

Exit Interview
With
OLIVER (OLLIE) ATKINS
On
November 21, 1974



**NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION
RICHARD NIXON PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY**

Exit interview with Oliver (Ollie) Atkins
conducted by Terry Good
in the Photographic Office in the West Wing
on November 21, 1974

- TG: Well to start with I know you are from the Curtis Publishing Company or Saturday Evening Post about 22 years or something like that Ollie?
- OA: Yes.
- TG: ...or 24? How was it that you were selected to join the [Richard] Nixon White House and become the photographer for the President? I don't expect you to go into a long description of that, but just a little bit of information on that will be helpful.
- OA: Well, I joined the Nixon group during the campaign of 1968 at the invitation of Herb [Herbert G.] Klein, who contacted me and at that time I was on the staff of the Saturday Evening Post, with headquarters here in the Washington bureau.
- TG: You had known Herb Klein?
- OA: I had known Herb for many years, of course, I had worked with the President and Rose Mary Woods and other people who had been on the staff for some time. Herb called me when I was in Chicago covering the Democratic National Convention as a matter of fact, that ill-fated convention they had out there. At that time the fortunes of the Post were not too good and I was delighted to come aboard. Of course, I worked during the campaign handling all the photographic matters that were required. Then after the election, if you want me to just to proceed just by legend--
- TG: Go ahead.
- OA: After the election I went back with the Saturday Evening Post for a period of a couple weeks and I just assumed that it was over, but then Herb called me again and said that the President

thought it would be necessary to have an official photographer appointed to the White House and would I entertain thought of taking on this position. I told them that I certainly would: the fortunes of the Post were looking very, very badly and I would be delighted to consider that. So when the transition team had been established (and I'm not sure exactly when that was), but sometime after it had been established, Herb asked me to come aboard in the transition group. I worked here out of the Washington offices for seven weeks, just slightly under two months. I think I was paid one month and I worked the rest of it gratis. Over in the new EOB [Executive Office Building] where the transition headquarters were established and, of course, I worked out of Herb Klein's office over there. Then just before (and I mean it was probably two weeks before the end of that year) I reported to New York and I talked to Larry [Lawrence] Higby and was told that I would be made the official photographer to the President. They wanted me to examine the photo office and photo laboratory and make recommendations as to changes that would be required, with an effort to cutting back on that operation. So I did this, and did it in connection with Mr. Robert Moore, who I made the supervisor of the photographic laboratory. The two of us examined that very carefully as well as the photographic office here at the White House. I think I had one meeting at that time with Mr. Yoichi Okamoto who was President [Lyndon] Johnson's official photographer. I assumed my duties here on the 20th of January 1969, that's inauguration day, and I've been here until today, which is my last day, which is November 21st, 1974.

TG: A couple questions on that period prior to the inauguration in 1969. During that campaign period were you the only

photographer on the Nixon campaign staff?

OA: Well, I was the only official photographer. We had two small girls that were involved in photography at the campaign headquarters in New York. These girls were not competent photographers, they were just amateurs, and of course I suppose that's one reason why I was brought aboard: because they needed a professional news photographer, which I am, to do this sort of thing. A great effort was made to find positions for these two girls, but they just weren't of the caliber that would operate in this kind of an operation, so I wasn't able to take them aboard here and they just disappeared.

TG: I have seen the contact print sheets for the campaign, the 1968 campaign. I take it then all the photographs that were taken during that campaign were taken by you.

OA: Well, that's not quite true because these two girls made a lot of miscellaneous pictures and some of the contacts in there were made by them. One of the girls' name was Buffy Parker, and the other girl I can't think of off hand; maybe it will come to me. In addition to that there was a photographer that had been brought aboard during the campaign from CBS [Columbia Broadcasting System]--oh, his name will come to me in a minute--and he was with us too as an official photographer. So, the two of us did it and I'm not sure that there was anyone in charge; the sort of thing was sort of a topsy growth thing, except I just sort of took command because no one else was doing it. I had to discreetly take command because we had to keep everybody happy, especially these two girls. They worked in the photo office in the New York campaign headquarters, and a couple times I sent one of them out on the road with Mr. [Spiro] Agnew. They did cover other campaign activity,

especially in the New York area, during that time. In effect, you had Mr. [Irving] Haberman of CBS and you had Buffy Parker and this other girl, who were all making pictures in one way or another. It was Irving Haberman by the way.

