done wrong in the handling of that situation?

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DENNISON: Well, the same thing the Navy almost did wrong and that is they didn't recognize the top people, the growing importance of aviation and the tremendous revolution this meant in all kinds of warfare. The officers in the Army Air Corps were in the unfortunate position of probably not being in line for the very top commands, because they were specialists in this one field, you see. So they were sort of being--they weren't kicked around exactly, but they didn't feel they had the recognition they deserved.

The air arm of the Army was getting so big that this was a solution, "Let's create a separate department." And, unfortunately, as time has gone on this department has gotten highly specialized. It's a question to what extent the missile, or Polaris, our underwater launch systems, are making the strategic bomber atomic delivery capability obsolete. The Air Force recognizes this and they are concerned about it. But what the solution is is another matter. They can't take over the responsibility just for missiles and then forget things with wings on them. There will always be a need for troop lift, for example, and for tactical aircraft in a good many missions. But

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the role of the strategic bomber, I think, is rapidly diminishing. Remember that when there wasn't an Air Force Hap Arnold was one of the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Combined Chiefs.

HESS: All right, moving on to another topic, let's spend just a few moments discussing some of the other members of the White House staff and how the White House staff operated. And on some of the more important people if you could give me an illustration of how you may have

worked with that person, and a specific subject on which you may have worked with them, which would help to illustrate your role and his. Now, Mr. Truman's Military Aide, of course, was General Harry Vaughan. Did you often have occasion to work with General Vaughan?

DENNISON: No, not really, because we were doing different things and there weren't very many situations that would throw us together. Vaughan had talents that I didn't have and then I think it was the other way around too. For example, I knew nothing about veterans organizations really or the problems, and he, being a civilian, had probably a better view of this field than I could ever have. Vaughan,

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incidentally, I think was one of the most misunderstood people.

HESS: What do you think was the basis of that misunderstanding?

DENNISON: Well, his attitude. He was disliked intensely by some professional Army people, mainly because he disliked them, which may have been some kind of a complex with him. He smoked cigars. Somebody in describing his appearance said that he looked like an unmade bed.

But Vaughan would give anybody his shirt, and literally. I mean he's one of the most generous men I've ever run into. He looked as if he had a perpetual hangover. I've been with him day after day in close contact like at Key West. He'd have about one drink a week and he didn't even want that. He taught Sunday school. He was active in that sort of work. His wife did the same thing. Even now she's got a special typewriter for typing manuscripts and things into braille. This is not unusual for the Vaughans. That's just the way they are. A lot of things that Vaughan did, like this deepfreeze thing, were done with the best of intentions. He's not

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accepting a bribe in his view, or anything of that sort, and so he just did some things that were a little stupid in a public relations sense.

But to get back to what you asked me, no, I never really had any direct working relationship with him.

I think I told you about this press conference he held when I first reported for duty.

HESS: And as you have mentioned, General Vaughan did have trouble with Regular Army officers because he was a Reservist. This I have heard before, and you were a Regular...

DENNISON: Oh, I think it was the other way around.

HESS: Oh, he was a Reservist, wasn't he?

DENNISON: Yes, I know, but I mean I don't think he got in trouble with the Army because he was. I think he put himself in trouble because he had this attitude.

HESS: Oh. Well, let's put it this way. There was some lack of rapport, some feeling of alienation between Vaughan, a Reservist, and the majority of the men in the Pentagon, who I suppose were Regulars.

DENNISON: Oh sure.

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HESS: Did you feel that you had better rapport with the Navy people since you were Regular Navy and not a Reservist?

DENNISON: No, I think the reason I did was because I was myself. I mean they knew me. That's one advantage. You serve with the same people year after year and you've got to get to know those people. Even when General Eisenhower was Chief of Staff he would call me up rather than General Vaughan to ask me to do something, nothing really important, but he had known me and he knew there would be no problem and that I would be glad to do anything I could without any fuss.

HESS: Well, one reason I mentioned this matter is that Commander Vardaman, the first Naval Aide, was a Reservist, and I have heard that there was somewhat of a lack of rapport between the Regular Navy officers and Commander Vardaman...

DENNISON: Complete.

HESS: ...because he was...

DENNISON: No.

HESS: Not because, but perhaps one element of the lack of rapport.

