

Oral History Interview

with

MARK F. ETHRIDGE

Visited the Balkans to study the postwar situation for the U.S. Dept. of State, 1945; U.S. delegate to the U.N. Commission of Investigation to study the Greek border disputes, 1947; a U.S. representative on the U.N. Conciliation Commission for Palestine, 1949; and chairman of the U.S. Advisory Commission on Information, 1948-50.

Moncure, North Carolina
June 4, 1974

by Richard D. McKinzie, Harry S. Truman Library

The Harry S. Truman Library
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MCKINZIE: Mr. Ethridge, I noticed that you had a great deal of affiliation with the [Franklin D.] Roosevelt administration.

ETHRIDGE: Yes, I did.

MCKINZIE: Presumably through your work as a newspaperman. Is that right?

ETHRIDGE: Yes, and then Roosevelt came to Warm Springs, Georgia when I was editor of the Macon *Telegraph* of Macon, Georgia. I got to know him down there. Then, the *Telegraph* had

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a reputation as a liberal paper and when Roosevelt went in he grabbed me for a farm tenancy commission first, and then I did fair employment practice for him during the war and I did a radio study for him.

MCKINZIE: I notice that in some of the writings about you, you are alleged to have anticipated much of the New Deal; that you proposed some things which, in fact, later was translated into action when Roosevelt became President.

ETHRIDGE: Yes, I did. I thought it was inevitable you had to have a New Deal or something, something had to give. Roosevelt picked up from something I wrote for one of his speeches, "too much wheat and not enough to eat, too much cotton and not enough to wear." That phrase was from something I'd written. And I made a speech, "Capitalism on the Defensive" in 1931, before the New Deal, which said, "something had

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to give."

MCKINZIE: You seem to have played a role of arbitrator in a lot of things during the 1930s for Roosevelt. Was there any particular reason for that? I noticed that you were involved in that business with the National Association of Broadcasters and the FCC as a kind of arbitrator.

ETHRIDGE: Yes.

MCKINZIE: And the work you did for the FEPC was in the nature of arbitration?

ETHRIDGE: The National Association of Broadcasters -- we had a selfish interest in that. We had a 50,000 watt station and when the musicians pulled a strike somebody had to get into it, and I got into it and got hooked as chairman of the National Association of Broadcasters. Then I was elected unpaid president in 1938 for several months, and then they selected a paid president and I went into the background. I never was interested

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primarily in radio; we had a station and I had to get interested.

MCKINZIE: I noticed during the war that you were an advisor to the Office of War Information. I wonder if I could get you to talk a little bit about that, about the philosophy of the Office of War Information? Did that seem to present any kind of a problem in your mind about preserving free information? It is in a sense a domestic propaganda agency.

ETHRIDGE: No, I never was very active in that. As a matter of fact, those were honorary titles. Elmer Davis was head of it and I think his philosophy was to let out everything that could possibly be let out. He didn't take as narrow a view of national security as [Richard M.] Nixon does. His was a broad view, and I think most newspaper people subscribe to the way he ran it.

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MCKINZIE: Certainly you did?

ETHRIDGE: Yes, yes.

MCKINZIE: The reason I'm asking you about that is I'm trying to lead you into how you happened to have your first contacts with the Truman administration after Mr. Roosevelt's death.

ETHRIDGE: I'll tell you how I think it came about. The contact was really with [James F.] Byrnes. I didn't know Byrnes except as anybody knew him. I knew him as a newspaperman around Washington; but he called me and asked me to come to Washington and I went. This was after the London conference of October 1945 broke down, and there had been bitter exchange between Molotov and Bevin in that conference, and he said that the break was complete and we were further away from the Russians than we had ever been. One of the charges that Molotov made was that the military and civilian people representing

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us abroad were lying to Byrnes about the extent of Russian domination of the situation. They were in charge in Eastern Europe and I think that the Russians claimed that Byrnes wasn't getting correct information about it and he wanted somebody to do a reportorial job first, a reportorial job.

MCKINZIE: That would explain then why he had called you.

ETHRIDGE: Yes. I found out from other people that a fellow named Brown from Spartanburg, which is Jimmy Byrnes' hometown, had recommended me, and Turner Catledge of the New York *Times* had seconded it for me to do a reportorial job. So my contact wasn't with Truman except I went to the White House as a matter of courtesy before I went on this mission. That's the only contact I had, and at that time, I don't know whether you remember it or not, but Byrnes fancied himself President.

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MCKINZIE: He was in the process of getting himself in deep trouble just then, I think.

ETHRIDGE: Yes, and in one of Truman's books he talks about Byrnes not giving him my reports.

