

Exit Interview  
With  
HERBERT G. KLEIN  
On  
July 13, 1973



Nixon Presidential Materials Staff  
National Archives and Records Administration

Exit Interview with Herbert G. Klein  
by John R. Nesbitt and Terry W. Good  
in Room 160, Old Executive Office Building  
on July 13, 1973

JRN: [Unintelligible] begin warming up the idea of oral history for the administration period by informally talking to the senior people, if they had the time before November, just to get their own version as they really would like to have it told about what their role was during the administration. [Unintelligible] on the non-controversial areas, because we would like to think that, five years from now, we'd be back, operating from the Nixon Library in California, when everybody feels a little bit more relaxed.

HGK: Hm hmm.

JRN: And might even be a little more candid: just sit down and do a series of one-hour interviews. We might come visit you six or seven times, spend an hour and really focus in...

HGK: Yeah.

JRN: ...on particular [unintelligible]. And we're very timid to approach an experienced journalist who has gone through this, who's been asking questions and in recent years been asked questions...

HGK: I suspect,...

JRN: ...so we [unintelligible] it in a very....

HGK: ...I suspect more than anyone [laughter]. I'll tell you the funniest experience I had in that regard is, I was doing a television program in Milwaukee one day. We had some discussion

of journalism, and I said that I judged people a lot as a newsman by what kind of questions they asked me. As a matter of fact, when I was a newspaper man, I thought I asked good questions. So, this fellow looks at me and says, "Alright, ask yourself a question." [laughs] I said, "Well,...."

TWG: Well, our problem is, as I think Jack mentioned, in your case you've been a participant in the life of Richard Nixon ever since 1946, as I understand it.

HGK: Yes.

TWG: For us to come in here and in an hour's time ask you to give us the highlights of that is impossible and foolish. I think the best that we can do is simply ask you to touch upon those periods of his life where you have been involved in a significant way. Then we'll go back and do our research in those areas and on those events and [unintelligible] come back to you perhaps in California...

HGK: Sure.

TWG: ...in a few years and discuss them with you. Obviously, we can't discuss them with you now because we don't have the information.

HGK: Yeah. We're probably going to have to even make it a little shorter because I've got to be at the Commerce Department to speak at noon.

JRN: What time do you want to leave?

HGK: She'll tell me.

JRN: OK. So that we can do kind of a Q and A thing.

HGK: Yeah, it'd be probably just a few minutes before twelve.

JRN: Well, we'd like to look at this briefly, because pre-

Presidential....

HGK: Well, are you interested, what type of things are you interested in most: in the nature of the structure or in anecdotal things? What are some of the areas that interest you the most?

TRG: I had some thought that you might simply start back with 1946 and come forward and simply say, "In 1946 I was involved in the campaign to this degree," and not go into any detail on it, but simply let us know that, yes, you were involved in it.

HGK: What my role was in each thing?

TRG: Yes. And carry it through making only just enough comment on it so that we will know that we had better do some research in that area, on that subject, so that we can come back to you in California.

HGK: Alright. In other words, you want me to sketch roughly what our relations have been during these twenty-seven years?

JRN: I think this would be a two installment thing, though. What you have just described is sort of the first part, in the time we have, and then to switch over and cover your role as Director of Communications of the administration since 1969.

HGK: Sure, I think we can do that easy because I can sort of give you some barebones to sort of work from.

JRN: We can look at it as a series of benchmarks [unintelligible].

HGK: Yeah. When I got out of the Navy in 1946, I went back to the newspaper where I had started as a copy boy prior to the war and was a reporter prior to going into the Navy, and that was the Alhambra Post Advocate. At that time, I had fairly little interest in politics and more concentrating on professional

things and that: I had an avocation interest in sports. When I got back, I became the news editor of the newspaper, which was the largest daily in the 12th Congressional District, in which the incumbent was H. Jerry [Horace Jeremiah] Voorhis [Dem., California; held 12th District Congressional seat from 1936 until 1946 when RN defeated him]. Voorhis was looked on I found out right away as an unbeatable candidate. He had been cited by magazines as one of the outstanding Congressmen of the country. On the other hand it was a district that should have been Republican, and the Republicans were looking for a candidate. I observed these things, as someone who was trying to re-establish himself, who was working civically with the Junior Chamber [of Commerce] and other things beyond the newspaper.

I first met Mr. Nixon when I went to cover one of the debates he had with Jerry Voorhis. The debates were vigorous, and one of the key issues which sometimes is forgotten was an economic one of the effort to get away from controls. Voorhis had a philosophy which was very liberal, and he was for more controls. Mr. Nixon was opposed to it, and that was the trend of the time, and he turned [out] to be very able. A great number of his friends in that race were friends of mine, and he also became a very good friend of the publisher of the newspaper whose name was Pauldon White. So we got to know each other personally as I covered him, and the more I knew him, the more I admired him and believed in the philosophy that he was espousing.

After he was elected in a major upset--one of the upsets of the year--we became actually better acquainted, because as a

young Congressman he made a point of coming by the paper. When he did this, he would usually visit with the publisher and with me. I can recall taking him through the composing room to meet the printers, and he took an interest in the mechanical aspects of the paper as well as the content of it.

When we--he went to Europe for the first time as a member of the [Christian A.] Herter Committee, he impressed me deeply by his ability to observe things almost as a newsman as he went through the various countries. I can recall him telling me that he made it a point of going to the minimum number of official functions and trying to spend his time out talking to the people or observing things in the countryside. One of the things I remember most was that he brought back a picture of himself from either Greece or Turkey (I believe it was Greece) standing by a stucco wall with a hammer and sickle painted on the back of it. This very thin, young-looking Congressman who looks much like Eddie [Edward C.] Nixon does now with that snapshot which he gave me. I hope when I finally go through all my files I have it; I don't know if I do or not, but it would be a great thing to have. He at that time also was--I think that trip had a major influence on his whole career in the Congress because I think that convinced him that it was important to build in an international way and that this nation could not be isolationist. I think that had the beginnings of the influence of the policies he's developed in all of his career as an internationalist. He also was very active in the House Un-American Activities Committee and on a number of occasions, why, he would talk with me about

problems he was having, the pressures he was feeling from the press here, about his observances. This would come when he had a weekend in the district, something of this nature.