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DENNISON: Well, I think that's probably right, but I think it was more Vardaman than whether he was Reserve or what the hell he was. And of course Vardaman left after, really unnecessarily raising hell with a lot of people in the Navy. In other words, he was arrogant and threw his weight around. Rear Admiral Foskett relieved Vardaman. But it isn't the Reserve versus Regular thing at all. Regular officers do have a tremendous advantage of having known each other through the years.

HESS: All right. Did you ever work with General Landry?

DENNISON: Oh yes, but again not on very many important things. We got along extremely well and I got along just fine with Vaughan. We're friends.

HESS: Commander William Rigdon worked for you, correct, as your Assistant Naval Aide?

DENNISON: Yes.

HESS: Just what is your general evaluation of the assistance that he gave to you?

DENNISON: Well, if I say invaluable, it's an understatement. He's completely self-effacing, extremely efficient. He worked so thoroughly and so quietly and he was completely devoted to the President. He's

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just a fine man. He could do almost anything, got along well with people, and he operated so unobtrusively that the press liked him and the Secret Service liked him. He's a most unusual officer, I thought.

HESS: The President's Special Counsel when you first came on board was Clark Clifford and then he was replaced by Charles Murphy. How would you characterize those two gentlemen that held that important position, first Clark Clifford and then Charles Murphy?

DENNISON: Well, in the first place they were completely dissimilar personalities. They both were politically astute, Clifford perhaps a bit more than Murphy. They were capable counsels; they were both held in high esteem by the President, and just like all of us on his staff, they deeply admired the President and understood him, or did the best they could to. Each of them really did more than you'd think they could. But remember, the President had such a small staff, and everybody was doubling in brass. Both Clifford and Murphy were very much involved in the presidential speech writing and political matters, of which, of course, I know nothing.

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But it's pretty hard to say how you worked with the staff, because each morning we'd have our staff meeting at 9 or 9:30 and go through the same routine and we all each sat in the same place around his desk.

HESS: Who usually attended?

DENNISON: Well, Admiral Leahy was the first one, of course, and he had a particular chair to sit in. And Bill Hassett, and first Charlie Ross, and later on Joe Short, and Murphy and Clifford, Dave Stowe, Matt Connelly, Harry Vaughan, Landry and myself. I mean we were the regulars. And this was a time when we would tell the President what we were doing and why. If we had anything particularly pressing we'd ask if he would take a look at it and sign it if he approved it. Then he would tell us what he had in mind in general and that was it.

Well, this meant that each of us knew what the other fellow was doing and if I had a tough problem, which I have had, for example on this maritime affair business, I had, as we all did, access to the tremendous potential of the Bureau of the Budget and its staff. I mean some of these problems I had

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in the maritime business were complicated legal problems. Each of the two men have helped me in drafting letters and they gave me suggestions and ideas. It was just completely across the board. We ran into each other in so many different things.

For example, here was Dave Stowe planning away for security of Government officials in time of emergency, which had to fit in with the plans for the President. But I can't remember any occasion in any dealings that we had where there was a strong difference of opinion.

It was a very rewarding experience to work with these fellows, but there were so many contacts almost every day there would be something.

Oh, Steelman was another one who was there, of course, John Steelman. He ran pretty much his own operation, not that he wasn't extremely helpful, but he had a fairly large staff compared to what the rest of us had. Now I didn't have anybody except Rigdon and a couple of wonderful yeomen. That's all I needed, and then I could call on the resources of the Government and did so very often.

So that's the way it worked with President Truman, but it wasn't—I think what I'm trying to

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say is our job was not rigidly bounded by any ground rules. We did whatever the President wanted us to and he would pick out things that he felt we had some competence in or some reason for knowing something about it or being in a position to do something else, such as naturally a sailor should know something about maritime affairs, and so this was pretty much the way it went.

Of course, as I told you before, with me and with Landry as well, we never got involved in any domestic political matters. The President didn't want us to. We were professionals. We weren't supposed to do that and he was so right. I didn't want to do it either.

HESS: Just one more man here and we'll skip on to another subject. The political matters were sometimes handled by Matthew Connelly, is that correct?

DENNISON: Well, it all depends on what political matters. I think that personal matters sometimes were, and maybe mostly were. I don't mean to say that Connelly wasn't of tremendous help to the President. He really saved him a lot of headaches. He wasn't the type to do much work on speeches, for example. He

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didn't have the kind of ability that it takes to do that. Not to say he didn't have other abilities. He understood the President, he admired him, he worked with him back in the days of the Truman Committee. Matt was a great help to everybody. I know in the early days he gave me a lot of good advice which was extremely valuable.