MCKINZIE: That's true. It's in Truman's memoirs that he mentions this. When Byrnes called you to Washington and said he wanted a reportorial job did he give you lots of briefings? Did you have access to the Balkan situation or were you pretty well up on Balkan affairs at this point?

ETHRIDGE: Well, I was pretty well up for a newspaperman, but he didn't give me a lot of briefing on it. I was to go to Bulgaria and Rumania, which were in Communist hands, and I interviewed in Bulgaria everybody from the extreme right, that is the regent to the King, to the extreme left. I interviewed, oh, I've forgotten how many, more than a hundred people, and cabled reports everyday

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to the State Department. So they got a great volume of report.

MCKINZIE: Did you have a good deal of help?

ETHRIDGE: No, I had one college professor, Si [Cyril Edwin] Black, who is now professor of Russian history at Princeton. His mother was a Bulgarian, and he had been working in the State Department. I don't know whether on the Bulgarian desk or not, but they attached him to me and I was glad to have him; and when I went on another mission I asked for him. So, that's how close we were.

MCKINZIE: Did you feel that you had complete access to all those people when you got there? Did you ever feel that somebody was trying to keep you from seeing this person or that person, particularly the people on the right?

ETHRIDGE: No, they followed me. They attached a young lieutenant to me as aide, so they said.

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MCKINZIE: Russian or Bulgarian?

ETHRIDGE: Bulgarian. But he was supposed to spy on me, and after I left, because he hadn't, they put him in jail. I've seen him since then, and I hear from him every Christmas. His father went to the University of Pennsylvania, so he has that American connection and they said that's the reason they attached him to me, because he had had American connections. But he was supposed to spy on me. He accompanied me on trips that I made outside of Sofia; he was very scrupulous. He would say, "I have to go across town to get gasoline," and that meant I was free to talk to anybody without surveillance; and I did talk to people without surveillance and because he wasn't diligent enough about reporting on whom I talked to, they put him in jail after I left.

MCKINZIE: You talked, I take it, to Maynard Barnes?

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ETHRIDGE: Oh, yes, yes.

MCKINZIE: Evidently he was in some kind of trouble within the State Department for some of his reports. I've seen evidence that maybe some people thought he was reporting the situation too harshly back to the State Department.

ETHRIDGE: That was what the Russians had claimed. The Russians had claimed that, but I found that far from exaggerating or overstating the case they were understating it. The Russians were just ignoring us. We were a joint occupying power. Theoretically the British, the Russians, and we were the occupying power. They didn't pay any attention to us at all. Maynard Barnes got worked up about it, yes; but he was reporting the truth.

MCKINZIE: How long were you there before you began to form some impressions that those elections they were supposed to hold weren't going to be

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very democratic? Was it just sort of immediately apparent or did it take a while to figure it out?

ETHRIDGE: Yes, within a couple of weeks. They had no intention of holding any elections. The Rumanians did hold an election I believe. A Rumanian colonel saw me off when I flew from Sofia to Moscow, and he told me that morning -- about 5 o'clock I flew -- he told me that morning how the Rumanian election had come out. Well, the election wasn't held until that day. He told me 24 hours in advance how the election came out, 99.4 percent. I pointed it out to him. They knew it was stacked.

MCKINZIE: You said you filed some reports to the State Department everyday, but did you have any awareness that Secretary Byrnes was getting those reports as you were doing them?

ETHRIDGE: No, I couldn't swear to it. Every now

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and then I wrote one "For Eyes of Byrnes." I did that later on in the Palestine commission, for the Secretary's eyes. But most of what I filed were routine interrogation of people. I'm sure the Secretary got my conclusions. I wrote conclusions from time to time and I'm sure he got those. But Byrnes, his background came out; he was a compromiser in the Senate and he thought he could compromise with the Russians on anything, and he was inclined to discount the harshness, say of Barnes, or the factual reports of [Burton Yost] Berry or General [Cortlandt Van R.] Schuyler who later became NATO commander. General Schuyler was in Rumania at the time. Byrnes felt, I'm sure, that he could compromise with "Uncle Joe "and my own feeling was he didn't take seriously enough the situation.

MCKINZIE: This must have been rather disillusioning to you, with a reputation of liberal thought and some commitment to integration of lots of things in the world as far as that was possible,

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and yet here this was just after victory and to go and discover that it's all falling apart. Were you depressed as a result of this?

ETHRIDGE: Yes, it was very depressing because I had been sympathetic to Russia but their design was emerging at the time, that is, their pattern of holding on to Eastern Europe. They were

hell-bent on holding on to Rumania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia. They didn't have Yugoslavia because Tito didn't let them have it, but they tried to get it.

MCKINZIE: Did you ever hear a Russian argue that that course of action was justified on grounds of their own national security?

