

Oral History Interview
with
VERE C. LEIGH

Member of Battery "D", 129th Field Artillery Regiment which was led by Captain Harry S. Truman in France in World War I, and friend of Mr. Truman since that time.

Stockton, California
March 4, 1970

by J. R. Fuchs, Harry S. Truman Library

The Harry S. Truman Library
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FUCHS: Mr. Leigh, I wonder if you would mind beginning by giving us a little of your background, when and where you were born and maybe your education up to the time that you went into the military.

LEIGH: Well, I was born in Corning, Iowa in December of 1896 and we moved to Kansas City in 1905, and I went to the Lathrop School and I graduated from that in 1910 and that was the end of my education, formal education. During that time

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I carried newspapers and sold newspapers and finally got a job, when I got out of school, and in 1917 I joined the old D Battery of the Second Missouri Field Artillery.

FUCHS: What kind of work had you been doing just prior to your going into the Battery?

LEIGH: I had worked for a food broker.

FUCHS: I see. So, you joined the Battery then at the time of the war.

LEIGH: Right after the war started. I think that most of us joined along in May. I think that war was declared in April, if I remember right. We drilled on the streets of Kansas City. I think they were building the old BMA Building across from the Union Station and it seems to me that we wound up with that as our headquarters

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before we went to Fort Sill. We were sworn into the Regular Army in August, I believe, and if I remember right, we went down to Sill in September.

FUCHS: Do you recall who mustered you into D Battery? You went right into -- D Battery was already formed.

LEIGH: It was already formed. Charlie [Charles B.] Allen was the Captain and he was Captain because those that were in the Battery already had elected him Captain.

FUCHS: Would he have been the one that swore you into the service? The National Guard?

LEIGH: No, he wasn't. This is funny. The way I happened to go into D Battery was -- and this is the truth: Harry Whitney, who is now a

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Judge in Kansas City, and another boy named Emmet LaMaster and myself were walking down Grand Avenue in Kansas City one day; and in front of the Kansas City Gas Company was a sign saying "Join the Artillery and Ride" and this appealed to us. We didn't care too much about marching all over France, so we all went in and signed up with Corporal [Frank G.] Hoffman. And I suppose that's what you mean by who took us into the Battery. I don't remember whether we took any oaths or anything but we became members of D Battery.

FUCHS: Yes, that's what I was just wondering if you recalled who...

LEIGH: Yes. And we used to go out to the Paseo and drill, 15th and Paseo. That was early, that was right after we went in. If I remember right,

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I still worked and drilled with them at the same time. I think we all did that until we were sworn into the Federal Army in August. I don't believe that we put in day and night with the Battery as long as it was a National Guard outfit.

FUCHS: This was when it was designated with the 129th Field Artillery then.

LEIGH: Well, when we joined it was the Second Missouri Field Artillery of the National Guard.

FUCHS: Yeah.

LEIGH: And then we were sworn into the Federal Army, it became the 129th Field Artillery and D Battery was in the Second Battalion.

FUCHS: Have you any recollection of Mr. Truman in

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Kansas City while you were drilling?

LEIGH: Never heard of him. Never heard of him. In fact, you knew -- just by being in a regiment, you knew some of the officers in the other outfits in that regiment, and if I remember right, President Truman was a lieutenant in F Battery; and how he ever became assigned to D Battery in France, I don't know, if I ever knew I've forgotten it. I never thought that much about it. We'd have officers go through our outfit and this was just one more as far as the Battery was concerned, but it didn't turn out that way.

FUCHS: What happened with Captain Allen? There are two Captain Allens, the one who was...

LEIGH: I don't know, they had -- you know after we

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got down to Sill the officers, a lot of them were pretty green and like Allen, he -- I don't know if he had had any military experience in the National Guard or not. Chances are he hadn't. He was a very likeable guy and easy come, easy go, and I think that we all ran over him. And they had to go to officers school down there, and I think Truman made a record for himself in that and I think Charlie Allen may not have made the grade at all. But I don't remember for sure, and some of the other fellows in the Battery can probably remember our different captains and so on, but I -- they were just passing in the night as far as I was concerned. There would be another one tomorrow. It was a pretty wild bunch. Pretty wild.

FUCHS: Do you have any recollections of Mr. Truman, or Lieutenant Truman, at Camp Doniphan or

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Fort Sill?

LEIGH: No, I say I knew that there was somebody named Truman down there in F Battery, but that was the end of it. It didn't mean anything anymore than Joe Jones, you know.

FUCHS: Were you conscious of the...

LEIGH: Very, very seldom.

FUCHS: No -- of the fact that he and Eddie Jacobson were running the regimental canteen?

LEIGH: Yeah, now you brought that back, I remember that now, yeah, that's right. I'd forgotten that. Was that the supply company?

FUCHS: No. He was just put in charge, as I know the story, of organizing with Eddie Jacobson, and running the regimental canteen?

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LEIGH: I think others had been running it and I think our canteen was in bad shape, and they put him in there to straighten it out. I believe that is the way the thing was, but I'd forgotten that.

FUCHS: Do you have any memories of the canteen?

LEIGH: Very, very little, very little, they didn't have much to offer. We had to go outside for -- the only thing that D Battery was really interested in was alcohol, and vinrouge over in France, and they didn't sell that at the canteen. I don't want to give you the wrong idea, they were young, but they were pretty good consumers.

FUCHS: What is your first recollection of Mr. Truman ?

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LEIGH: The night he took the Battery over. He stood there, and I don't even remember [John H.] Thatcher saying anything, but the chances are he did and the chances are he cried a little bit because he was an emotional type guy, Captain Thatcher. But Truman wasn't, and he stood there and he was kind of a rather short fellow, compact, serious face, wearing glasses; and we'd had all kinds of officers and this was just another one you know. And he announced to the Battery that he was going to be in charge and when he gave orders he wanted them carried out. He made it pretty plain; and then he turned the Battery over to the First Sergeant and the First Sergeant told us to fall out, and then we gave Captain Truman the Bronx cheer, that's a fact.

FUCHS: Is that right?

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LEIGH: Yeah, it's a fact.

FUCHS: That's interesting.

LEIGH: I'll tell you later what the Bronx cheer was.

FUCHS: Was this while he was in hearing?

LEIGH: Was he? He was walking away you know. And the next morning, on the bulletin board, about half of the noncoms and most of the first class privates were busted. And then we knew that we had a different "cat" to do business with than we had up to that time. He didn't hesitate at all. The very next morning this was on the board. He must have sat up all night, you know. I think the First Sergeant was at the head of the list. I'm not sure.

FUCHS: Who was this?

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LEIGH: A fellow named [Glen F.] Wooldridge, but I don't know whether he canned him right then or whether it was a little later, but he canned him. And it kind of gave you an idea, you know, that maybe this guy wasn't to be trifled with, you see. And he wasn't either. Then we were at a school of fire, at a place called Coetquidan. It was one of Napoleon's old training grounds you know, little country villages around us. And that's where we took over the 75s; we had been using a three inch piece, it was a copy of a German gun, and it wasn't anything like the 75; and the officers had to get used to it, too. But it was a great piece of artillery, and we loved the gun; it would do tricks. They used to say, you could knock a sparrow off a telephone wire at eight or nine thousand yards with the 75. The

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Battery really, I think, became pretty proficient at firing those guns. Mr. Truman saw to it that we did, that we worked at it. Anyhow these were wild kids but they weren't dummies by a whole lot, they could learn.

We enjoyed our stay at Coetquidan. They had what they called la gare, which in French you know means the station. This was a railroad station down at the foot of a long hill, and this long hill had bars galore all the way down, and any time that you wanted to round up D Battery in the evening that's where you went and got them. He had that to contend with, too, but he contended with it alright.

FUCHS: Do you know if he ever went down there personally or did he always dispatch his...