TG: Would there be any way that you might estimate the percentage of the photographs taken during that period that you took, as opposed to the other three people? Would it be fair to say that you took over 50%, 75%?

OA: Yes, I would say that Haberman and myself made 85% of the film shot; of the pictures used, why I suppose Haberman and myself made, split that fifty-fifty to be very generous about it.

TG: OK. The reason I asked as I recall those contact print sheets do not have the name of the photographer at the bottom.

OA: No, that's right. We had no machinery for doing that. The film was developed at the Curtis Publishing laboratories where I had an in, and we were getting overnight service on this. They didn't have the machinery for handling like we do now, recording all that information. Under great pressure of the campaign, every corner that I could cut, I did, and that was one corner that got cut. Now we have a complete set of those contacts that were turned over to the Archives. They are coded so that every thing with an "A" on it means that it was made during the campaign period; they were the "A" series.

TG: I remember that now that you mention it: "A" followed by a number, a four digit number something like that.

OA: Well, the digits started at "1" and went right up through. The minute the President said "I do" up there on Capitol Hill, we switched to the "B" series because he was then President.

TG: That fills me in a little bit on that campaign and transition period and that will be very helpful. Following the

inauguration, what sort of a staff did you bring together to cover the President and the First Family?

OA: Well, we weeded out the Okamoto staff very substantially; we discharged all but one civilian at the photographic Laboratory and I think that was about thirteen people we released down there. We brought in two in the management level and that was Mr. Moore, who was the Director of the Laboratory and Mr. John Shannon, who was the Assistant Director. I knew them both at the Curtis Publishing Laboratory, where they ran a very successful laboratory. Then we brought in as technicians Mr. Karl Schumacher; those three were at the laboratory. Up here at the White House, there was some question as to how many photographers they really had up here, because during the period from the election until inauguration day a lot of people disappeared. I just had no record of who they were or what they were doing, but there were several photographers up here. Of that group I maintained two: Mr. Robert Knudsen and Mr. Jack Kightlinger; all the rest of them I just let go. Of course we kept Miss Mary Matheus then, now Mrs. Beckman, as the office secretary. So our staff remained intact throughout the Nixon years, exactly like that, with the only change being that I brought Mr. Schumacher up to the White House photographic office, because the demands on this office were so great that we didn't have the personnel to take care of it. He came up with the responsibility of looking after Mr. Agnew; he was assigned to the Vice President's office. That didn't keep him completely busy so he did a lot of other things around here like taking care of all the curators' needs and miscellaneous utility photography for the White House staff. Mr. Knudsen was considered the No. 2 photographer under me and Mr. Kightlinger

was assigned to the social side and Mrs. [Patricia] Nixon. Splitting it up that way covering a seven day span each week we covered everything, that was it.

TG: That took care of a couple questions I was going to ask you and that was: how did you, or in fact did you, assign specific areas of responsibility to these people. You wrapped that up in very fine fashion. Nevertheless I would assume that, in those cases where there was a big event that required additional coverage you would have pulled these people in to handle it.

OA: Yes, we did. We had--being from the media when there is a big event, I would assign each photographer a certain responsibility. Now just take a simple thing like a Head of State arrival on the South grounds: one man would be put in the press coop, another man would be put up in the second balcony, and a man would work on the first balcony. Another would be what we would call "at random," so he would move around, and so we would cover all the bases. By giving each man an assignment in this way all bases were covered in case of any unforeseen thing. We made major shifts in the covering our material in color. Whereas some color was done during the Johnson years, we switched it so maybe 95% of everything was in color as opposed to the Johnson people who did 95% black and white. Now under the [Gerald] Ford administration they have gone back to the 95% black and white, and that's just a judgment of the people in charge. The cost differential is so little that it doesn't make much difference. It's a matter of volume of film, and our volume of film during the Nixon years was restricted so that we didn't overshoot things. By using a careful shooting schedule we were able to hold costs down to even less than what

the Johnson people were spending doing it all in black and white.

TG: You used a phrase there that probably means a lot to the people in the business, but I'm not sure that I understand it: a shooting schedule.