ETHRIDGE: Yes, yes. And also on this ground. Several Russians argued with me, that Britain was through, that Great Britain was through and "why don't we divide up the world into spheres? You take this part, we'll take that part." That came back in the Balkan commission later and in the Palestine commission and

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the Mideast. That argument was made to me several times. Yes, this was very disillusioning because I had somewhat shared Byrnes' feeling that we would get along now the war was won. We'd settle back, and have collective security.

MCKINZIE: When you were in Rumania and Bulgaria, were there still at that point some Americans other than diplomatic personnel there? Were there still some American businessmen there with whom you could speak?

ETHRIDGE: No, there weren't American businessmen there. It was too soon after the war. There was nobody except American civilian Foreign Service people and military, and the Foreign Service people were subordinate to the military at the time because it was a military occupation; and while we had ministers in both Bulgaria and Rumania they were in fact advisors to the military.

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MCKINZIE: You then left Sofia and went on to Moscow, did you not, where you had some conversations with [Andrei] Vishinsky?

ETHRIDGE: Yes, Vishinsky.

MCKINZIE: Did you think that anything could happen, positively?

ETHRIDGE: No, when I was sent to Moscow at the suggestion of Barnes and Harriman, they both joined in and my mission was to tell the Russians what situation I found in Bulgaria -- I hadn't been to Rumania at the time -- what the situation was, and Vishinsky was most cynical about it. In the first five minutes he said, "I don't think we're going to get together Mr. Ethridge."

And I said, "Well, Mr. Vishinsky, I haven't come 9,000 miles for my health, shall I leave the room and cable the President that the Russians don't want to hear our story?"

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He said, "By no means, by no means, let's talk."

And we talked. But the result was the same, they wouldn't give in in anything. I told him about how the minority parties were treated in Bulgaria -- I mean the democratic parties -- and how they were kicked around. He said, "A frightened bird is frightened of the bush on which he sits." That was his reaction to that: "We don't pay any attention to all the rest of that stuff." Another expression he used was, "When you're going to make an omelette you have to scramble some eggs."

MCKINZIE: Did he give you any hope that there could be any change?

ETHRIDGE: No, Vishinsky didn't. Stalin later gave Byrnes a false hope.

MCKINZIE: Did you talk to Byrnes? Who else was in Moscow when you were there?

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ETHRIDGE: [Averell] Harriman, Harriman was all. But I cabled Byrnes regularly.

MCKINZIE: Why do you suppose they didn't want to make your final report public?

ETHRIDGE: I don't know, I don't know. I just have no idea.

MCKINZIE: Did you then talk to Mr. Byrnes after your return?

ETHRIDGE: Yes, oh yes, after I came back.

MCKINZIE: Well, maybe I'm getting ahead of the story a little bit. You know this was just at the end of the war and this was December, as I recall, of 1945. Moscow must have been a pretty dreary place by that time?

ETHRIDGE: It was, it was. I stayed at Spaso House where Harriman stayed. He didn't have any fire, he had little chips of wood. He did have an American PX where you could get things, a

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very ordinary affair, but you could get some the Russians didn't get, but you couldn't get any fuel or things like that; it was cold as hell. It wasn't any fun staying at Spaso House.

MCKINZIE: How long did you stay in Moscow, do you recall, after you came there from Sofia? How long were you in Moscow?

ETHRIDGE: Oh, about 10 days, about 10 days. Yes, just about 10 days.

MCKINZIE: Long enough to convince you that there was really no hope for a revision of Russian policy toward Bulgaria.

ETHRIDGE: No, no hope at all. And then I went to Rumania from Moscow, and while the Rumanians couldn't speak with the authority that Vishinsky could, the same thing was evident

that there was not going to be any change in policy. I talked with King Michael in Rumania and he told

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me about the incident of Vishinsky slamming his door so hard that it busted the panel. He demanded that Michael install [Petru] Groza, I believe, as Prime Minister, and Michael refused at first, although he later succumbed and did name Groza. Vishinsky was so angry that he slammed the door and busted the panel. I talked in Rumania with everybody from the extreme left to the extreme right, from the King on down to the lowest Communist, and as a matter of fact I had sessions with the Communists, several sessions with them.

MCKINZIE: Did they have any explanation for their treatment of minority parties or democratic parties or did they think they were treating them all right? What line did they take with you?

ETHRIDGE: Well, they made no apologies for the way they were treating them. I was trying to think of the name of the woman who -- Anna Pauker. She

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was the Russian-installed boss; she had a direct line to Stalin, and she dictated what the Rumanian Government did. There wasn't any question about it. I had a five-hour session with her, and we wound up drinking B & B, she loved B & B.

MCKINZIE: But it didn't make any difference?