LEIGH: No. I don't know.

FUCHS: ...non-coms.

LEIGH: No. He could read the riot act in few words. He didn't mess around you know, it was - he was pretty stern.

FUCHS: Do you recall any specific examples where someone did something and he read the riot act?

LEIGH: Well, I'm thinking of something that happened. We were on our way to the Argonne, the whole regiment, and we'd march at night -- not march, you'd have these horses pulling material -- and we pulled into some woods this night, and you slept on the ground and the ground was wet. This was in the fall of 1918 and they had a lot of rain in northern France and it wasn't very pleasant. There's always a "wireless" operating in every military outfit, you know that as well as I do. Troops weren't supposed

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to know where you were going to the next stop. You didn't make a lot of mileage. You didn't make a lot of mileage, you might cover fifteen, eighteen miles, I guess twenty maybe a night but -- no not that much -- but anyhow we knew where the Battery was going to stop the next night, see; and that night -- I was on a gun so I didn't get to ride a horse -- three or four others -- I don't remember who was with me. I think this kind of shows the kind of disciplinarian that he was. We weren't going to desert the Army. We knew where the Battery was going to stop the next night and rather than poke along -- those horses don't walk very fast you know. We were young and we could go. We got out ahead of the Battery, and followed the road and then went right to this town where we were going to be billeted that next night.

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FUCHS: You don't remember the name of the town?

LEIGH: I don't remember the name of that town but Truman would remember it. So, I remember we hid behind an old building there and smoked cigarettes, Bull Durham cigarettes, and time went by and it seemed like the Battery would never come. But finally here they came poking down the road, and when they did we fell in behind. All we had done, was just got out ahead of them and waited for them and then joined them again. So this is what we did, and this is the kind of a Battery it was, guys did things like that, so now we fell in behind. Now, we felt good about the whole thing, because here we were back home again. And a man rode up and said to another fellow on a horse, "Sergeant, take these men's names." And that was the

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lieutenant colonel of the regiment and we were supposed to be stragglers. This is a court martial offense, and I mean they could make it kind of nasty for you; and our names were turned over to Captain Truman. The next morning we were all ready to be summoned up there and court martialled, but nothing happened. Not long after that, I don't remember whether we all went up together or if I went by myself, but I remember I had to go up in front of Truman. He said, "Now, don't ever do that anymore." He said, "I understand what you were doing. I don't condone it, the Battery has got to be cohesive, you know, got to stay together. If everybody started wandering all over France, I won't have any Battery anymore. Don't do it anymore. That's all. Goodbye."

You see, this lieutenant colonel wanted

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to have us court martialled, and he certainly had the authority over Harry Truman; but you know Harry Truman, and [Colonel Karl D.] Klemm was a little rough himself, but Harry Truman must

have fought for us. He must have said, "I know these boys, they were straggling out in front of us, but they weren't straggling trying to get away or anything like that." I'm telling you this long-winded story just to illustrate.

FUCHS: No, it's good.

LEIGH: But I think that was just -- that was understanding, and I know that everyone of us tried a little harder after that, you see, because that's one way to make believers out of kid soldiers.

FUCHS: Yes. After Captain Truman took over did you have any other doubts about his capacity

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to lead or command at any particular time?

LEIGH: Well, we didn't really know him, and all we knew was that if we started yelling when he told us to fall out -- we'd done that four months before, you know, we had been doing just as we damned pleased almost -- and we found that this guy brought us up short. The first thing was that, if you had any sense at all and you saw that list on the bulletin board, you know this cookie meant business. And then, of course, they tried him out. You see, that's the nature of a soldier, they tried him out and every time they tried him out, they got the worst of it. And I guess it took him about a week or ten days to convince everybody he was boss.

FUCHS: Do you remember any other incidents where someone tried to run...

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LEIGH: No, in the back of my mind, but I can't be definite about it, there was an incident in the billets one night but I don't remember what it was now.

But you're asking about Truman. From Coetquidan we went down to the Vosges and that was the first time we were under fire. You were asking about Truman -- you'd have thought that he was sitting in the kitchen of his own home with his feet on a chair and about as much worried when we were under fire. I don't think he'd ever been under fire before either and it didn't bother him a damned bit. We had to leave the guns there because they were stuck in the mud. We'd been firing at the Germans and they returned the fire, that's all it amounted to, for it was just counter-battery fire and it didn't mean a great deal. I think

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that some boys in E Battery got hit but D was lucky. Later on there were pretty heavy casualties throughout the Regiment and the Division, but we didn't have many. We were just -- well, part of it was luck and part of it good leadership. Some of the other batteries didn't have that kind of leadership. There's such a thing as sticking your battery in a spot where they shouldn't be you know, and Truman didn't make those mistakes. We found all that out.

FUCHS: Was this the Battle of "Who Run?"

LEIGH: In the Vosges, that was the Battle of "Who Run." That's the first time we were under fire. And we were firing away and having a hell of a good time doing it until they began to fire back. We tried to hitch up the horses and get out of there but we couldn't move the guns. We had got them in alright -- we were down in a hollow.

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These were the Vosges Mountains, and they weren't in the Rockies, you know, but they were high. But I guess we dropped a little around the Germans, too. If I remember right, we were firing some gas that night, and woke somebody up over there. They had 77s, very accurate guns. We had to come back the next night to get those guns out of the mud.

FUCHS: Do you recall sort of a panic or sense of panic then?

LEIGH: At the Battle of "Who Run?"

FUCHS: Yeah.

LEIGH: Oh. I don't know, maybe two or three guys might have run, I don't know. That was one thing. This was an Irish outfit, there was a lot of wit in it, but I don't think that many

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of them ran. I was a pretty good runner, but I didn't run that night. We kidded ourselves a lot you know. "Who Run" was that, kidding ourselves.

FUCHS: Do you recall Mr. Truman on that occasion?

LEIGH: No, I'll tell you who can tell you about Truman on that night, the first time we were under fire, is "Smack" [Milton R.] Evans and Fred Bowman. Those two were with him, I believe, that night, and that was the first time that he was under fire as far as I know.

FUCHS: The first time that Mr. Truman was commanding the Battery do you recall feeling that he was a very competent or...

LEIGH: Well, we didn't know whether he was or not.

FUCHS: ...after he started to give orders.

LEIGH: After we had had him for a week or ten days we knew who was running it and that he was capable, and he was. On firing problems you began to hit the target. The Germans had a Prussian division opposite the 35th and they had broken through but the 110th Engineers held them off. The 110th were the heroes of the 35th Division in the Argonne. The Germans had brought a battery of artillery up and it would have been enfilading us, it would have been firing off from one side, see. Truman didn't panic, he let them take their horses away from the guns, which was exactly what he should have done. If it had been me I would have probably hollered for D Battery to start firing as soon as I saw them. He didn't do that, he let them get into position, get all set to fire,

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with their horses by this time a couple of miles away. Then he had his firing data exact. It's no good to have a man up there if he don't know what the hell he's doing and he was good on this plotting, I don't know where he learned mathematics so well, but he was good at it. And he said that we knocked all four of their guns out. So, if he said so, it was so. Truman didn't lie about anything.

FUCHS: Do you recall any of the other occasions where you had specific contacts in any of the battles?

LEIGH: Well, the 35th as a matter of fact, got in there late, you know. We didn't go in actually until August and the thing was over on the 11th of November. And we had one rest period as I

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remember in between there when we came out of the Argonne. We went from the Vosges over to St. Mihiel. We didn't go into action in this one, we were in support. There was a bulge in the line there. I think they called it the Nancy-Toul Sector. But somebody was doing the fighting up there, it didn't last long and they pinched that sector off and we went on. And then we went over into the Argonne, and during the Argonne, the whole Division had heavy casualties, our Regiment had casualties, too. I think D Battery had a few men hurt but not many. And then the Division had to be fixed up -- I've got the figure seventy-five hundred casualties in about a week in the Argonne and I think that's about right for the 35th. So, it had to be rehabilitated. And then after that we went to Verdun, and we were

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there, getting ready to leave there, on November 11th. We were there for some time. And on November 11th came the Armistice, and we were damned glad of it.