The President was very, very conscious about showing any partiality, or any favoritism, to any one of us and he really leaned over backwards on this. It wasn't laughable, but it almost was sometimes, because of these extremes he'd go to. We were getting along just great. There weren't any jealousies as far as I could detect with anybody. I mean no one said, "I'm the guy the President really looks to." That's a lot of nonsense. I mean nobody could be that presumptuous.

Then, of course, I don't think any of us were stupid enough to think anything like that in the first place. But if he did something for one of us you could be damned sure that something like that would be done for everybody else, which is great.

HESS: What do you recall of the legal difficulties

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that Mr. Connelly ran into after the administration?

DENNISON: Well...

HESS: And what is your opinion of that situation?

DENNISON: I can't help but think to this day that this was really a Republican Party hatchet job and I think Matt was a little naive, just as Harry was. I'm sure Matt didn't have an evil bone in his body. The attack against him seemed to me to be so vicious, and there are so many strange things about that--didn't one of the judges commit suicide? I don't know where the pressure came from, but I'm sure there was pressure there.

I just felt very, very sorry for him. He had a young son and he talked to me about him a good many times. Well, it was just one of the hazards, I guess, in political life, but it was very cruel. I really don't know the merits of it at all. I just--my instinct tells me that he was really persecuted.

HESS: Did any of the staff members sit in on the Cabinet meetings in the role of a secretary to the Cabinet during the time that you were there?

DENNISON: No. This raises an interesting point. There

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wasn't anybody except Connelly. He did occasionally make some notes, but the President told me a number of times, "You know the Cabinet's use is only such as the President wishes to make of it." Essentially it's a political device and hasn't any position in our Government structure such as the British Cabinet. I've been in Cabinet meetings and I've been in the meetings of the Security Council with him.

The Cabinet meetings were pretty dull, I thought. Nothing was ever decided. I mean the things they were discussing mostly were politics, and sometimes they'd get into inter-departmental discussions. But Forrestal really was sold on the idea of having a Cabinet secretariat and organizing and having an agenda and having papers and all that kind of stuff.

Well, he couldn't even get close to first base with the President on that kind of a thing. The President didn't want that. He didn't need a Cabinet in that sense. He had a Security Council. I've seen him run those meetings. That was beautiful because nothing came up that he didn't want discussed. He didn't do it by pounding on the table. He just controlled everything that went on. He knew that

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this was nothing but, and could be nothing but, an advisory body. It was the same way with the Cabinet. The Cabinet can't make any decisions and the Security Council can't, but I think the President felt that the Cabinet wanted to see him, wanted to talk to him, and it makes you feel pretty important, I suppose, to sit around a table with your name and title on the back of the chair.

HESS: Good for the ego if nothing else.

DENNISON: Yes.

HESS: Did you think that the Cabinet members were his principal advisers? If the subject was, say finance, was the Secretary of the Treasury the principal adviser or were there other people, maybe even out of the Government, that Mr. Truman might have relied on more than the people he had in his Cabinet?

DENNISON: Well, it's pretty hard to say because it depended on what the problem was, but I think in general he didn't look on anybody as his principal adviser, in or out of the Cabinet, but in finance, for example, there might be some angles that the Attorney General would think about or the Secretary of Commerce beside the Secretary of the Treasury. And when subjects like that came up there were the people who might be

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able to contribute some ideas.

But to go back to what I told you about President Truman's decision making. When he called in his advisers they were men whose opinions he respected, but he had in the back of his mind all the time that they saw the problem from the standpoint of their particular responsibility.

But his concept of a political Cabinet, one really not having a place in the executive structure, I think is the key to his handling of the Cabinet.

HESS: Were you concerned with the issues of integration of the services? One of the reasons I ask is that one of the file folders in your files at the Library is entitled, "Segregation and Naval Bases."

DENNISON: Oh, I know what it was. I was concerned in it only because the President was concerned. The Navy really was in the forefront of the armed services in recognizing the racial

facts of life and encouraging Negroes to become members of the armed forces. This was not new. We had Negroes in the Navy for a long, long time, and some of the older ones that I knew were fine men. I mean they were respected by their shipmates and they were damn good sailors.