ETHRIDGE: No, no, no. She was a hard-boiled -- she had denounced her husband, you know, and had him shot. That's what kind of girl she was.

MCKINZIE: Did you then leave Bucharest and come all the way back to Washington for conversations with Secretary Byrnes?

ETHRIDGE: Byrnes had arranged the Moscow conference for December, and he wanted my report before he left. So he cabled me -- I had flown out of Rumania to Rome, then Rome to North Africa to break the trip, and I had been in bed an hour in North Africa, Casablanca, when a young

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lieutenant woke me up and said, "You're to get on a plane immediately." So, with less than an hour's sleep I flew the Atlantic, and Wally [Walworth] Barbour who was later minister of Sweden -- he's among the distinguished ambassadors now -- met me and took me to the State Department to Byrnes right away. Byrnes asked me to write my report and I wrote 27 pages and took it to him and he asked me to condense it. He said he wanted to have it translated by Chip Bohlen and read to Stalin. So I did. I condensed it to seven pages and he took it to Moscow with him and read it to Stalin, and Stalin said it was too late to do anything about Bulgaria. They had already had their election and he wasn't going to do anything about Bulgaria, but he would do something about Rumania, and [Amb. Sir Archibald Clark] Kerr-Harriman-Vishinsky were

appointed a commission to go to Rumania and select a prime minister. Well, the Russians vetoed the first 22 names that were submitted

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and finally accepted the rector of the University of Cluj, who turned out to have been an underground Communist all his life. So we got royally hornswoggled on that.

MCKINZIE: Did you ever talk to President Truman about your mission, later?

ETHRIDGE: Yes, later. I talked to him on the basis of the reports I made. As you see, in there he got very angry with Byrnes because Byrnes hadn't given him my report.

MCKINZIE: In his memoirs he said he wrote Byrnes a letter on January 5, 1946, and said that he hadn't seen your report until after the Moscow conference.

ETHRIDGE: Yes.

MCKINZIE: And that Byrnes hadn't even told him the nature of the progress at the Moscow conference, or if in fact there was any progress. I guess

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Truman didn't think that there had been any progress at the Moscow conference.

ETHRIDGE: You remember, Byrnes came back from the Moscow conference and made a speech before he even saw Truman. I think that's how Truman found out about the Moscow conference. Yes, I talked with Truman about it later. The issue had passed, Byrnes was out. But Truman remarked, "I didn't see your report."

MCKINZIE: Did he ever talk to you of his idea of a Danube confederation?

ETHRIDGE: Yes, yes.

MCKINZIE: In connection with any of this?

ETHRIDGE: No, it was after the Balkan commission, You see, the Balkan commission was appointed the next year. How did you know that? Did I make some reference to his having...

MCKINZIE: Yes.

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ETHRIDGE: Yes, he talked to me about it. And he said that the dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian empire was a political necessity but an economic disaster. It was a natural economic unit, and in the Danubian confederation he would have liked to have brought that about; but you couldn't have gotten the Russians to go along with it for a minute. There wasn't any possibility of getting it and the problems were entirely different from what he had envisioned when he talked about the Danubian confederation.

MCKINZIE: How do you mean?

ETHRIDGE: Well, the problem in the Balkan thing was Bulgaria, Albania, and Yugoslavia were trying to overthrow Greece, and the drive was on the part of the Russians to overthrow the Greek Government and take possession of Greece. It never got around to a discussion of the Danubian confederation. It was entirely an emergency

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situation where you were trying to rescue Greece.

MCKINZIE: Then you came back from your travels to the Balkans in late 1945 to get almost immediately into the investigation of sabotage in Greece, did you not? In 1945 and early 1947 I know you were back in Greece checking on borders.

ETHRIDGE: Yes. There was an interlude there, I've forgotten how many months, but when the Balkan thing came up they called me again.

MCKINZIE: This is Byrnes again?

ETHRIDGE: Byrnes, yes, asked me to go.

MCKINZIE: Now, that was with the U.N. investigation?

ETHRIDGE: Yes, it was the first U.N. commission, Greece appealed to the U.N. on the basis that these other countries were trying to overthrow her, and the U.N. set up this commission with a member from each of the 11 regular members

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of the U.N.; I was made the American delegate.

MCKINZIE: Did you still have faith in the ability of the U.N. to resolve those kinds of problems?

ETHRIDGE: Yes, because it was untested, it was untried at the time. The Russians were not enthusiastic about the formation of the U.N., as you know. With that reservation, I had faith. I felt they might go along with the U.N. I didn't have unbounded faith, but up to a point I had faith that it could accomplish something.

MCKINZIE: The reason I asked that question was at the same time that U.N. commission was appointed, just about the same time, Paul [A.] Porter was sent to Greece to head an economic commission.