FUCHS: Was that the Gerardmer Sector?

LEIGH: I believe. I'd forgotten all about it.

FUCHS: Something like that. I've seen a photograph of that. I believe he has a photograph at the Library of this sector where he was firing on the last day of the war.

LEIGH: Well, that's where it was.

FUCHS: And I thought it was the Gerardmer, I may be wrong. I just wondered if you had a recollection?

LEIGH: No. No, I haven't. No, I haven't. It was up in the hills around Verdun.

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FUCHS: Yeah.

LEIGH: We fired across the valley there. We were on one set of hills and the enemy was on the other. On that last day, I remember (I don't know why the hell they sent me, because to this day I get lost going downtown). I go to San Francisco and I'm completely turned around. In St. Louis -- in North St. Louis, I was all right, South St. Louis I didn't know which way was up. I don't have a good sense of direction. And on that last day I had to go down to a little town behind the lines where there were either two or three trucks of ammunition to go up to the front - artillery ammunition -- and they sent Mr. Leigh down there to guide these trucks up. Isn't that like the Army? There must have been somebody better than me because it's all I can do to find my way home

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at night, but anyhow I did happen to remember the way. This was on the morning of the 11th, and we got the trucks up there and I remember seeing a wounded soldier and I thought this was a hell of a thing to happen so late in the game. The poor kid they were bringing in had had his leg shot off right across here you see and three guys were carrying him in a half of a pup tent. They had him bandaged up and carrying him out of there, and apparently they hadn't given him anything and he was in bad shape. He was moaning pretty bad. It made me sick. The word was that there was going to be an armistice at eleven o'clock.

FUCHS: Do you remember anything about the orchard at Cheppy?

LEIGH: The peach orchard?

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FUCHS: I guess that was a peach orchard.

LEIGH: Yes. I remember we went in there and cut down trees to give us a field of fire, so that the guns could fire out of that peach orchard. I think it was there that we had a guy who was a horseshoer -- again this was a horse drawn outfit you know -- and on the first and fourth caissons, the first and fourth pieces, we had mounted machineguns. I remember Schneider French machineguns. This was a "protection," air protection for a battery. And this horseshoer who had nothing to do with the guns, but in case of action, was to man one machinegun. This was in the peach orchard. And here comes a German plane flying at about three hundred feet. We're used now to planes flying, but those things paddled along in those days, and they were a good target, too. He hit some

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of our horses. He didn't hit any men as I remember. One guy was flying the plane and the other guy is just firing away as cool as hell. Firing and blasting away and I thought, "That's no way to treat American soldiers." I dived under a caisson loaded with 75mm shells which is no good place to be -- I wasn't diving from the fire from this plane, but from our horseshoer who was firing excitedly -- you take hold of this thing and it just keeps on firing. He was firing in a flat arc instead of aiming. He was just firing it flat. If you stood to your full height you were a dead man. We never let him forget it and he never got to handle that machinegun again either. I remember that about the peach orchard. The peach orchard, I think we were there two or three days. We cut down some of the trees in order to get a

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field of fire, and then it changes for you are seen and then you have to go someplace else. And the next time we were on Rue #1 I think it was, the French national highway. Our intelligence got information to get the hell out of the peach orchard because the Germans were going to blow that peach orchard off the map. And we hadn't been out of there, I suppose, as much as a day or maybe a few hours, something like that. I know there was a lot of heavy stuff going over and it didn't hit us. You know when you're in the artillery they don't shoot at you with machineguns. You're back from the line, and they shoot at you with that heavy stuff. They wiped that peach orchard out.

FUCHS: What was this German gunner in the plane firing?

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LEIGH: I don't know, I don't think it was as heavy as a 45, but it might have been some caliber about 45. I have an idea that it was an observation plane and they were slow. An observation plane on the way home.

A German plane came along (this was another time) and there were three or four observation balloons up and you saw one right after the other, they go up in smoke and the observers parachute down.

I saw a British plane get on the tail of a German plane in the Argonne and drive him into the ground. They both looped and looped and the Englishman had him doing a loop too close to the ground and he couldn't pull out. Then you saw the smoke and heard the explosion, I haven't thought of this stuff for years. But that's got nothing to do with Truman either except

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that he was there.

We really showed our colors after the armistice. Did anybody ever tell you that we were billeted in a place called La Beholle?

FUCHS: I may, the name sounds familiar. I don't really remember.

LEIGH: They were old French billets back of the lines in Verdun and they were wooden; and we ran out of wood for the furnaces. It was a cold winter, that winter in 1918, and those billets evaporated. The officers were surprise that when we first moved in there were a certain group of billets, and after about a month there were not so many billets. We tore the sides off and the roof, and everything else, and put them in the stove.

FUCHS: What about Colonel Klemm? He was the Regimental

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Commanding Officer as a Lieutenant Colonel.

LEIGH: No, he was a Colonel. He was a full Colonel.

FUCHS: A full Colonel?

LEIGH: Yes. The Lieutenant Colonel was named Elliot.

FUCHS: Who was Colonel [Robert M.] Danford?

LEIGH: Colonel Danford had the Regiment before Klemm got it.

FUCHS: How did you feel about him?

LEIGH: Danford was a soldier. He was the only real soldier that we'd run into. He was not harsh; he was kind of a hand in glove guy, you know, he was a disciplinarian for he was Regular Army;

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but he knew field artillery. He trained us at Sill. He trained the Regiment.

FUCHS: When did Klemm replace him?

LEIGH: I think about the time we went across. Along about that time. You see they all had to go to that school down there and some were weeded out; I have a sneaking suspicion that Klemm was a capable soldier, but he didn't have any personality, and he was a little on the harsh side. I think that Klemm had gone to West Point at one stage, when he was young you know, and maybe dropped out of it and then got back in. But he was the Prussian type of officer, you know, and we didn't like him. But, he wasn't running any popularity contest and he seemed to know how to handle the Regiment.

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FUCHS: Did he finish the war with you?

LEIGH: Yes.

FUCHS: Did he come back with you?

LEIGH: He came back ahead of us.

FUCHS: Why was that?

LEIGH: I don't know. I really don't know, but that's my memory, that Klemm did not accompany the Regiment on the way back. I think he had gone back ahead of us. Well, we laid around after the armistice; I think we sailed the latter part of April or the first part of May, something like that.

FUCHS: I think I saw a clipping or something that said that when the Regiment was greeted back at Kansas City that Colonel Klemm was there in

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civilian clothes in the crowd, and that I thought was rather unusual.

LEIGH: I believe that's true, but I don't know the story behind it, and I wouldn't speculate on it. I believe that it's true.

FUCHS: Certainly.

LEIGH: I didn't like him, although I didn't know him, but I still didn't like him, and he probably was a pretty good soldier.

FUCHS: Did you go into the Reserves after you...

LEIGH: Not me: I hadn't lost anything in the Army. I don't think many of our guys did. Have you learned whether they did or not?

FUCHS: No. Of course, Colonel -- well, he became Colonel Truman, he stayed in after you left

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and became Colonel. And Eddie McKim and...

LEIGH: McKim? He stayed in on the Reserve? Eddie McKim?

FUCHS: Now, maybe I'm speaking out of place. I was thinking he had gone to summer camp once or twice.

LEIGH: Oh, he could have.

FUCHS: With Mr. Truman. I know he was up there sometime. Now whether he was in the Reserves or not I'd have to look it up, but I just...

LEIGH: You're probably right. Well, I think Ed left town soon after we came back and went to Omaha, and we didn't keep track of each other. The only reason they're doing it now is that we're all getting so old and they want

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somebody to talk to, that's all.