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I think that maybe we went overboard, and I'm sure that the other services did too, in finally overdoing it.

For example, as far back as when I had the *Missouri*, [Admiral Chester W.] Nimitz, who was Chief of Naval Operations, sent me a letter and said he planned to order a Negro lieutenant to my ship (I think at that time maybe he was the only Negro lieutenant we had), and what did I think about it.

So I wrote back a letter, after thinking it over a long time, and said first I want to thank you for consulting me. I'm grateful to you. I will accept, of course, anybody who is ordered to my ship and I'll treat him just as I treat any other officer, but there are a couple of points I'd like to raise with you. One is that the *Missouri* is really a show piece and in some areas unfortunately there is racial prejudice.

And secondly, if you put this lieutenant in the *Missouri* you've lost all of your maneuvering room. You've put him in the biggest ship we have and the one that every officer wants to serve in. Why, if you're going to assign this man someplace,

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don't you start in a smaller ship, say a destroyer or a cruiser?

Well, whether what I had to say meant anything to him or not, he didn't order the man. But the problem is you can't permit racial discrimination among fighting men. They're too close together. You can't have this going on. The Filipinos in the Navy are well-liked and they're great people. They are very clannish, of course. They have their own ideas about what to eat and all that kind of stuff. But this segregation in naval bases, desegregation is what it was, with the constant effort to eliminate it before it even started. Then the other aspect was to move ahead to increased integration.

The President wasn't a fanatic about any of these things at all. He didn't hammer on the table and say that something had to be done about it. That wasn't his way.

HESS: In your opinion what was Mr. Truman's basic belief and basic opinion on civil rights; a man from Independence, Missouri, which is really a southern town?

DENNISON: I hate the words liberal and conservative. I

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don't know what those words mean, but remember what I mentioned before. The President really, honestly felt that he was President of all the people. It didn't make any difference whether they were black or white or what they were, and he didn't have any anti-black feeling that I could even sense, let alone detect. Of course he knew all about the Civil War and all the reasons for it and everything about it. I remember one time we were talking about Mark Twain. I think I mentioned Twain as being such a great writer, or something, and the President took out after Mark Twain. Because he'd bought his way out of serving in the Army he was no damn good.

The President was so sympathetic. One day we were talking about Justice Holmes and I said I thought he was a great justice and certainly his minority opinions were becoming majority opinions. The President didn't want any part of Oliver Wendell Holmes. I said, "Well, I never had the privilege of hearing him."

He said, "Well, I did. I've been in the court and Holmes was absolutely ruthless with young attorneys and bullied them." He said, "Any man who would do a thing like that, humiliate these people, is basically

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no good." So that may give you a clue about his civil rights view. He had no biases whatever that I could discover.

HESS: Just one further point. At the time that you wrote the letter saying that it might be best that the Negro officer not serve in the *Missouri*, wasn't that racial discrimination?

DENNISON: I'll give you the reasons why I thought not. It was so pointed to order a black lieutenant that nobody ever heard of and put him in the *Missouri*. If it had been within the normal course of events that he was due for this kind of duty it might have been a different matter. But, no, it wasn't because I didn't want a Negro. I was sure that if I had one he would have been treated just as I told Admiral Nimitz. I wouldn't have been strained either. But it had to come out that here we were just putting on a show. We didn't really mean it. We just had this lieutenant and we wanted to make everybody believe we were really integrated when we really weren't.

HESS: The man had not earned the right.

DENNISON: No, and everybody would know it, including himself, so it wasn't fair

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to him and it wasn't fair to my ship.

HESS: Did Mr. Truman, to your knowledge, ever have any intention of running for re-election in 1952 after he won in 1948?

DENNISON: No, and I'm sure you know that story. I may have told you myself. He wrote this memorandum to himself not long after he had been re-elected that he was not going to run again, and he meant it.

HESS: Is that the memorandum that he read at Key West?

DENNISON: Yes.

HESS: You were present at the time that he read the memorandum, correct?

DENNISON: I certainly was. I was sitting next to him and when he got through with it I had a hard time believing it. I asked if I could see it and he handed it to me and I read it.

HESS: Do you recall if that was on November the 19th of 1951 as William Rigdon has in his book *White House Sailor*, or was it in March of 1951 as Mr. Truman says in his *Memoirs*? What month was it?

DENNISON: I would think it was November. What was the date of the dinner at which he made his...