OA: That means when you send a photographer out, he's to look for certain things. Instead of shooting ten rolls, wildly trying to catch everything, he'll shoot one or two rolls and do substantially the same thing. Now there's planning that goes into photographic coverage, and when these assignments were given out, they were given out just like a picture editor on a big magazine gives them out. Each man was looking for certain things. Now, of course, in an emergency, should something happen in front of them that was unforeseen, he had the freedom to go ahead and shoot another roll if he wanted to; we didn't cut them back like that. But they were looking for pictures more than just cranking film through the cameras, and so every roll counted.

TG: That touches on another area that I wanted to ask about. You obviously then knew in advance in most cases that there was to be a photographic event coming up maybe the next day or the day after, depending upon how big it was. Would you sit down with your photographers and as you say arrange a shooting schedule and what have you, for all of these events?

OA: Oh yes, nothing ever happened by accident. Well, except in a couple of emergencies, when the President just strolled out on the South grounds and we didn't know it. Then you just have to run out and play it by ear. A normal event involving the President was predetermined and scheduled, and I got a copy of what was called the scenario. I knew what time it was going to

happen, roughly what the President was going to do and how long it was going to last, whether the press was going to be there, the names of the people involved and a description of what the event was. Based on that I had pretty good information, and I would send one man or two men or three men or whatever it required to properly cover that event. Also the event itself, if it's the Peach Queen or something, you do it with one man, whereas if it is King Hussein, then you make another judgment as to how much coverage you need for historical purposes.

TG: Were these shooting schedules set up by you yourself or in consultation with someone from the Press Office? How would you determine how many people should cover an event, where the camera should be placed to get the proper coverage? Was it done by you yourself?

OA: Yes, I did that. The Press Office didn't have the knowhow, nor did they have the time or inclination so that--I don't recall a single instance where anyone from the Press Office gave me any directions in that department; they just relied on me to do what was right. We had no problems in that respect.

TG: I had the impression that the information would have flowed from the Press Office to you and along with that information, informing you of an event, they might have said, "Ollie, we want to cover this, this, this and this." It would not have surprised me had they also gone ahead and said, "have one, two or three photographers cover it, etc., etc. Perhaps do it in color as opposed to black and white." But...

OA: Not, it didn't work that way at all. It was strictly up to me. The Press Office just didn't pay any attention to this operation at all. The scenarios came from the Staff Secretary's office, David Hoopes, for the most part toward the

end and before that really his counterparts and I examined them. The one fellow that I haven't mentioned in this thing is Mr. Andrew J. May, Buck May, that was a retired gentleman, who just wanted something to do and approached me just before I took the position. I brought him in as office manager and assignment editor. As people called in here to have a photographer assigned to something, Buck would keep track of all these so nothing was missed as any assignment keeps track of things. We kept a big "day book" whereby all the assignments were written down: the time, the place, whether it was color or black and white and what the event was, so the photographer would not show up with a wide angle lens to shoot two people and vice versa; he wouldn't show up without a wide angle lens if he had to shoot 140 people. So this was all carefully scheduled and controlled, just like any picture editor or desk would do. Nobody just wandered around here doing what he though should be done; it was all very much orchestrated and everything was kept track of. We knew where a man was, and a photographer; we didn't have two events happening at the same time. Occasionally, you know, two events would happen at the same time, and Mr. May would tell one of the parties that we just didn't have a man available but in thirty minutes we would, or fifteen minutes we would. Except in a very, very few cases the individuals involved were very happy to change their plans or the little ceremony or whatever it was allowing enough [time] for the photographer to get there.

TG: Did you ever borrow photographers from other government agencies for extra special or extremely large events?

OA: No, no.

TG: It was always handled by your people, right?

OA: Oh yes, yes. The only borrowing that was ever done was Bob Moore, the laboratory supervisor. On occasions I would make him come up here and put him on a step ladder or something to shoot a special angle that it was humanly impossible to do without another body. He would just go up on the ladder and do his thing up there and that worked out very well. In fact sometimes he made some of the more usable pictures. On foreign trips we would take Mr. Moore along and, at a convenient point during the trip, he would pack up and gather up all the film and fly back early with it. We didn't bring it all back after the trip, but, at a point maybe three quarters through the trip, he would fly back with the film we had. When the official party returned to the White House that [film] was all processed, he had made an edit of the maybe thirty or forty best pictures, and they were all hanging up in the White House before anybody got back here.

TG: That was always very impressive, the way it seemed like, as you say, before they were back there were pictures up in here.