FUCHS: Do you have any other recollections of France, and Mr. Truman specifically, that you think might be of interest? Now some of this you have told sort of lends color to the story of the Battery, and I think it's of interest.

LEIGH: Well, the Battery and Truman in my mind are like this. They are one. In France -- no, I remember what happened from the time the war was over until the time we sailed. Captain Truman was Captain Truman; he was Battery Commander and when you saw him you saluted him. I was just one of the buck privates in the rear ranks. Fred Bowman ought to be able to give

you a mine of information. I'm just trying to tell you what I know. He was the Captain, he was the head man, and he was treated as such, we respected him, and he earned it. That's why

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we respected him, because he earned it. And when you're in a wartime outfit you don't go around holding chats with the Captain of the outfit, you do what you are told to do and stay at a distance. I suppose there's a lot of little things. You see him all the time, but you're used to him. He's not a dramatic type or anything like it. He's no Patton, you know. He might have been a better soldier than Patton, but he was not a show-off. There is none of that in Truman's make-up.

FUCHS: You did tell me about Father [L. Curtis] Tiernan, a little story. Would you mind...

LEIGH: Repeating it?

Well, it was -- as I told you this Battery was at least seventy-five percent Catholic boys, and I wasn't, and this was the night

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before the Argonne. We were going to start firing that night and we all knew it. We knew what we were there for. And quite a few of the guys in the outfit had a little talk with the -- I started to say Monsignor, well, he wasn't a Monsignor, he was just a priest then you know; and he came around to me. He was Lieutenant Tiernan. A guy with a lot of guts. He knew me well enough to call me by my right name, and he said to me, "You know we're going into action tonight, is there anything you want to talk to me about?"

I knew what he meant but I didn't have anything to say along those lines and I said, "Yes, I've got a hundred francs here I'm going to give you to because if I get hit I want you to send it to my mother."

He went on and laughed about it. He thought it was funny. Years later he laughed

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about it. That's the funniest confession he had ever heard.

FUCHS: That's pretty good. Where did you get the nickname "Pup?"

LEIGH: "Skinny" [Floyd T.] Ricketts hung it on me. Down at Ft. Sill we used to wear these coveralls, you know, fatigues they called them. You'd wash them, which you did yourself, of course; and you hung them out to dry. I went to get mine one time and on the back of them somebody had stenciled in black letters "Our Puppy" and it was a long time before I found that it was Ricketts who did it. I had to wear them, I couldn't take it off; and I didn't care because I called the other guys by their nicknames, too; and some of them were worse than that.

FUCHS: Why did he call you "Our Puppy?"

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LEIGH: I guess I looked like a dog to him. I think that [Harry E.] Whitney put him up to it.

FUCHS: Who was?

LEIGH: Judge Whitney from Kansas City.

FUCHS: What is his first name?

LEIGH: Harry.

FUCHS: Harry Whitney.

LEIGH: Well, better known as "Cue Ball."

FUCHS: Did you come back on the *Zeppelin* or was there more than one ship that...

LEIGH: We came back on the *Zeppelin*. They carried me on board. We got to Brest and I got pneumonia. They wanted to put me in a hospital but I got these two friends of mine, one

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on each side, and we go up the gangplank, and they've got a doctor there checking, there was a good deal of sickness at Brest; and I could hardly breathe, but I wasn't going to the hospital. And the three of us went up and they were holding me one on each arm. We had a guy die in the hospital there of pneumonia. The second day out, in the morning, I went to the bow. You know on a vessel how that bow goes up and down. I threw up my guts and do you know the next day I felt like a new man and the congestion was gone. I was afraid to ask for any medicine. I just wanted to get out of Brest. I'd heard too many stories about Brest. It was a mudhole, a pesthole. The third day out I was all right and the boilers broke down on the *Zeppelin*. Well, it had laid there in Bremen Harbor for four or five years.

They had a German crew on board with U.S. Navy officers in charge and they asked for volunteers to go down and shovel coal -- they couldn't get up pressure, you see, something was wrong with the boilers and they couldn't get up pressure enough and the black gang down there was worn out. So, I went down and shoveled coal for awhile and took a good look at it, and then felt that that was no way to treat a convalescing soldier and I quit.

Another thing that happened on board the *Zeppelin* as we docked at Hoboken. The sailors who were in charge of this vessel were Americans, and most of them hadn't seen any action of any kind. I had a whole bunch of souvenirs. I had a German trench knife you know, sawtooth, I don't know what all I had. I also had a 45 caliber pistol, and I had a whole sack full of stuff stuck under my bunk and while we were out about nine or ten days nobody touched it, and every time I went away and came back,

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I'd check it -- these were my souvenirs to take home. Now we're docked at Hoboken and we're all up on deck watching the Statue of Liberty. They docked and the people on the docks cheered

us and we cheered them, and the order came, "Get your stuff, and fall in." So, I had my duffle bag but I had this other stuff hidden. I went down to get it, it wasn't there. It wasn't there at all and there were two sailors standing about twenty-feet away talking to each other and looking at me and grinning. "Did you lose something?" Everybody that had anything loose and not tied down lost it. They stole us blind. There wasn't anything you could do about it because you couldn't prove anything.

So, I've taken you over there and brought you back. I think from then on we had other

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things on our minds. We'd seen Truman and all the other officers for a couple of years, and we wanted to go home. Well, we came back, and Evelyn and I got married in 1921 and bought a little house in Kansas City; and then we moved to St. Louis in '32. I went into business for myself in 1936.

FUCHS: What job had you had here from '19 on?

LEIGH: Well, getting out of the Army then you know, you got \$50 and a kiss. That was it. Fifty bucks. In this last war they treated the guys pretty good. They gave them a chance for an education and so on. You got \$50 and a big kiss. I couldn't get a job for awhile and I got a chance to go to Bartlesville, Oklahoma and drive a team of mules. They figured I had

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brains enough to do that. I had a grade education, and I had expected to grow into a salesman's job in the food brokerage business, because I'd been with a broker since 1911 before I went in the Army. Then I was a fourteen year old kid and I grew up in the office. When I came home there was no job open. So, while I was down there in Oklahoma I heard from Fritz Bowman, who was with the Ismert Hincke Milling Company and he said, "I can get you a job in the office here." Well, I kissed the mules goodbye and went back to Kansas City and went to work there, and that's where I met my wife.

President Truman was a past master of a lodge in one of those little towns around Kansas City, and when I came back, two or three of us joined the Masonic Lodge, and he came over

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and gave me my Second Degree. But there was something else that I told you that -- one thing he did for me. What the hell was it now.

FUCHS: Well, it might come to you later.

LEIGH: I don't know what it was in relation to.

FUCHS: Did you go to his wedding?

LEIGH: No. I wasn't invited.

FUCHS: I know one story says that boys in his Battery attended his wedding. You know Ted Marks was his best man and...

LEIGH: Well, some probably did. He had cronies just the same as I had cronies but they were old friends or officers in the 35th. I don't know who all would have gone but, no, I didn't go to his wedding.

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FUCHS: Do you recall any contact with him in the years 1919 to '32? What about the Battery reunions?

LEIGH: Well, he'd come to them but I think he got a little sick of us because there wasn't anything wild about Harry Truman. He had his feet on the ground, and he'd gotten married and we, most of us had too, but that didn't make any difference because on a Battery reunion night we tried to close up all the bars in town. That was all there was to it you know, and he didn't do any of that, but he'd show up usually.

FUCHS: He wrote you about the reunion in 1920. Apparently you had written him a letter. He remarked about your learning how to behave. Do you recall any of that?

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LEIGH: Well, I think the first couple of reunions we had, were at the Elk's Club in Kansas City and after the second one they asked us please don't come back, give your business to somebody else. And I think that was what I was referring to. They weren't used to us at the Elk's Club. They didn't need us that badly.