HESS: That was in the next year, 1952, and that was on

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March 29th at the Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner at the National Guard Armory.

DENNISON: Well, you're talking about November '51.

HESS: That's right, November '51.

DENNISON: Well, it had to be because I remember I thought then, "Well, why did he tell us now," and of course it never leaked. But if you believe Truman's accuracy, it would have had to have been only a matter of days before he said it.

HESS: No, he said a year, see...

DENNISON: Well, I'm in the wrong year then.

HESS: In his book he said it was March of '51, and the announcement was March of '52.

DENNISON: Oh.

HESS: You feel quite sure that it was not an entire year before the public announcement was made?

DENNISON: Yes.

HESS: All right, I believe that he made it quite clear, at least he said so in his book, that he asked that there be no leaks, is that correct?

DENNISON: No. He didn't have to ask any such thing. He well knew that none of us were going to say anything. We had sense enough to realize the

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significance of the decision. No, he didn't say, "Now I'm going to tell you something and don't tell a soul." That would have been insulting. He wouldn't do it and it would have been completely unnecessary.

HESS: Okay, do you remember the attitude of the other people who were there at the time?

DENNISON: Yes, I think we all shared the same feeling of gratitude that the President would take us into his confidence to that extent. I think that I probably was less surprised than most of them because political considerations were entirely outside of my concern and I couldn't have cared less about the impact on the Democratic Party. It was President Truman I was thinking about. If he was serious enough about it to write himself this memorandum, I knew damn well that anybody would be stupid if they just said, "Well, you don't mean this, Mr. Truman. Won't you reconsider it?" He meant it.

HESS: Who do you think the President would have preferred to see as Democratic standard-bearer that year?

DENNISON: I have no idea because...

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HESS: Of course that was the year that Adlai Stevenson ran, but he was a bit reluctant at times. According to Cabell Phillips in his book, *The Truman Presidency*, Mr. Truman reconsidered his decision in March of '52 about one week before the announcement and asked some of the members of his White House staff and they said it might be best not to run again. Do you recall anything in particular about the convention and campaign of '52?

DENNISON: No.

HESS: Did you keep pretty well out of that one too?

DENNISON: Oh, yes, completely.

HESS: Were you surprised that General Eisenhower won?

DENNISON: No, not really. He was a popular figure and respected and liked and he was appealing. Stevenson was a measurably smarter man, or more intelligent, but he didn't come across very well.

President Truman told me one time about the political conventions. He was talking about '48. He said, "Any President is going to absolutely control a convention," And then he went on to explain what he meant. What he was saying was that any President really had the thing in the palm of his

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hand and that what he wanted done was what was going to be done. They may have been over optimistic.

HESS: What do you recall about the transition from the Truman administration to the Eisenhower administration?

DENNISON: It was miserable. Here again the President recognized the need for continuity. He remembered how awful his position was when President Roosevelt died having never been briefed on anything. He hadn't been kept informed about anything and he didn't want that to happen again.

He invited President Eisenhower to come down to stay with him in the White House, or to be there. Eisenhower declined, and instead of taking advantage of the opportunity to get some of his people to sit down beside us where we were working day by day, which was what President Truman was offering, he waited until the last ditch and then sent down a group of people who didn't know anything about anything to go around and ask each one of us what we were doing. That was all he did. So in spite of President Truman's generous offer, President Eisenhower, for his own good reason I'm sure, didn't accept, and the result was

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that the very thing that President Truman tried to avoid occurred. You got a-new administration which was completely in the dark.

It was just too bad, and of course President Eisenhower's idea of a staff was the Army concept, completely different from the President's concept, where you have a Chief of Staff and the Commander in Chief doesn't see anybody else except every other Thursday.

HESS: Was Sherman Adams much in evidence during the days of transition?

DENNISON: Well, the days--there were damn few days. I forget the man who headed up this group. I'm trying to recall whether it was Adams. It may have been. It probably was. Well, a genius couldn't have sized up that operation overnight. The end result was that some of the things which were being done weren't continued. I mentioned about maritime affairs. They still don't have a maritime coordinator and maritime affairs are in really sad shape.

HESS: What comes to mind when you look back on your functions on maritime affairs? Just what were some of the main things that you worked on?