ETHRIDGE: Yes.

MCKINZIE: Let's see, [Lincoln] MacVeagh, I guess, was the U.S. ambassador at that time.

ETHRIDGE: Yes, yes.

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MCKINZIE: I've read that when you got to Greece and you and Porter and MacVeagh sort of got together and made an assessment of the situation; and I guess the question would be, why feedback through them, why not feedback through the U.N.?

ETHRIDGE: Well, I fed back through the U.N. too, but I did talk with Porter and MacVeagh regularly. After all, I was the U.S. representative on the U.N. commission, so I did operate through the Commission, but I kept them up with what was going on.

MCKINZIE: How did they handle that commission in Greece? How did the Greek Government handle the U.N. commission? Did they keep you in Athens or did they get you out and take you to...

ETHRIDGE: No, it was the Russians who were trying to keep us in Athens, because they said here is the center of the trouble. They resisted our

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moving at all; they resisted very strongly our moving even to Salonika. They said that is the seat of the trouble. This monarchical-Fascist government of Greece is the trouble. And they resisted our moving around. But we moved to assert our right to do it if nothing else. They resisted very strongly our going into Yugoslavia or into Bulgaria, and we sent a team into Albania. Albania didn't amount to much. We sent a team of -- I sent a young fellow who was later ambassador to Egypt as our representative on that team. We insisted on going since it was a U.N. commission. The Russians and the Poles were teamed together. They jointly resisted everything we proposed almost.

MCKINZIE: What kind of hard evidence could the U.N. team come up with, that there had been supplies and hospitalization services, and all the rest of it, coming from Yugoslavia and from Bulgaria?

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ETHRIDGE: We had a good deal of direct evidence. We had witness after witness.

MCKINZIE: You were there for quite some number of weeks?

ETHRIDGE: Yes, yes. I think we were there four months and then we went to Geneva to write our reports in Geneva for two or three months. I think the Commission covered seven months.

MCKINZIE: I noticed that by February of 1947, just about a month before the British announced that they were going to pull out, that you had sent a dispatch back in which you said that it appeared to you that there was going to be an all-out Communist push to take over the government. You know that's a fairly courageous act to say that you think that's going to happen

and to send it back to the State Department. What occurred -- just accumulative evidence, or was it more...

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ETHRIDGE: Yes, yes. Well, they were having demonstrations in Athens the whole time, and they broke up a couple of meetings of the Commission with their demonstrations outside. And I walked out of a Commission meeting, saying, "If you people can't keep order there's no use in us going on." I did that twice. I did it up in Yugoslavia once when -- they organized these demonstrations. They'd have a cheerleader. Yes, you could sense it, you could sense it. They were going to try an all-out push and the Truman Doctrine prevented it.

MCKINZIE: Yes. You, I take it, did talk to Paul Porter and to MacVeagh about sending back such a report as that?

ETHRIDGE: Yes, yes.

MCKINZIE: That brings up all sorts of difficult questions. If Greece were going to be in serious trouble and it was going to take massive

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aid to save Greece, it was almost a corollary to that that there was going to have to be some changes in the Greek Government; that it wasn't just going to be a matter of giving them money, because money wasn't going to do it.

ETHRIDGE: No.

MCKINZIE: Now, I guess the delicate question there is, how do you do that without intervening in the internal affairs of a sovereign nation, or do you just do it?

ETHRIDGE: You had to get into the internal affairs in this case, and Paul Porter and I organized a "[Constantin] Tsaldaris must go," clique. He did go. I've forgotten who succeeded him. Anyway we did get rid of Tsaldaris. Tsaldaris was a stupid fool. The day I got to Greece he gave a luncheon, and MacVeagh was there and Paul Porter, and I; and Tsaldaris backed me in to a

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corner and said, "Now the first thing we must do is get back the Rhodope Mountain territory that Bulgaria had lost, we must recapture Epirus."

I said, "My God, you don't even hold Athens, how are you talking that way? You just hold a part of Athens, and you don't hold anything except garrison cities. How the hell are you going to get back anything?" He was a stupid fool.

MCKINZIE: So, in the interest of saving democratic capitalism it was necessary to intervene in the internal affairs of Greece?

ETHRIDGE: Yes, yes.

MCKINZIE: I've read that the request for U.S. assistance did talk about aid in administration, aid in setting up economic institutions, and that that had pretty much been drafted in the State Department for Greek signature. Do you think that this feeling about Tsaldaris was

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shared pretty much by all the American diplomatic people there, or did he have his supporters?

ETHRIDGE: No, I think it was shared by all the diplomatic people there.

MCKINZIE: Before you got there, and before Paul Porter got there, did you have any sense of this emerging crisis? Before you were appointed to go to Greece, did you have an awareness that Greece was a terribly dangerous, volatile area?