I remember when he and Ed had the store on 12th Street. They had a good location, or I thought it was a good location, but then came the depression in 1929/1930, and money was scarce. Well, they just didn't make a go of it. But he and Eddie remained friends right on through to the end.

FUCHS: Do you have any vivid recollections of the store? Did you go in there?

LEIGH: Sure I would. After the war I didn't have

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any money, neither did any of these kids, but if we needed a shirt or tie, or underwear or something, that's where we bought it. Sure. One shirt at a time, you know. They call these the days of affluence but what actually is is a debt economy, and it wasn't that way then. If you didn't have the money you didn't buy. You could buy on time but most people had better sense. They just did without, and they did without real good around Truman's store. Twelfth Street was dead in those days and it was probably a bad time to go into business. But we turned out enthusiastically for him when he ran for office.

FUCHS: What was your specific job in the Battery?

LEIGH: Well, I was number four man on a piece. A piece is a piece of artillery.

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FUCHS: What gun was that?

LEIGH: A French seventy-five.

FUCHS: I mean didn't they have the guns numbered?

LEIGH: No. The positions are numbered.

FUCHS: I see. I think what I had in mind was that the gun sections had numbers.

LEIGH: Yes, first, second, third and fourth sections were the gun sections.

FUCHS: What was your particular section?

LEIGH: I was in one and then I was in four, and four was "Squatty" [Edward P.] Meisburger. I was in his, but I wound up the war in the eight section, and I felt right at home there, because of Sergeant Fred Schmidt. He didn't give a damn and neither did I. That was the

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way I turned out.

FUCHS: Were there eight guns in that...

LEIGH: No, only in the first four. In that section I don't think I did anything. The war was over and there wasn't much to do. This might be funny. It's got nothing to do with Truman. I don't know whether Truman ever knew about it. We were in the Argonne and we weren't eating regular because they weren't bringing much up there. And you are young and starved. And you'd eat anything that moved, or didn't move. And there was a good deal of enemy fire and sometimes they'd come close to us and you had to watch yourself, and you couldn't have cooks out in the open with fires, you know. This night they prepared the food down in an old German dugout and you had to go down a ladder,

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and it was all hollowed out, and they were doing the cooking down there. The food didn't amount to much. I don't remember what it was, probably corned beef. But anyhow it was food. It came my turn, and I went down and got mine and they asked me my name and what outfit I was in and I told them. I went up the ladder again and I ate it and it seemed all right and I was starving to death, everybody was, and I went down again and I got another one. I gave them a different name that time. You see, in nature, self-preservation is the first law, and I believed in that and I got that second helping and I felt much better about the whole thing. In about an hour Sergeant Meisburger, who was my sergeant, said he wanted to talk to me, and he talked to me. He ate my rear end out. And he wanted to know if I'd had my

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rations and I said, "Yes."

And he said, "How many times?"

And I said, "I got them twice."

I thought I was going to tell him -- let him in on something. He said, "I want you to know something, I didn't get any food tonight." He said, "They said that they put out an even" -- you know, say that there was forty-two or fifty-two men from D Battery, they had put out fifty-two rations; but Ed had been a little late and he didn't get anything. I don't know whether Truman knows this or not. He knows a lot about me that I probably don't know he knows. But Meisburger put me on barrage guard, and I think this was the second night we were in the Argonne and we were there a week. I was on barrage guard day and night all the rest of the time we were in the Argonne. What you had to do,

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they gave you a sector and as long as you were on guard you had to keep your eyes peeled on that sector for the infantry signals, if they wanted a certain kind of fire they fired different kinds of rockets. I stayed on barrage guard. You stood there no matter what was going on, you stood there and you just watched that sector, and then if it was in our sector, where we could reach with a 75, you see; if it was in that, then you had to yell like hell that it was a certain kind of rocket, and then we were supposed to go into action and fire.

FUCHS: You stayed on that for...

LEIGH: I stayed on that until we staggered out of the Argonne.

FUCHS: You said you thought maybe Mr. Truman still owes you ten francs?

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LEIGH: No, that I owed him.

FUCHS: Was there something connected with that story?

LEIGH: I borrowed ten francs from him, oh, maybe like a couple of months before the end of the war. He was pretty good that way. I don't think he was broken out with money, but he did loan me ten francs and I think I paid it back, but maybe I didn't. I don't know. I might owe him ten francs today and I would be glad to pay it, but I've never had guts enough to bring it up. And now probably he don't remember anything about it.

FUCHS: Anything more about any of the reunions that you had before you went to St. Louis?

LEIGH: No. He was in attendance most of the time.

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Of course, after '34, I don't think he came back very often. As a Senator he had plenty to do in those days and I don't think he came back for the reunions unless he just happened to be there. I don't remember much about that, but I remember him being around pretty often between 1920 and 1934, and I imagine he was there more than half the time.

FUCHS: Were you acquainted with Eddie Jacobson overseas?

LEIGH: No. I wasn't. I didn't know Eddie.

FUCHS: Do you have any recollection of the American Legion Convention in October of 1921?

LEIGH: In Kansas City?

FUCHS: Yes, sir.

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LEIGH: No, but I can tell you this about the American Legion. It had just been formed when we came back in 1919. There was always someone calling you up and saying, "Why don't you come down and join the Legion?" So, they had a meeting and it seems to me that it was someplace around Tenth and Grand. We had, in the American Army, what they have in all armies, in all wars. Now, the draft was going full blast and there were a lot of guys who were drafted like along in August or September or October of 1918 that were in the Army and they were the first ones to get out. When the war was over the Army wanted to get rid of them, you know, and take them off the payroll. So, we'll say they'd been in sixty days or ninety days, and they hadn't been anywhere, at least they hadn't seen any action, they hadn't been out of the country. And I have always found

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guys like that have the biggest mouths. They can get up and they can talk and the guys that have been there don't talk much. Isn't that your experience? They don't say very much.

FUCHS: Yes, not very much.

LEIGH: O.K. So, I went to this meeting of the American Legion. Somebody invited me. I thought I'd look them over and see how it went and maybe I'd join it. Well, I don't know if you remember anything about Jack Dempsey or not; but Jack Dempsey was called a slacker by an awful lot of people who themselves were slackers. Jack Dempsey had an out, he was supporting a widowed mother, as much of an out as a lot of guys had, and he was kind of a hero of mine. We had some guys in that Battery that could fight with their fists, or box, quite a few of them, and one of

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of them is Tommy Murphy. You ought to talk to Tommy. He was amateur lightweight champion of the United States two years in a row. He was a pretty good boy. He'd box guys like Willie Ritchie, pros you know, and people like that. Emmet LaMaster and Harry Whitney, and myself and a couple other guys belonged to a place called Kelley's Athletic Club and we used to

box down there, so we were interested in a boxer like Dempsey. Up on the platform comes one of these -- we called them motor mechanics, I don't know why we hung that on them, but a guy that had been in the Army about sixty days, you know, with a big mouth, never saw any action you know, was a motor mechanic -- up on the platform climbs one of these motor mechanics and he damns Dempsey up one side and down the other as a slacker. And I stood up and I said, "You're

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a Goddamned liar," and got up and walked out and never went back and I've never went back and I've never been to a Legion meeting since. And I'm not sorry. I have nothing against the Legion, but I thought that if it was going to be taken over by those guys. It was made up mostly of veterans, but that was me and the American Legion. I never joined anything. I'm not a joiner anyhow.

FUCHS: Very good.

LEIGH: I wish I could think of the story -- Truman did one thing for me. I can't think of it. It shows you how light minded you get. You can't remember from one minute to the next.

FUCHS: I'm pretty much the same way.

LEIGH: But how could I get diverted on that? If he

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ever did anything for me I ought to remember it.