OA: Right. We're doing that right now in connection with the Ford visit to Tokyo. Bob will be back in here tomorrow morning. When they [Ford's official party] all get here Monday night, these boys will have worked in the lab night and day over the weekend and all that stuff will be hanging on the walls, up to the end of the Tokyo or the Japan visit. We will not have the Korea and the Soviet end of it because the boys will carry that back with them.

TG: Speaking of international trips, were there special problems that you encountered traveling with the First Family or the President on these? Did you have to work the counterpart in

these foreign countries, your counterpart, to make sure that proper photographic coverage was done of an event that involved the President and perhaps one of the dignitaries of that foreign country?

OA: Well, that was an on and off situation. Normally, when a visiting dignitary came here, we would take the official photographer for the visitor under our wings and give him everything that we got. In fact sometimes we went way out of our way to look after him so that he didn't miss anything. In foreign countries, it was my experience that, for the most part, we were kind of on our own, and the official photographers were very little help to us. One exception to that was in Russia the official photographer over there helped me. Our own Secret Service and our own staff people were very generous in assisting me so that I would get entree to the various things. Well, for instance in Russia I practically lived at the Kremlin. I just sat outside the President's suite there, and whenever he went any place I just joined in the crowd and went with them, with the result that I have remarkable pictures of the President operating in the Kremlin and Henry Kissinger and the President walking down a Kremlin hall. Things like this, you see, are wonderful things. I also made every press photo. When I wasn't with the press, and you know there is a press pool that travels with the President, either myself or one of my men was always with that pool, so that I was shooting everything the press got as well as what I was making privately. So, the record that we have of the Nixon administration covers both sides of this. In addition to being the photographer, I looked after the press photographers and the pool. We squired them around and got them in the right

place and we worked very closely with the Secret Service on this, so that, except in a couple cases...I never did much spontaneous on that; I would always get on my radio or tell one of the agents that I would like to bring the press pool up for a few minutes to a certain location. We had a very harmonious relationship there, whereby we take the important press pool photographers (and reporters at times, but mainly the photographers) in the special locations where there were unusually good pictures that nobody could foresee until you saw the event. We would let them work up there for a few minutes and then we would bring them back down to an area where they were more or less out of sight. There was no point in keeping them up on the edge of the stage during the whole speech; they can go up for thirty seconds and do their thing and get off. Or a back shot in behind the President, sometimes that made a spectacular shot, and if I didn't bring them up there, they wouldn't get there. Now I'm not saying that the Press Office didn't help in this; we all worked together to see that this was done to cooperate with the press.

TG: You touched there on another question I was going to ask: did the press photographers see you as their White House liaison man, either officially or unofficially?

OA: Oh, very much so. Yeah, unofficially I'd say. I was a mother to them; I looked after them and if they had any gripes or problems, I tried to iron them out, or, if some local policeman grabbed on of them, I'd try to solve that problem as best I could. I tried not to look like a news photographer; I tried to look like an official, but that's pretty hard for a fellow to do when he's traveling with cameras and a bag. We had a very wonderful ID folder that was very useful because the

normal White House pass, you know, is just not much good. When you get away from the White House, it looks like a pass to a circus or something, and the local police officer, who had been briefed on these passes, I'm sure, but briefed about a hundred other things, just didn't recognize the pass. So we got these very nice folders that were like commission books, but it said that I was the personal photographer to the President and the other men had "official photographer to the White House," and they were very official-looking. When you got in a jam someplace, you could calmly exhibit that and tell the gentleman who you were. In most cases the officer would recognize us and let you through, and, if he didn't, you could usually find a Secret Service agent who would vouch for you, and then you could bring your people through. Now I had very little trouble getting through myself; it was when I was bringing a herd of press photographers through that I was looked at with some skepticism. I did the best I could. Being a news photographer myself and knowing the problems of news photographers, I did my very best to take care of these fellows and keep them happy and let them get their pictures without putting out a disturbing show, which sometimes will happen if you don't keep control.

TG: Then you were not only their liaison or their mother on international trips but also... [OA: Domestic trips, oh yes.] domestic trips and here at the White House too.