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DENNISON: Well, I had a five foot shelf of books on that. It mainly had to do originally with covering what we said were excessive payments under the Maritime Act which permitted construction subsidies up to a certain percentage and then beyond that, depending on the defense feature. And the action taken on the contract was absolutely illegal. The shipping companies were fighting us tooth and nail, and we had differences of opinion within our own Government. But I got into all kinds of things--labor problems--and that's a pretty murky field in the maritime business too. I was young and innocent in those days. I couldn't understand some of the things that were going on. I talked to some of the top labor leaders and said, "You fellows must realize that you're pricing yourselves out of the market and you're destroying the American Merchant Marine. The Government isn't going to keep on paying all these subsidies. It can't. Why do you do it?"

They said, "Well, we don't think that the American Merchant Marine is here to stay. In any event, and to be brutal about it, we're just out for a fast buck."

Well, I can't understand it now any more than

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I could then. Why destroy something just to make money quickly instead of building up a vital industry so it would continue to offer employment. This is an extreme example and all labor people aren't like that.

Consider the shameful longshoremen's union. You have a situation where the contract expiration dates are different on the West Coast, the Gulf and the East Coast. Whoever negotiates first has to be topped by the other guy. In other words, the East Coast guy gets something, then the Gulf people have got to get something better and the West Coast better, and around and around.

Well, my idea was that there ought to be a common contract expiration date. Tear up the contracts and start all over again all at once. I never got this idea off the ground because it would take an awful lot of persuasion to ever get that idea across. These labor leaders have all got to be elected.

HESS: Was Paul Hall in charge of the Maritime Union back then?

DENNISON: I'm not sure. He's been around a long time.

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I really can't remember.

HESS: We have several other subjects that you wanted to take up--President Truman giving some flags to your children--Mr. Truman's formula on raising children. Do you want to take those up at a different time?

DENNISON: No, I'd be glad to do it now. Have you got any tape left there?

HESS: Yes, we sure do.

DENNISON: Well, first, about those flags. I wanted to get that on the record because again it's so typical of the President.

We were down in-Key West one time. It was a fairly quiet afternoon and the President was on the porch reading and I said, "I want to go to town to buy a present for my children."

He asked, "What are you going to get?"

I said, "Well, I want to get them each a flag."

And he said, "I think that's a great idea, but don't worry about it. I'll take care of that."

So I didn't do anything about it. We got back to Washington and he sent for me one day. I thought he had forgotten about it. But I've always been

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wrong when I thought he had forgotten anything. He handed me a box, wrapped up, and a letter, a letter to my daughter Lee written by hand and this was--well, she was born in '45 and this was '50 or '51 I think. Anyway, the letters are on file somewhere. So I took the thing home and gave it to my daughter. She opened it and here were two silk flags with fringe around them that I recognized immediately because ever since I had been in the White House they were on each corner of the President's desk. These are the flags that he gave to my children. My son was only three or three and a half years old at the time.

Lee, my daughter, wrote a letter to the President and thanked him in a typical kid's letter and said, "I hope you're having a good time in the White House," and that sort of thing, and thanked him for the lovely flags and put "x's" and circles under the signature.

The President replied in his own handwriting too. He was pleased that she liked the flags and he said it was the most beautiful symbol in the world, particularly when you see it in a foreign country, and your good father will explain all this to you one

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day, and it's been a long time since I've had a letter from a nice little girl, and he went on to make a few other remarks and then signed his own name and put x's and circles under his signature.

He said, "Tell your brother when he's old enough to write me he owes me a letter."

The other one is about raising daughters. I was quite serious about this daughter business. I only had one. I asked the President one day (sometimes I wonder why he put up with some of my questions, but he always did), "What is your formula for raising daughters?"

He said, "Well, Bob, that's very simple. All you've got to do is to find out what they want to do and then advise them to do it." How true that was.

HESS: And you had a story about offshore oil and the President's idea about trying to obtain money for political purposes.

DENNISON: Well, this was a painful experience. It was in the afternoon and I was alone with the President and Harry came bursting in, all enthusiastic, and he said, "Boss, I've got a great thing I want to tell you. If you'll make a statement about ownership of offshore oil rights," I forget what the issue was,

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but this was a very live one at the time, "we can get "x" number of hundreds of thousands of dollars for the Democratic committee out of Louisiana and some other southern states."

This was one of the very, very few times that I've ever seen the President upset. I know he must have been upset a good many times, but he never showed it. But this time he said, "Harry, don't you ever say anything like that to me again." He said, "I'm the President of all the people and I don't give a damn whether I'm re-elected or whether any Democrat is ever elected, if we have to do it by doing something that is wrong."