FUCHS: Did you know Spencer Salisbury overseas?

LEIGH: Yeah, yeah. He was a character. I didn't know him except I knew he was an officer you know, a captain. He -- but I think he was a good soldier.

FUCHS: Do you have any anecdotes about him?

LEIGH: No. I think there probably are plenty.

Did you ever hear of a character we had called "Sox" [Carl] Werner?

FUCHS: No.

LEIGH: Well, this has got nothing to do with Truman, so there is no use putting it in there, just wasting time.

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FUCHS: No, it might be interesting to someone. They like to know about all the boys. Who was he, what was his...

LEIGH: Sox? He was an adornment to the Battery. He was probably one of the world's worst soldiers. I was one of the fifty worst, twenty-five worst, maybe ten worst. He was a husky guy and a good football player and when he got out of the Army he went down to -- are you a native of Missouri?

FUCHS: No, sir.

LEIGH: Well, you know where Warrensburg is, don't you?

FUCHS: Oh, yes.

LEIGH: Well, there was a normal school down there, and they were trying to put together a football

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team to play the other small colleges in Missouri, some of whom had pretty good athletic teams. They were trying to put together a football team and they paid Mr. Werner to play football for them. They all got together and celebrated Armistice Day on November 11th, 1919, right in the middle of the football season, and Sox had apparently carried the ball pretty well and they liked him down there. Couldn't teach him anything but he could play football and he wasn't there to learn anything anyhow. The story goes like this: That whoever was in charge said, "And now, we would like to hear from Carl Werner, our leading fullback [or whatever he was on the football team] and he will tell us what the boys in Battery D did on November 11th, 1918, just one year ago today."

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And Sox (now this gives you an idea), he got up and says, "Well, I don't know what they did in other outfits, but in D Battery of the 129th Field Artillery on the evening of November 11, 1918, the vinrougers went rouging and the cognacers went cognacing." They had expected more.

He stunned them. Warrensburg is a little church-going town you know. Oh, Truman's the guy who can tell you these stories if you could get him to. He knows more than anyone because he had them all under surveillance.

FUCHS: Yeah, pretty good. You left Kansas City, then, and went to St. Louis and went into the...

LEIGH: I went to work in a branch office of a food brokerage company, whose main office was in Kansas City. They sent me down there to handle

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the merchandise end of it. I worked for them for four years and quit and went into business for myself and stayed in business until I retired here in '66.

FUCHS: What was your business called?

LEIGH: Leigh Brokerage Company. That's why I come out here.

FUCHS: Do you recall anything of the 1922 campaign after Mr. Truman had lost his haberdashery business and ran for Eastern Judge of Jackson County?

LEIGH: Well -- do I remember? I think I've been given credit for being active on that -- because some of the boys were. Tommy [Thomas E.] Murphy, and Harry Whitney and some of those guys got out and knocked on doors out in the country -- I didn't do it because I couldn't do it. I

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had a wife and a kid, and I had a job and I worked for a guy that if you weren't there about ten hours a day, you didn't have a job. I mean that's the way it was in those days, you produced or else, and I just didn't have any time. I was with him in spirit, you know, but that didn't do him a hell of a lot of good because I can't say that I actually -- but some of the fellows did. They got out and beat the bushes out there in the county and I think got him enough votes over the normal, the normal quota that he would have gotten as a Democrat running out there, enough to get him elected. No, but I didn't have anything with it.

FUCHS: Do you recall any thoughts you might have had at the time as to how he got into politics and was run for this office?

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LEIGH: There's no secrets in this world. It's pretty well-known that through Jimmy Pendergast Truman met Tom Pendergast, although it seems to me that Shannon was in the picture someplace in there. Shannon was strong in the county. Did you ever hear of him?

FUCHS: Oh, yes.

LEIGH: Well, he was strong out there and whether -- oh, I'm not going to go on record with this because I could have the whole thing backwards. But someplace along the line, it seems to me that one time he was running, that Shannon helped him, but I believe that Jimmy -- here's what I think, Truman never told me anything about it. I think that Jimmy Pendergast introduced him to the old man and eventually -- anyhow in 1934, that's how he got the nomination for Senator, you know.

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FUCHS: Yes.

LEIGH: But in that interim there I'm sure that the Pendergast faction helped him.

FUCHS: Yes. Well, that's pretty well-known now.

LEIGH: Yes, pretty well-known. All you have to do is watch the Kansas City *Star* for those years, at that time, and you have a pretty full story.

FUCHS: One reason I asked is, of course, the story that you more or less gave, that it started with Jimmy Pendergast looking for a good man and taking Mr. Truman and introducing him to Mike. There is another story that Mr. Truman's Battery D buddies sort of got behind him and pushed him for this, and then Pendergast recognized this guy as being a Mason and a veteran and a farmer, and so forth, had a lot

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going for him in the county:

LEIGH: He had all the makings of a candidate in that area out there; but I don't know that D Battery had so much to do with that because you had to have that political backing to get elected. If it didn't start with Jimmy Pendergast, who did it start with, Joe Blow? Where did it start? And then there was another fellow that was Captain of A Battery that was very friendly with Truman, and he lived out in Independence and I think he had some influence and got some votes. Every vote counted.

FUCHS: That was who?

LEIGH: Keith Dancey. Keith Dancey was Captain of A Battery. I think he (I may be giving credit where it's not due), but I think he had something to do in helping him get started. Oh, there probably were an awful lot of people, each one contributing a little bit. I think the Truman family were pretty well-known out there, you know. They had lived in that area for quite a while.

FUCHS: Did you know his mother?

LEIGH: No, I never met her, and as I understand, his father was tough. That's where that hickory comes from, you know, that's the old man. He was a farmer and if he wanted to do something, he would do it, and he'd just as soon take you out in the middle of the street and prove it to you.

FUCHS: He was supposed to be feisty, I don't know.

LEIGH: Well, I think there's something to that.

FUCHS: You know then that Mr. Truman was elected

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in '22 and served '23, '24 and then was defeated when he ran again in '24.

LEIGH: Yeah, but then he came back.

FUCHS: Then he came back in '25 and -- or '26 and ran...

LEIGH: He got to be presiding judge.

FUCHS: ...he ran for presiding judge and twice was elected to that but I wondered if you knew anything about the jobs he had in the interim. Its said...

LEIGH: I know he built a hell of a lot of roads out there under his administration and saved Jackson County a lot of money, compared to the money that had been spent on similar roads previous to his administration. In other words, if it was true, and who doubts that he had

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connections with the Pendergasts, and they had contracting connections -- the public did not get screwed under his administration. It was an honest administration, he built a lot of good roads that they needed and did it at a low cost. And I don't know what else you can expect from a public servant. So, I mean, that's the kind of a guy I think he is.

FUCHS: Do you know anything of his selling memberships in the Kansas City Auto Club when he was -- after he was defeated in 1924?

LEIGH: Times were tough with me, I wasn't worrying about anybody. No, I don't know, I don't know anything about it.

FUCHS: Do you recall his connection with the Community Savings and Loan Association?

LEIGH: That rings a bell but I don't know what it

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was. It was just some something, I can't remember.

FUCHS: It was right along that period.

LEIGH: I can't tell you. You've got to remember I was young and I was having to scuffle pretty hard for a living myself. I had problems of my own. But, no, I wasn't, I was never close to Truman anymore than ninety-five percent of the Battery wasn't close to him, anymore than ninety-five percent of the guys at the Bank of America are close to the chairman of the board. They just don't get that close you know. After all, it was a full-fledged outfit when he took it over, it had it's training and everything, and he'd had his and we were supposed to be ready to set up shop and do some business.

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FUCHS: What recollections do you have after you went to St. Louis and he became candidate for Senator?