OA: Oh, yeah. Not so much right in the White House. When they were just going in the President's Office or working around the grounds, in general for the most part the Press Office handled those things, but the minute we got off the White House grounds...you see, on Air Force One I went with them. I got them into the right cars and the motorcades. If they were

going with the right helicopters, I would tell them the number of the helicopter and point the direction. If someone got lost, I kept track of them all; I got them all on Air Force One. If someone was back in the lobby and corralled some place, I would rescue him and, except for two or three occasions, I just lost very few people.

TG: So your relationship with the press photographers was harmonious. While you were officially not part of them, you were still part of the same peer group, I suppose.

OA: Oh, yes.

TG: The associations were close, congenial.

OA: Yes, I think we had a very harmonious and cooperative operation there with both the reporters and the photographers. Of course, as a man may fight with his wife once in a while, there were times when they demanded things that were unreasonable or that I just couldn't do, so I'd say, "Look, boys, I just can't take you up there at this time; it's not going to work out. Now let me see what I can do about that." Sometimes it worked out and sometimes it didn't; sometimes they were unreasonable, sometimes they were very reasonable but for other reasons I couldn't bring them up into a certain location. I think that there was a mutual respect both ways for the problems of both parties. I'm very proud of the fact that I got along so well with the press. I never had a single black eye from anyone except a bad actor. I had a couple of bad actors that nobody could keep happy, you know, they are unreasonable. They didn't travel with us too much. There was one gentleman from a well-known New York paper that was absolutely unreasonable. The likes of that, nobody could keep track of, but 99% of the time we did very well.

TG: Of the photographs that were taken by your office, what percentage of those would have been your photographs, Ollie? Any rough idea?

OA: Well, we went by an arrangement here whereby my personal profile was just about as low as possible. I probably shouldn't brag about this, but I tried to keep egotism out of this thing as much as possible, and so I just don't have any even "guesstimate" of what percentage of the film I shot. However, I shot everything the President did, with a few rare exceptions when I just had to go home and sleep. I consider myself duty bound to be every place I could physically be and, when I couldn't be there, I assigned one of the other men to fill in for me. But I allowed very little to interfere with my personal coverage of the President and Presidential activities, so I'm sure, if a count were made of the contact sheets, mine would be on the heavy side. However, I would like to repeat that we tried to run as a big team here and the combined effort of everybody made a very complete record. Not doing it that way would be a staff problem for one thing, but also it would cut back on situations. I know plenty of times we put a man up on a view of a motorcade, dramatic motorcade some place, and then all that man would do would be shoot that one section. Well, you couldn't get out of the motorcade to go up and do it; you had to be in front of it, you see. Then on an arrival someplace we always had a man out front, because when I ran off Air Force One down the tail ramp with the pool, by the time I got down there, the President was often down already. So the man at the scene ahead of us photographed that; he was responsible for covering it, and he did. It didn't bother me that somebody else was making those shots, just as long as they

were being made. I think we had a capable, talented professional staff. I was very proud of all the fellows, and I hope they feel likewise.

TG: I gather then that you didn't really have a typical routine each day. You wouldn't necessarily work at 9:00 and leave at 5:30.

OA: Well, we didn't come at nine because we came at seven. I came at seven for two reasons: one, because the President was generally in his office at 8:15 or 8:30 and that gave me an hour to grab a bite in the mess and to review the day's work, read the schedule, check up on everything. Two, there's an hour of calm around here when the President's in town between seven and eight, when the phones don't ring too much and you can really plow through a lot of paper work. Then, after eight o'clock, and increasingly until nine, that calm dissipates until bedlam breaks loose from nine to whatever time the President stops. There was no work day as such. Now, I tried to make it fair to everybody and give a man--when there was a lean day, we tried to get a man off. Having worked seven days the week before, I tried to slip him off so he could get his car fixed or buy a new tire or whatever had--to see his wife. We tried to do this for morale purposes and just plain human kindness. Now there were times when it didn't work that way. There were times when we made these long trips, and, when we did and business was slow here, the boys that didn't make the trip we tried to spell them off so that they'd alternate in duty days here. But, but when you walked in in the morning, there was very little indication when you were going to go home at night. Sometimes those days ran late in the night: eleven, twelve o'clock. Thank goodness that President Nixon was really