Now Vaughan was absolutely crushed. He thought he had great news. So he didn't say a word, just turned around and went out. I was embarrassed and kept my mouth shut.

After a moment the President turned to me and said, "Bob, that really hurt me, but I just had to do it."

And I said, "Well, I understand, Mr. President."

Boy, that's one issue that when he started--if anybody said anything to indicate that he was going to use his office as a political tool, they had

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better duck.

HESS: You also wanted to mention Mr. Churchill's visit to the United States in January of 1952.

DENNISON: Early in 1952 members of the new British government headed by Winston Churchill came to Washington for a series of talks. Churchill was accompanied by Lord Cherwell, Lord Ismay, Anthony Eden, and Sir Oliver Franks. On the day of their arrival, Saturday, January 5, the President invited the British party to meet him aboard the *Williamsburg* for a cruise down the Potomac. In addition to the President, Secretaries Acheson, Snyder, Lovett, Ambassador Gifford, and Averell Harriman were also invited. The President wanted complete privacy so there were no reporters present and no photographers. We were to make an overnight

cruise on the Potomac. I was aboard in my usual role, accompanied by Chief Petty Officer Paul Begley who was a member of my staff. Chief Begley always accompanied the President to take pictures for the record.

On this particular occasion the President and his party met with the British in the afterlounge

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of the *Williamsburg*. The forward bulkhead of the lounge contained a fireplace which seemed an ideal background for a photograph of the President and the Prime Minister. At least so I thought. I asked both of them if they would mind posing for their picture. They readily agreed. Just as Begley was about to snap this historic picture I noticed that over the mantel hung a painting of the engagement between the U.S.S. *Constitution* and the H.M.S. *Java* on December 29, 1812, off the coast of Brazil. In this engagement the *Java* was destroyed after Captain Lambert had surrendered to Captain Bainbridge. I stopped Begley and went up to apologize to the Prime Minister and the President, explaining, as of course the President well knew, that this was not deliberate but perhaps they would prefer a more neutral background. The Prime Minister put on his glasses, examined the painting, and then, putting his glasses down on the end of his nose, turned to me and said, "Young man, that was many years ago. Go ahead and take your picture." The President, of course, was amused.

Three enlargements of this photograph were each autographed by the President and the Prime Minister. One was presented to the Prime

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Minister, one to the President and I have the third. I assume that the President's copy is on file in the Truman Library.

HESS: I understand that you helped with the arrangements for Mr. Truman's stay when he came to Washington to attend President Kennedy's funeral, correct?

DENNISON: Well, the President called me and asked me if I would help him and get back in as his Aide, and I said I would be honored, of course.

So I met him at Blair House where he was staying, or was to stay, and there weren't very many arrangements to make because the White House had taken care of all of that. Of course the President had a car available and anything else he needed. He didn't need very much. He wasn't going anywhere. But he did have privacy. He was guarded, of course, and there weren't very many of us around. He wasn't besieged with a lot of people. He looked well. Mrs. Truman didn't come but Margaret came down.

But speaking of President Eisenhower's message. Somebody answered the telephone and got a garbled message that was supposed to have come from President

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Eisenhower to the effect that he wanted to know if he could pick up President Truman to go to the funeral ceremony.

Well, I forget ,who answered it, some butler or Secret Service man or somebody, and I found that kind.of hard to believe. I called the Statler and got through to General Eisenhower. He said, "Thank God, I've got you on the phone. I don't seem to be able to get through to anybody."

And I said, "What can I do for you?"

He said, "All I want to know is whether Mamie and I could stop by to pick up President Truman and Margaret to go to the cathedral. I don't intend to go to the graveside and I don't suppose President Truman does either."

So I said, "Well, General, I'll call you back."

He said, "Well, that's no problem. I'll hold the phone."

So I said, "Well, the President is right here." I asked the President and he said, "Certainly."

At the appointed time around came President Eisenhower and his wife and he did pick up President Truman and Margaret. He did go to the cathedral, and

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after the ceremony there they came back to Blair House. The President asked General and Mrs. Eisenhower if they wanted to come in and have a drink or a cup of coffee or something. They accepted and they all came in the living room of Blair House and sat down.