LEIGH: Well, I remember that I got a few votes for him amongst some people we knew, mostly hardshell Republicans. I remember I talked about it at the Athletic Club and so on, and I got a lot of nos but I got some yeses, but that's just -- that's nothing. I mean you don't get credit for those things because you go to the front for a friend.

FUCHS: Yes.

LEIGH: And he was more than a friend, he was my old Battery commander and by that time we were a little bit proud, you know, of the thing, that we'd hung together where other outfits just fell apart when the war was over, never saw each

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other again, and we were cohesive. I remember I was very much interested in that election. The papers were damning him up one side and down another for being a Pendergast stooge and so on; and I think I converted three or four or five or six people and got them to vote for him. That's about all I remember. And I told you about this incident -- it must have been just before 1940 or in 1940, about that time, at the Coronado Hotel, you know. There was nothing to it, I was just there seeing him, but he was Senator then; and there was some talk -- I know what the talk was -- the phone rang and some newspaper reporter saying that there is some talk about you running for Vice President with Roosevelt and he said, "No, nothing to it." He said, "These guys are crazy, I'm not going to run for Vice President," or he wasn't even

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thinking about running for Vice President or anything like it. It was a newspaperman that called him, that's the way it was.

FUCHS: Then what did he do?

LEIGH: What did he do? He didn't do anything, we just sat there and talked.

FUCHS: Wasn't this the occasion when he said he had to make a phone call?

LEIGH: Oh, yes, that's -- he called his wife and talked to her about two minutes. I had forgotten about the phone ringing and this newspaperman, see.

FUCHS: You thought it was rather interesting though that he would take time to call his wife every night when he was on the road.

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LEIGH: That was the point. I guess that there was really nothing to it, but to me it made an impression that -- I know I was away from home a lot and I'd call my wife, but I didn't call her every night. In the first place it cost money to call every night. I think that if Bess said, "Jump off the bridge," he'd jump. Now, I may be all wrong and I may be romanticizing the whole thing, but the people I ran around with didn't call their wives every night, but he did, and it stood out and I've remembered it all these years. That's a long time ago.

FUCHS: Do you have any specific memories of him as Senator visiting St. Louis, other visits, or did you see him in Washington? Did you ever have occasion to go to Washington?

LEIGH: No. No, later on I used to have to go east

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on business and then -- I remember one time he invited me. He said, "Come to Washington sometime when you go east and I'll take you to lunch in the Senate lunch room, and you can have bean soup." I remember him saying that because that was their specialty in those days. I don't know whether they still have it, but I never took him up on that. I think I did see him in Washington one time as a Senator, but I wouldn't swear to it. You know it wasn't very long after 1940 that he was President of the United States. I didn't have any business in the east until the war came along and then I got some shippers in Baltimore and in New Jersey and I would go east. I don't think I ever was at the White House when he was Vice President, but Christ knows I was there enough afterwards. I'd go out of my way you know.

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I would stay at the old Willard Hotel.

One time [Bob] Evans and I and some Army captain, who I guess was going to get a discharge, and I drove -- I left St. Louis and went down and picked up Evans and this Captain and we drove through West Virginia and on to Washington and took a kind of vacation. All just to be doing something and I remember that was the first time I ever saw Congress in action. Evans knew Barkley very well and he knew his way around. He got us a big suite of rooms at the Willard, and we had open house; and we had politicians come in and the Mayor of Louisville I remember, and Congressmen. I remember when Matt could get away from the White House he'd come over.

FUCHS: Was Evans originally from Kansas City?

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LEIGH: He was originally from Kansas City.

FUCHS: Migrated...

LEIGH: Well, I think he went to Chicago first and then from there he went down to Louisville and went to work for a big bank there, I think it's the Citizen's National or First National and worked up to where he was in charge of their real estate department which was a pretty heavy job. He just retired a couple of years ago. He's all right, he's in good shape.

FUCHS: Among the letters that you showed me, there is one in which you mentioned the tally sheet of the second and third wards in the 1926 election in which Mr. Truman ran for Presiding Judge. Do you have any recollection of that now?

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LEIGH: I have recollection of it and I -- he must have sent something to me out of the paper or something.

FUCHS: No, he was thanking you for...

LEIGH: Sending it to him?

FUCHS: ...his original tally sheet of the 1926 election of the second and third wards, and he proceeded to tell how many he won by then, and the next time.

LEIGH: And the next time. That's right, I'd forgotten all about that. I don't know where I got that. I can't tell you where because that was long after -- was that when he was Senator?

FUCHS: You sent it to him when he was President.

LEIGH: When he was President.

FUCHS: He was running for Presiding Judge that year,

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1926.

LEIGH: I don't know. I haven't any idea where I would have gotten that, unless I went down to the *Star*, and you know, went back and got it.

FUCHS: I believe that the Battery had a party when he was nominated to be Vice President, do you recall that?

LEIGH: Well, that's the one that I showed you a picture of.

FUCHS: That's at...

LEIGH: At the President Hotel.

FUCHS: Any recollections of anything humorous that occurred there?

LEIGH: No, he wouldn't get up and make a longwinded talk. He'd let everybody else do that you know.

The old Padre, he'd talk your arm off. But Truman didn't talk much. You've got to get him out on the firing line and then you find out what there is to him. I think Truman is a guy who wouldn't stand out in a crowd. He doesn't have any Hollywood charisma about him or anything like that. You have to know the guy, and when you know him you love him.

FUCHS: What were your feelings when Roosevelt died and you knew that he would be the next President?

LEIGH: I thought it was a very good deal.

FUCHS: You had no apprehension about that at all?

LEIGH: No, I knew he might make mistakes. It's a rough job. I don't know why in the world anybody would want it. I'm not very sure he wanted

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it, but at that time it was evident that Roosevelt didn't know which end was up, and the war was approaching an end; we all felt pretty sure it might be another year or so, but it was approaching its end. You had the feeling that if he administered the affairs of State the way he administered the affairs of the Battery, with the same kind of judgment and courage, we wouldn't have anything to worry about. I think he was a pretty good judge of men. He wrote me, or he said to me one time, we were talking about those times and he said, "And I only had one sonofabitch in my Cabinet and I got rid of him."

FUCHS: Who was that?

LEIGH: I'm not sure, so I don't want to say, but you can look around and see who he got rid of and

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maybe I can come up with one.

FUCHS: Did you know a Roger Sermon?

LEIGH: I knew who he was, I didn't know him.

FUCHS: How about John Snyder, did you have any...

LEIGH: No, Snyder was a banker in St. Louis and working for some bank down there. I don't know whether he was with the Reserve Bank or working for one of the commercial banks. That's where Truman got him but I never had heard of him until he made him Secretary of the Treasury.

FUCHS: Of course, they became acquainted in the Reserves after the war.

LEIGH: Well, I didn't know that. I didn't know where he'd got him. Some thought he was a lightweight, but looking back, I'm not so sure

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he was. I'm not so sure he didn't understand pretty well -- and then they get all the advice in the world, they can call in all the economists from everywhere.

FUCHS: What memories do you have of the 1948 campaign when Mr. Truman was nominated to be re-elected?

LEIGH: Well, I'll tell you this about the 1948 campaign. I found out what a piker I really was. I thought he was going to be elected and six months before the election I made a \$100 bet on Truman, with a guy down in Arkansas. I made a \$100 bet with a guy who's living right here in Stockton today. I made a \$100 bet with a salmon canner in Seattle. That's how much I thought

of the Old Man's chances. I thought he was going to beat Dewey and -- well, he had to beat three people, as a matter of fact; and time

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went on and it didn't look so good and about that time around the athletic club I belonged to in St. Louis you could get ten and twelve to one against Truman. If you took Truman they'd bet you ten or twelve to one, and I know of bets that were made. Not conversation bets, but money bets. I showed you that picture over there where they were all congratulating him after he won. I kissed my three \$100 bets goodbye. I'm sure that nobody asked me to give to one campaign, but even Smack raised a lot of money for Truman, this Evans in Louisville. He won't give himself the worst of it but I know he worked and he raised money down there in Kentucky. Nobody asked me and I didn't volunteer. The day after election we knew he was going to be President, I went down and gave Tom Evans a check for \$100 and I've always felt

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like a heel about it since. But they had a pretty good debt that they had to take care of you know.