not a late night liver; he liked to be in bed before midnight himself, and even on the road. This was a great advantage to us because we sort of knew that everyone would be in bed at a reasonable time, here or on the road. Of course, when the President quits, then we still have to get home and go to bed; it's still an hour at least after he leaves that we're free to go. What we did was to stagger the coverage: I would be in at seven, then we'd have another man coming in at nine, and generally that was Bob Knudsen, came in around eight-thirty; and then we would have Jack Kightlinger coming in around ten in the morning. If he had a real late night social event over there, we would bring him in at two or three in the afternoon, and then we would have Karl coming in at nine or nine-thirty [and] working through the day. So, during the heavy part of the day, we had a lot of people on, and, during the two tails, if there were no special events planned, we had lean coverage. There were all kinds of exceptions to this, but that was a normal day. Then on weekends we would have a weekend schedule. If the president went to Camp David, we could cut everybody off except the duty photographer. Unless we had an invitation to send a photographer to Camp David (we went up there by invitation), we would have a duty photographer down here. Well, we had one here in any case. He had his Pageboy on and that meant he couldn't go far from home and he had to have his cameras ready to go. He would be responsible for any emergency that came up. Well, there were emergencies every weekend; he'd be called for this, that, and the other thing. Many a time we would open up the laboratory and everything else on a weekend, Saturday nights, Sundays, whenever there was a crisis. Sometimes "pseudo crises," but still things that had to be

attended to. Mr. [Ronald] Ziegler or others would want to rush out a picture for some reason or have a certain thing covered, we would have to crank up everything. The Duty Man would have that responsibility, so that one call to him would put the whole photographic staff back in operation. That's just exactly the way a newspaper operates, you know. When there is a Thanksgiving afternoon and nothing's going on and the morning paper's gone out and everybody's home eating turkey, if some crisis comes up, one man is called. He calls another man, he calls another man and pretty soon like a chain letter everyone of the staff is back on the job, and that's exactly the way we worked.

- TG: I gather then that during this period of time, following the election in 1968, you didn't have many free days, or many days off, did you?
- OA: No, I had five days off the second year and I had five days off the first year of the Ford administration, and that's it for six years.
- TG: A total of ten days?
- OA: Yes, ten days leave and I wasn't sick a single day so you have--that was my record. All the other fellows, I tried to give them all a little vacation this last year, the last year of the Nixon administration. Some of them got two weeks and some of them got three weeks, depending on what they wanted. Amazingly enough, some of them didn't want three weeks. So, there is very little time off.
- TG: I don't know how you did it, I really don't.
- OA: Well, it was tough, it was tough. It isn't a normal civil service job, you know. Someone, unless he is really sick, he comes to work even if he's feeling bad, he comes to work.

There's a moral obligation. I never prodded them on this; they just knew I was here and that they better get in here. I didn't hold any axe over their heads at all; they just felt a moral obligation that, if I could make it, they could make it. That goes for blizzards and everything else.

TG: Explain why this office did not have motion film coverage of the President, Ollie? Was there any reason for that?

OA: Well, during the Johnson years that was detailed to the Navy Photographic Center to support the Presidential activities on the cinema filming of the Presidential activities. This got to a point when I came aboard, whereby to the best reckoning I had, there were some thirty people give or take a few, who were assigned to that: directors, film cutters, editors, cameras, sound men and gaffers that carried the lights and did other chores. I really don't know how many were officially assigned here, but my ballpark estimate was that there were thirty-two. I was told by Mr. [H.R.] Haldeman to eliminate this, and the first thing I did--well, the second thing I did--was to eliminate them. So, all that operation was retired. Well, after we had been in office for a couple of months, the President made a trip to Europe. You remember that first trip? I was called upstairs to talk with Mr. Ziegler about the wisdom of maybe putting on one Navy film crew to record this for the Archives on film. So, we laid on two cameras, a sound man and a lighting man, to make that trip. Then we found as we progressed in the administration that there were times when on official and ceremonial occasions, when visiting dignitaries came, and when important things like the State of the Union message was being delivered, that there was an archival need for covering these things on cinema film. On the basis of this

we kept what I would call a low budget operation going. Well, this thing proceeded kind of without direction, because I wasn't anxious to take it on; I had my hands full. So, when the President employed a television specialist, Mark Goode and Bill [William] Carruthers and those gentlemen, why this sort of fell under their thinking because they were more or less in charge of television operations. The placing of television cameras and camera stands were done with the advance people in the Press Office and others, so their expertise sort of carried over into the film department. Without any consultation on my part, except very informally, why these gentleman were assigned then to this Mark Goode's office.