There were again only a couple of us there. I don't know where the magic came from, maybe President Truman inviting him to come in or maybe because of Eisenhower's thoughtfulness in calling up in the first place, but at any rate they sat down by themselves on a couch and started talking and reminiscing.

They were going along just great and a Secret Service man came in and said, "There's an Army officer at the door who would like to make a statement."

I went out to see what this was all about. Well, some officer, it was a colonel, I think, seemed to be embarrassed and didn't know what to do. I said, "What's your problem?"

He said, "Well, Mrs. Kennedy sent me over here to make a statement to President Truman, and she understands President Eisenhower is here."

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I said, "Well, forget that statement. What is it?."

"Well, she's upset and embarrassed because she forgot to invite these two gentlemen to come over to the White House." Remember all these foreign dignitaries were there after the ceremony.

I said, "Well, come on in, but don't make any statement. Just tell them what you told me and take it easy and relax, or if you want I'll tell them."

He said, "No, I'll do it." So he told them exactly what happened.

And General Eisenhower spoke up first and said, "Well, please tell Mrs. Kennedy that I understand completely. My wife and I understand it, and it was very kind of her to think of us, but we must get back to Gettysburg, so please present our apology."

And Truman spoke up and said, "Well, I feel very much the same way. I appreciate her thoughtfulness and I understand why we weren't thought of in the first place. She has so much on her mind. But I, too, am tired and I've got to rest and I'm sure she'll

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understand."

Well, that guy turned around with relief and left.

HESS: He really thought he was on a diplomatic mission.

DENNISON: Yes, he thought they'd get incensed, mad, and take it out on him. Instead they just kept on having another drink and talking. I thought it would never end, but it was really heartwarming because they completely buried the hatchet and you'd think there had never been any differences between them and they were right back where they came in when Eisenhower came back from Europe. And in the end, when they really had to go, President Truman, as he would, much to the horror of the Secret Service, went out to the curb and started talking again while the car waited to take the Eisenhowers away. It was really wonderful.

So that was the end of this feud and unnecessary hard feelings. And about time, too.

HESS: Did Mr. Truman, to your knowledge, ever think seriously of running for the Senate from Missouri in 1952 or there after, after he left the Presidency?

DENNISON: No, not that I'm aware of. But I can understand

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why people might have thought so and he might have jestingly said so. He missed Congress, he loved Congress, and I think the former Presidents or former Senators have the privilege of the floor, don't they? They can apparently come in on any session they want to, but I think he had had it as far as running. I can't imagine anybody running for the Presidency and winning, going back and running for the Senate or anything.

HESS: Was it John Quincy Adams who went back to the House?

DENNISON: Yes.

HESS: I believe it was.

DENNISON: That was a different era.

HESS: Yes. In your opinion, what will be Mr. Truman's place in history one or two hundred years from now?

DENNISON: Well, if we have any history by then, I think that it is going to become clearer and clearer that he was one of the principal molders, of the course of events after World War II, and made us really a world power, and gave us direction, and provided the ideas and the means to pull the whole

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world back together. I think this is going to be looked on as a very significant period in our history.

And I can't help but be irritated when somebody tells me, some of my friends, "You know President Truman is going down in history as one of our great Presidents."

And I say, "Where the hell have you been? I could have told you that in January of 1948." You just had to feel, when you were with him, certainly after you got to know him, that he was truly a great man.

HESS: What do you see as the major accomplishments of the Truman administration?

DENNISON: Well, there are so many it's most difficult to generalize, but it seems to me that the major accomplishment was the rehabilitation of the world after the debacle of World War II, and it took a lot of foresight, a lot of imagination, and a lot of understanding. There were any number of things that, had they not been done, or had they miscarried, would have left us in deep trouble. The aid to Greece and Turkey, the Truman Doctrine, has really been the foundation

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of our foreign policy ever since, and had it not been for the Marshall plan it would have been a completely different world.

HESS: What's your favorite memory of Mr. Truman?

DENNISON: Well, I've got so many happy ones that it would be pretty hard to think about any one. I think my favorite memory of him is not any one incident, or any one time, but getting to know him, and at least thinking I understood him, and having his trust and confidence. And I was extremely fortunate to have that experience.

HESS: Do you have anything else to add on Mr. Truman or your service in the White House during the Truman administration?

DENNISON: No, I think not. I think we pretty well covered the waterfront.

HESS: Well, thank you very much.

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