ETHRIDGE: Yes, because I followed the U.N. debates and so forth.

MCKINZIE: But not so much through U.S. channels, then, but more through the U.N.? What I'm trying to get at is what kind of reports the State Department might have been getting about the situation in Greece prior to your arrival and prior to the arrival of Paul Porter.

ETHRIDGE: I don't know what reports they were getting.

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I believe the United States introduced a resolution for the U.N, to get into Greece, so they obviously kept up with the situation.

MCKINZIE: When you went back to Geneva to draft the report, what did the Poles and the Russians do there when you got down to the terrible problem of having to do that?

ETHRIDGE: They took the position that they would like for the report to be unanimous, but in closing they had reservations, so we framed the report that was unanimously signed but contained the reservations of the Poles and the Russians.

MCKINZIE: By the time you finished that work Byrnes was no longer Secretary of State and I believe General Marshall was.

ETHRIDGE: Yes.

MCKINZIE: What kind of a relationship did you have

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with him? Was it any different from that with Secretary Byrnes?

ETHRIDGE: No, I didn't have much contact with Marshall. I reported to him. Yes, I reported to him and he wasn't very much up on the situation. When he came back we had to sit around the U.N. for a couple of months while this case was under debate, and so forth.

MCKINZIE: How did you view that kind of public service at that time? It had taken a lot of time during those two years, and you were after all right at the peak of a journalist's career and here you were snatched away from it.

ETHRIDGE: Yes. Well, I thought it was something I had to do and we had an arrangement on the *Courier* where Barry Bingham, who owned it, was publisher when I was away, and I was editor when he was away, so we had a swap. We both came up on the editorial side of the newspaper, so, we kept it running from the editorial end.

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MCKINZIE: Well then, after this business on Greece, which, as you say, was resolved finally by the Truman Doctrine, you for a short time were going to get involved in the Palestine thing. There's one other question I wanted to ask about the business in Greece, when you came back and you had seen the situation -- of course, there was no way for you to know that the Truman Doctrine was going to be announced -- what was your assessment of the probabilities of the fate of Greece when you left there in February?

ETHRIDGE: Oh, the Truman Doctrine was announced before I left Greece. It was announced on March 10.

MCKINZIE: That's right, yes.

ETHRIDGE: It was announced before I left Greece, and, my God, it was greeted with the wildest demonstration on the part of the Greeks. They'd just got their guts up and all evidence of the Russian takeover disappeared. My Russian opposite number said to me, "What does this mean, Mr.

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Ethridge?"

I said, "It means you can't do it."

He said, "I understand that kind of language."

Paul Porter and I wrote the cable with the concurrence of MacVeagh that produced the Truman Doctrine.

MCKINZIE: Where did you do that?

ETHRIDGE: In Athens.

MCKINZIE: In your hotel room?

ETHRIDGE: No, over at the Embassy.

MCKINZIE: At someone's instigation?

ETHRIDGE: No, we just felt the situation was desperate enough; felt that Greece would go down the drain if the United States didn't do something. It was desperate. In our own minds, we gave Greece about five weeks, no more. And Truman reacted within 10 days of two weeks. Loy Henderson was in charge of the Middle East desk

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and he knew that situation, and Acheson, I believe, was Under Secretary at the time, and they got Truman to act immediately.

MCKINZIE: How did you happen to get called in on the Palestine conciliation mission?

ETHRIDGE: Well, the real truth of it is that somebody else had been designated to be the American representative and he had sense enough to see what the situation was, so he went on a binge. I was called in the last minute. I guess they considered me at that time a sort of workhorse. I was chairman of the [U.S. Advisory Commission on] Information, I had been called chairman of the FEPC, I had been on these missions; so, I got a call from Acheson asking me if I were going to be in Washington the next day. It happened I was going to be; I was going up to the Commission on Information, and he said, "Well, come to the State Department before you

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go to the hotel will you, when you get off the train?" At that time we were riding trains and I said, "Yes." I got in at 8:20 and went to the State Department, and Acheson said, "I suppose you know why we want you?"

I said, "No, I have no idea."

He said, "We want you to go to Palestine."

I said, "My God, I haven't lost anything there. You all have given me enough dirty assignments already," and I said, "Besides, I don't agree with your hourglass division." I said, "I don't agree with it at all."

And I don't think he did very much, because he didn't demur too much when I said, "I don't agree with it." Then he told me that the United States was in a hell of a mess because it had proposed the creation of the Palestine commission and the man they designated had been on a three week binge and wasn't able to be briefed and the commission was going to

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meet in three or four days. It had already held a meeting in Geneva, and John Carter Vincent, who was minister to Switzerland, sat in on that meeting for the United States. But the commission was going to transfer to Jerusalem and going to have a meeting and I kept demurring saying, no, I didn't want to go, I didn't feel any call to go; and finally Acheson picked up his white telephone to call Truman and said, "Ethridge is bucking, I'd like to bring him over."