[INTERRUPTION]

TG: I take it then...

OA: So he took over the responsibility for that. Now, those fellows leaned on us a little bit for guidance at times, but they really were not my charge during the administration.

TG: That was a question that occurred to me this morning when I was thinking about this. Well, I knew about the Navy Photo Lab and I knew that they did have coverage. [OA: Yes.] I was just curious to know how it tied in with your operation.

OA: Yes. Now under the previous administration, of course, they came directly under Mr. Okomoto. I was glad to shed them, and I think they are continuing that under the Ford administration.

TG: I think you touched on this briefly earlier but I'll ask again. Were there occasions when there was to be an event, whether it was Presidential or First Lady or one of the daughters, that no one suggested to you that there be coverage of it, and then you yourself would recommend that someone from your office should cover the event?

OA: Well, in many, many cases when events were taking place and there was no scenario for them... Now, in things involving the President, there were very few things that didn't involve a scenario, but there were other cases when Mrs. Nixon would want an official picture or something, or we'd send a man in with a visiting photographer to make a few shots at the time he was doing his work, [or] Julie or Tricia [Nixon Cox] would call up for something, and we would take care of that. That was spontaneous to a large extent. Of course, we gave high priority to anything the First Family wanted. There were times when other photographers would come down to photograph the President or some-, anyone in the family, and frequently we'd have a man, the man generally charged with that responsibility would go over there. Partly it was to make sure it all went smoothly: sometimes visiting photographers, once they get their foot in the door, are a little difficult, and so our man'd keep an eye on that. When it looked like they had been there long enough, he would sort of indicate that the time was right for quitting.

TG: Mentioning the visiting photographers: were there occasions when groups would come in to see any member of the First Family and they would bring their own photographer with them?

OA: Not too much groups. For the most part the visiting photographers would be assigned to do a special picture that had been pre-arranged, for a magazine or a for some other reason, a television production or something, and then we'd have a photographer over on that.

TG: What were perhaps the highlights of your time here at the White House in terms of events or projects. Are there any that stand out?

OA: Well, certainly there are. Oh, just off the top of my head I'll recite to you some of the things that come to mind. Of course the First Inauguration, and the Second Inauguration, and various important pictures of the President.

TG: When you say important pictures do you mean that the event itself was important or the photograph that you took of the President at some event really was a photographic masterpiece?

OA: Well, I'd say that pictures of him in his office, meeting with his staff and with others, photographically raise themselves to where they were important and the event wasn't necessarily that important. But then going on to the events, you have the arrival ceremony of all sorts of heads of states. As you remember, there were just numerous occasions when that happened. The speaking to the Joint Sessions of Congress were important. Official pictures of the Cabinet in session and a meeting with the Cabinet officers and their wives was a first. The real historic trips were the trip to China and the President standing on the Great Wall of China, eating with chop sticks, and the visit to the Soviet Union and walking around the Kremlin grounds and doing business in the Kremlin. Which, by the way, is one of the most ornate buildings I ever saw in my life; it makes the Vatican look like a rather ordinary place. That's just off the top of my hat, those are spectacular events. Now, coming down a notch from that elevated place there were meetings with [President Charles] DeGaulle and the leaders of Europe in the situations of the European capitals, the Pope, the Vatican, and some of the fantastic situations that developed on the very last trip the President made which was to the Mid-East. We were in Alexandria in a motorcade and the train ride from Cairo to

Alexandria and the movements around Cairo itself were--I almost hesitate to use the term millions, but there were more than one million people around. They were certainly uncommon events and highlights. President Nixon standing with King Faisal in a joint statement, after meeting in Saudi Arabia and receptions with Arabs. I suppose Saudi Arabia stands out in my mind more than any other place because the place of women in Arab countries is much reduced from what us Westerners regard it. I remember seeing Arabs who wouldn't touch Mrs. Nixon's hand because they didn't want to be associated with a woman of any kind. Suddenly it came to me the difference in our civilizations; those things hit you in the eye. This was true in a diplomatic reception in Israel, when they--the high Arabs came through the receiving line, they would greet, nod [to] Mrs. Nixon, but they wouldn't touch her, wouldn't shake hands.

TG: That must be a very strange... [OA: Yeah, you're right.]
sensation or sight.