FUCHS: Why did you feel like a heel?

LEIGH: Because I didn't do it before. I'm not trying to alibi or I wouldn't tell it to you at all. It's not that bad, because I wasn't solicited and I'm not in the habit of parting with money unless somebody asks me for it, see. I guess I thought, "Well, they don't need it, or they hate to ask the guys in the Battery for something." You'd hear stories about people who were making \$5,000 donations, well, there weren't too many of them doing it, I guess. I heard, much later, that I think it was Philadelphia -- they had to borrow money to get out of town. He just didn't have any money. Of course, that was all taken care of after he got elected.

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After he won, of course, there's plenty of people like Vere Leigh who would come up.

And I don't know, it bothers me, I told you there's one thing he did for me and I can't think what it was. I don't know, my mind got turned away. He must have done something for me or I wouldn't have said that.

FUCHS: What did you think when he appointed Charlie Ross from -- who had been from Independence, of course?

LEIGH: Yes, but he was a *Post-Dispatch* man, he was a top guy. I thought that was great. Naturally I would because the *Post-Dispatch* was a Bible as far as I was concerned. Any of their men were good enough for me. I knew some of them over there. They were good boys.

FUCHS: I believe you were in San Francisco in June of '48 when Mr. Truman was here. What do you recall of that?

LEIGH: Oh, that's when I was telling you about Jimmy Swett.

FUCHS: That was what?

LEIGH: Didn't I -- I told you about Jimmy Swett, that fellow down on the peninsula...

FUCHS: That was in our conversation before we turned the recorder on.

LEIGH: Oh, you want me to tell you. All right.

My wife and I were out here. I was out here on business and she came along for the trip, and we were staying at the Fairmont Hotel and we had a nice room on the mezzanine floor. Truman had this train and he was coming across the country and at this time he was in Seattle.

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I don't know if he stopped in Portland on the way down, but he was coming down to San Francisco and the politicians were all over the Fairmont Hotel, you know, to see him. It was supposed to be some kind of -- I forget what the excuse was, but it was supposed to not be a political trip, although it was nothing else but a political trip, you know, he was out here mending fences.

FUCHS: He was going to the University of California to get a degree and that was the...

LEIGH: Yeah, that's what the papers said. Well, that wasn't what it was for and everybody knew it. He had an awfully big entourage to be coming out here to get a degree. He was like anybody else that was running for office. He was running for office and he was doing the best he could. So, as I said, one day, we weren't

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ready to leave San Francisco at all, far from it, and the hotel notified us that we would have to leave the hotel, that the room was going to -- now this was on the mezzanine floor -- are you familiar with the Fairmont over there?

FUCHS: I've been there one time, clear to the top.

LEIGH: Well, there's the lobby and then there's like a mezzanine, you know, that's where all the old dowagers used to live -- those used to be apartments, and Swigg cleaned all that out and made bedrooms out of them. Well, that's where the Presidential party was going to be, I didn't know that, but they were going to have -- the Secret Service picked it out, and that was what they wanted, and that's what they got. And so they told me I had to vacate, and I said, "Why?"

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And they said, "Because President Truman is coming here and he's going to take that whole floor."

"Well," I said, "don't move me yet."

And I tried to call Matt, but there was no way you could call. You couldn't work out any connections, and so I sent a long-winded tearful telegram to Matt that we had been at the hotel for three or four days, now they told us we had to move on account of Truman coming, and that I wanted to stay and I wanted to see the Old Man (he wasn't an old man, anymore than I was in those days, but that's what we called him, that's "The Old Man"). I said I wanted to see him and I don't want to be chased out of the hotel and couldn't he do something about it?

That evening a Secret Service man went to

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the manager of the hotel and told him to leave those people there and so they called us and they were so nice, they said, "Well, we can move you to another part of the hotel if that's alright with you."

And I said, "Yeah, that's quite alright, just so we don't have to move out."

A concern I represented in San Francisco had a sales manager who lived down the peninsula, San Mateo or down there someplace. I was in their office one day before Truman came down from Seattle and the manager said, "Vere, we know a family named Swett and the father has a manufacturing business, and his son, Jimmy Swett, is the first boy in the Bay Area that won the Congressional Medal of Honor, and the family are black Republicans just like I am, but Jimmy is a Democrat and a war hero and he

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did win the Congressional Medal of Honor, and he thinks the sun rises and sets in Truman." Truman always had a way with young guys. You might make a note of that. They liked him. They just took to him, you know, and he appealed to them. And he said, "Could you arrange for him to meet Truman?"

And I said, "Jesus, there's going to be a mob scene up there, you know. He's come a long way and will only be here a couple of days." And I said, "I'll try."

I didn't know Jimmy Swett from Adam but I made an appointment, I forget how we did that. He was to meet me in the hotel lobby, and we shook hands with each other and I said, "I'm Vere Leigh."

"Jimmy Swett."

And I called Connelly on the telephone and he said, "I can't get you in here now." He

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said, "This hall is full of people. I can't do it. What's so important about it?"

I said, "Well, Truman likes soldiers, good soldiers." And I said, "This guy must be pretty good. He shot down five Jap planes in one morning, that's what he did at Guadalcanal, five of them one right after the other. Five Zeros."

So he said, "Well, I'll see what I can do. You come on up and I'll tell him, but you may have to wait awhile."

I turned to Jim and said, "Is that all right?"

And he said, "Sure."

So, we went on up one floor in the elevator and here was the usual White House detail and everything, and we went right on in. Not that I could go by them, but they had been told to let me by them, and we went to the anteroom

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and sat down, and pretty soon, who comes out but His Nibs. I said, "This is Jimmy Swett." I said, "How are you Captain."

"Fine." He's got a grin you know. I always enjoyed that. He showed that wonderful grin. He said, "Come on in."

And their daughter was with them on the trip, but she didn't come in the room and they had a beautiful, big sitting room there and who was sitting over in the corner but Salisbury. Didn't he have F? Who was the Captain of F Battery? Do you remember? Was it Salisbury?

FUCHS: Salisbury wouldn't have been there would he, not in San Francisco.

LEIGH: Well, this guy was, he was a Captain out of the outfit and we had a nickname for him "Two Gun" or something like that, he was a

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wild man...Well, what Battery did Ted Marks have, wasn't that C Battery?

FUCHS: Seems he had C -- E Battery -- wasn't Salisbury E Battery? I would like to know who was there.

LEIGH: Maybe I will think of his name. He looked like a swashbuckler, you know, he looked like a big cowboy, rough guy, and I think he was. And he and Truman were good friends. Who was the guy in F Battery, who was captain of F Battery?

Maybe it will come to us. Anyhow I introduced Jimmy to them and we sat down there and talked and Truman wanted to know, he said, "I see in your lapel you've got the ribbon but let's see your -- Vere tells me you won the Congressional Medal of Honor," and he says, "that's a

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great thing, a great honor." He said, "Have you got the citation with you?"

Jim just turned as white as a sheet and he said, "I'm sorry," he said, "I just didn't think to bring it. I've got it in the bank in a safe deposit box and I just didn't bring it."

Truman said, "Oh, we'll take your word for it." He said, "Give me a piece of paper," and somebody handed him a piece of paper. That's when he called and said, "Bring in the photographers," and that's when they took that picture I showed you. He was supposed to be looking at the citation -- that's what it was, the citation.

FUCHS: Did he chat?

LEIGH: He was very pleasant to Jimmy and talked to him for some time.

FUCHS: Well, thank you very much.

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