Truman said, "Bring him over."

I went over and Truman began to put on the heat, as only he could, and I kept telling him my objections and telling him I didn't agree with the hourglass division, and he said, "If you're so damn smart why don't you go over there and recommend a settlement?"

I said, "No, it's too late, you're stuck with this..."

He said, "We're not stuck with anything."

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I kept demurring and finally Truman lost his temper and he said, "Listen, I can get a million sons of bitches to make war tomorrow, can't I get one son of a bitch to help me make peace?"

I said, "When do I go Mr. President?"

He said, "Tonight."

Well, I didn't. I flew back to Louisville and gave my power of attorney to a man on the paper and kissed Willie [Mrs. Ethridge] goodbye and went back and got one day's briefing for each thousand years of Palestine history. Then they shot me through to Jerusalem, and I got to Jerusalem an hour before the Commission meeting. That's the way I got stuck on the Palestine commission.

MCKINZIE: Did you feel confident while you were there that anything could happen?

ETHRIDGE: No, no, we tried honestly but neither side was ready for peace. It's very much like

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the Syrian-Israeli situation now. That was the feeling between them. The Arabs felt that we had kept them from winning the first round, but Israelis felt we had kept them from winning the second round, so we were not popular with either side. And the Arabs wouldn't sit down with the Israelis. You notice the Syrians, first time they sat down -- the Arabs wouldn't even sit down with the Israelis.

MCKINZIE: Did you get any sense of what President Truman, other than the fact that he wanted somebody to help him make peace, thought should be done about resolving the whole Palestinian problem?

ETHRIDGE: No. One thing he felt was -- he had an ideal notion that if you could get them to agree on water rights and so forth, in other words, if peace was divisible, instead of making a whole peace, if you go at parts of it and

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make an agreement as to the division of water out of the Jordan and out of Lake Galilee, they'd cool it. If you just pecked away at minor parts of a peace and get them to work together, that would be an approach to it. Then he had the notion of a corridor across Israel -- see Israel is a sphere separating Egypt from the other Arab countries, Saudi Arabia, so forth. He had the notion that a corridor across there with free access to the Arabs countries would help the situation a good deal. Then -- I guess, this was the State Department notion -- they called for separating Jerusalem as a separate city, such as Danzig used to be.

MCKINZIE: Right.

ETHRIDGE: And somebody sent over a young lawyer to work on corpus separatum. I let him work on it, but I never had any faith in the idea because the Arabs and the Israelis were not

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going to share it. Besides somebody had to pick up the garbage and somebody had to operate the bus lines and somebody had to operate the sewer system. But I don't know that that was his idea; I think that was a State Department idea. He had no clear notion of any solution to the thing.

MCKINZIE: Other than the time you went over to the White House with Acheson, before you were going out to Jerusalem, did you have occasion to discuss the whole thing with the President?

ETHRIDGE: No, no, I never, because I was in the field. I finally had to ask to be released, and I suggested they designate Paul Porter, and he was designated; but he couldn't get anywhere with it either. Nobody got anywhere with it.

MCKINZIE: You said they gave you dirty assignments. They asked you to take another one in 1951, that Commission on Internal Security and Individual

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Rights, which Admiral [Chester William] Nimitz ended up being chairman of, and I think you declined to serve on that one.

ETHRIDGE: I had forgotten that one.

MCKINZIE: This was one where they were trying to get all that loyalty business, you know. There's a letter in...

ETHRIDGE: About me?

MCKINZIE: Yes. You mentioned, too, Mr. Ethridge, that you had been on this commission on information. It was an advisory commission on information.

ETHRIDGE: Yes.

MCKINZIE: Do you think that kind of advisory commission serves any worthwhile purpose? Now the reason I ask that is that today everybody is a little cynical about commissions and committees and that sort of thing. Is it a way

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to just obscure or obfuscate some issue or can they really, in cases such as this, be helpful?

ETHRIDGE: I don't know how effective it is now, but it was conceived as a sort of brake on -- when the State Department took over, the Information Service, the State Department was very leery about it. Acheson and I talked about it, and Acheson thought the State Department shouldn't be an action agency and this was action. He thought it should be purely in the policy line. So this was conceived as a sort of a bolstering of the Information Service to give it some status and that was what its purpose was in the beginning. I don't know what it's doing now.

MCKINZIE: I see, to give some status rather than to determine its policy.