OA: Yes. I'm sure Mrs. Nixon had been briefed by our protocol people, so she was alert to it, but just imagine! How ridiculous can one be?

TG: I told you at the beginning I wouldn't ask opinions and evaluations; I have, in fact, when I asked you what were the highlights. Is there any one photograph that you took, or several photographs that you took, that from your point of view are really exceptional photographs that you would like--if there is a Nixon library and a museum, are there any photographs that you would like to have put up there on the wall as examples of your work?

OA: Well, probably some of the greatest casual pictures I made of the Nixons was of President and Mrs. Nixon on the beach at the

San Clemente residence on a sort of foggy, rainy, misty afternoon. There were several shots of the couple walking hand in hand down in the misty beach area. Later there is a close up of the President with Mrs. Nixon's head on his shoulder that's probably the greatest picture I made of the two of them along that line. But the pictures of the President and Henry Kissinger walking in the halls of the Kremlin and on the grounds of the Kremlin and eating with the chopsticks, and standing on the Great Wall of China, as ball park "guesstimates" of the greatest pictures I made that includes them right there.

TG: Those, of course, have been put on the walls of the White House, and I think they have appeared in any number of publications.

OA: They've been well exhibited.

TG: And as they well should be. I'm not a photographer other than the typical amateur, but these that you've named I remember seeing, and they certainly caught my eye. Well, that's nice to know. Where could we reach you, Ollie, let's say as the years pass? Obviously we wouldn't anticipate picking up a phone and calling you, but perhaps if we wanted to pursue some of these photographs to get a little bit more background on an event from you as you saw it, is there any place that we would write you? I know that you are going back to Curtis Publishing Company, is that right?

OA: That's correct. Well, I'm going back to Curtis Publishing and I thought I was going back February 3, but they want me to go back tomorrow, so I'm officially putting it at February 3. I'm living in McLean at 1364 Macbeth Street, and my phone number there is 356-3737, that's McLean, Virginia 22101. However, I'm

not sure that I'm going to stay there too long; it's a pretty big pretentious house for just my wife and I, and our girls have their own homes now. My business address will be as vice president of the Curtis Publishing Company at 1100 Waterway Blvd., Indianapolis, Indiana 46202, and that's code 317-634-1100. I'm sure that I'll be available there for a long time.

TG: That's what we're interested in, is a home address if a person thinks he is going to be there for the next five or ten years, or in that case a business address.

OA: I'll be in touch with Rose Mary Woods and Julie Eisenhower and Len [Leonard] Firestone and some of the other people that I don't figure will be fading out of the picture right away. They will always know where to find me. I have a great interest in the Nixon Library, I volunteered my services at any time to assist in that. I think that the photographic section of that library is going to be very valuable and very necessary and I have a special interest to see that that is set up so that it is professionally operated and run. Mr. Robert Moore, at the laboratory here, is very familiar with the materials in the library and he is an expert at knowing how photographic material should be preserved and used. This is particularly important with so much color involved. By the way, this color material, you know, there is a process now for duplicating it where the more important pictures could be duplicated so that they would last, be in a frozen form for a hundred years, we figured. The regular negatives, the original negatives, which we have now, unless they are duplicated, have been used so much that they stand a chance of fading, in fact some of them have shown signs of fading already, the dyes being what they are. There is a possibility of this. Mr. Moore is very much

interested in becoming the photographic curator for the Library, and, if I have anything to say about it or if the library people will consider it, why he will be very happy to take on those responsibilities when the library is a reality.

TG: We, of course, have talked with him, thanks to you and the efforts that you have gone to to assist us in providing information has been very helpful, and I'm certainly very grateful to you for it. Bob has been very helpful. I know I have had the pleasure of sitting in on several meetings with him and I was quite impressed with his technical grasp and knowledge and his interest.

OA: And he's a worker.

TG: He really is. Well, I think that takes care of the questions that we like to cover during this what we think might be a first interview with everyone, Ollie. I've overstayed my welcome, I hope you will forgive me for that. I enjoyed this, I really did.

OA: I'm delighted to have you.

TG: I must say, in spite of the fact I've been here through the entire time, you've told me things today that I was unaware of, that I hadn't picked up over the course of the years, so it's not only been an informative session for me, but hopefully the information will be of value to us in the years to come.

OA: Very good, glad to do it.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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conducted by Terry Good
in the Photographic Office in the West Wing
on November 21, 1974

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