ETHRIDGE: Yes. It was assumed that the State Department would fix policy. I tried to get Acheson

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to put the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs who was Bill Benton at the time, I believe...

MCKINZIE: At the time this was created, yes, it was Benton.

ETHRIDGE: ...tried to get him to put Bill Benton on the Policy Planning Staff of the State Department. Acheson was against that; he didn't think information ought to be mixed with policy, which was a great mistake because hell you can transmit policy so much more intelligently, if you know why it's made and if you're in on the making of it. I tried to get him, also, to put Ed Barret on it later, but he wouldn't do it. He never did give up on that. My relations with Acheson were very pleasant but he was unyielding on that.

MCKINZIE: Well,, then you had relations with Byrnes, Marshall, and Acheson. Do you think on the basis of the kind of experience you had, that it's possible to rank them in effectiveness as

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Secretaries of State? They're very different men, they had a different style. I'm not so sure their policies were all that much different, but they did have different ways of working at how to do things. Do you have any views as to who was the easiest to work for?

ETHRIDGE: No. I had more contact with Acheson, I suppose, than anybody. I found him easier to work for and with. I think Acheson changed a good deal of his own policies after he left as Secretary of State, but I found him easier to work for. Rusk was his deputy and I worked with Rusk a good deal, particularly in, I believe it was the Balkan commission. Yes. George McGhee I worked with on the Palestine commission. George McGhee came out with a plan sort of like the Lowdermilk plan for water, concessions, and so forth. But hell, it never got anywhere either. Nothing, nothing, There wasn't any give or take. The Israelis were not going to give

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up an inch of land and the Arabs were adamant that the U.N. said Israel must give back, they must take their refugees back, you know, there was just no way of reconciliation.

MCKINZIE: No way that pressure could be used to bring it about, that you saw?

ETHRIDGE: No, no. Truman let me down on two phases of the Palestine thing. One of them was, I recognized that Israel was going to be very tough to deal with, and Israel was desperately trying to get into the U.N. I got a promise out of the President that we would withhold recognition of Israel in the U.N. Hell, I hadn't been out there a month before we moved for recognition of Israel in the U.N. We moved it. We just didn't vote for it, we moved it. Another was, we were to give Israel some money through the Export-Import Bank., and I got him to promise to hold that up until we could get some positive indication. Well, they

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released that before I got through with the Commission.

MCKINZIE: There wasn't much leverage, then, again.

ETHRIDGE: No, I didn't have any, I didn't have any. That's one reason I said, "I'm going home."

MCKINZIE: Do you think that a man whose career is outside Government can be as effective as a career Foreign Service officer, in these cases, in the kinds of things that you did? You in a sense have no bureaucratic constituency to backfield you there; but on the other hand you don't have all those restraints, either.

ETHRIDGE: No, I came to feel that it was a mistake to send special non-career people, that it was a mistake to send them.

MCKINZIE: People such as yourself?

ETHRIDGE: Yes, including me.

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MCKINZIE: On what grounds?

ETHRIDGE: Well, I think career people live with the problems, live with it, where we run in and out. For instance, there's still a Balkan commission I think. Hell, who would stay on that, not I, for all these years? It would take somebody a lifetime to serve on the Palestine commission. You've got to make a career of it, and, again, we would run in on phases of it and run out on phases of it.

Truman came to Louisville once to a Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner, and while I was a Democrat I wasn't affiliated with the party because of the paper of mine. He called me up at home and said, "What are you and Willie doing?"

And I said, "Nothing."

He said, "Well, come on down here, I want to see you."

So we went down to his hotel and spent an

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hour or so with him, just an agreeable hour. He was very fond of Willie. We didn't talk anything political at this time, but he was a great talker and Willie was a great talker, and I sat there looking at them. He said, "Mark, I don't see how you stay married to this damn woman, she talks as much as I do."

He was very fond of Willie, and she used to lecture and when she went to Kansas City he would always show up there. I think he introduced her once.

MCKINZIE: Did you get out to the Truman Library while he was still there?

ETHRIDGE: No, I never have been there.

MCKINZIE: I was going to ask you about the newspaper business and whether anyone ever thought it was a conflict of interest, on the one hand to be the editor of an important newspaper and on the other hand to be conducting the Government's

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business?

ETHRIDGE: No, I never heard that. There were some Government positions where you would be in conflict of interest but the Advisory Commission on Information, no. And in the foreign field. I wouldn't have taken a domestic job.

MCKINZIE: Did you have the view at that time that foreign policy ought to be bipartisan?

ETHRIDGE: Yes, yes.

MCKINZIE: And you pursued it that way?

ETHRIDGE: Yes. Well, you were in a process of making a new foreign policy right after the war.

MCKINZIE: Well, thank you.

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