In 1948 his campaign was headed by Harrison McCall who died recently, who we used to call the "Grey Fox". In those days in California, you could run on both tickets, so that you could seek the Democratic nomination by cross-filing, as well as the Republican. He [Nixon] cross-filed. Because of the intensity of the activity with the Marshall Plan which emerged from the Herter Committee, with what he was doing on the House Un-American Activities Committee and on the Labor Committee and some things he was doing for the district.... The big district issue was the Whittier Narrows dam, which is a flood control dam in part of the district near El Monte. Because of all of those things, he came back only once prior to the primary election. I functioned as a volunteer advisor to him during that time on my own time, not as part of my newspaper function, which was that of the news editor yet. There were about I suppose four or five of us who primarily advised him and got committees organized for him: "Democrats for Nixon" and things of this kind.

TWG: Are there some names of those people, Herb, that come to mind?

HGK: One of them would be Frank Jorgensen. The fellow who headed the Democrats for Nixon is Bob Halburt who lives in West Covina. A fellow named, I can't think of his name but Loie'll [Gaunt] remember because he always headed transportation and has over a lot of years that he's lived in that area, and he's still active. Those would be a couple of them, and Jorgensen would remember who

else might be.... I don't think Murray Chotiner was active at that time, but he may have been, At any rate....

JRN: Do you predate Murray Chotiner?

HGK: I think so, but I can't swear to that. I'm not sure when Murray first--maybe he kept [unintelligible] in 1946 also. At any rate, the one appearance he [Nixon] may have made prior to the primary election was, he came out to the district on a weekend and we went out to El Monte to inspect this area where the dam was and to have pictures with the newspapers. It was the heart of the Democratic part of that district, and he was accompanied by a minister whose name was Reverend Dan something, who was sort of the leading civic leader in El Monte at that time. We went to the site, and he [Nixon] had to go back. He was elected in the primary, which was a tremendous thing for a freshman Congressman to win both tickets. His opponent at that time was a man named Steve Zetterberg who lived in Pomona and practices law there yet I think.

JRN: Was he a serious Democrat?

HGK: He was a serious Democrat who was a liberal and who really didn't understand the issues. Some of the things he would espouse personally would turn off people in the district.

JRN: Do I remember correctly? Voorhis moved before the 1948 campaign?

HGK: I don't know when he moved, but I would think so. He moved to become the head of a co-op, and I don't think--you know, he was living in Washington mainly; he was living in the district fairly little by that time, but he had no part of that campaign. Between 1948 and 1950 I then continued to see him [Nixon]

frequently, and I can remember one time when we were both thinking of changing careers, and we sat down in a little tiny coffee shop with Bill Arnold, who was his administrative assistant at that time. He was worried about whether or not he should get off of the House Un-American Activities Committee: whether to go on to another committee or pursue the thing. I was wondering whether I should leave the newspaper business or whether I should go with another company, because I had a couple of offers, or even whether I should ask him to see if he could make me Postmaster. And we....

JRN: Are you serious?

HGK: Yeah.

JRN: Postmaster?

HGK: Well, you know, you look into things. You're not making much money. He encouraged me to stay in the newspaper business with that company, which was the Copley Press, and I did. We were just, it was two friends talking back and forth. I don't think either one of us--I don't think he was seriously thinking of leaving the Committee, and I wasn't seriously thinking of being Postmaster. I was seriously thinking of an offer from the Los Angeles Examiner though. But we had just sort of an informal friendship during that time.

In the 1950 campaign he talked to me about it before he announced for the Senate, and along with a lot of other people who were in the district and who [were] part of his friends. I just thought of something not related but about someone who would be interesting to do [unintelligible].

TWG: Were there other people on his staff back here in Washington or in the 12th District there whose names come to mind that might.... You mentioned Bill Arnold.

HGK: Bill Arnold was the principal one. There was a girl who was a secretary who Rose [Rose Mary Woods] will know, and I can't remember her name.

JRN: Dorothy Donnelly Cox.

HGK: Yes, Dorothy Cox. That's right. The woman I am trying to think of is the mother of the assistant Managing Editor of the LA Times now. I have stayed at her house; I should remember her name. She's one of his early supporters, and she lives in Covina. She knew him while--she's one of the real members of the original Committee of a Hundred. There are a thousand, you know, who claim to be. I'm not one of them. But she would be an interesting person sometime [when] you're out there to talk to. The name is just like on the, it's like Wagon or, I can't think of it right now.

At any rate, in 1950 my association was in discussing with him whether or not he was going to run. Some advisory things, we went before the California Republican Assembly as to whether or not he was going to get the nomination. Murray Chotiner was more influential in that than I was by far. And then, I wrote the first editorial, an endorsement [of] him after he was nominated, or after he announced that he was going to run for Senate. It was kind of a boost to get an editorial right away. My role in that campaign was of an informal advisor and of helping him with Junior Chamber people across the state, because by then I was

very active in the Junior Chamber. I had been a president of the local chapter in Alhambra. I had helped elect the state chairman, and I had been the successful manager of a candidate for National President of the Junior Chamber, so I knew most of the Junior Chamber people up and down the state. I got a lot of them together with him at various functions, like he spoke at the state Jaycee [Junior Chamber of Commerce] meeting, and they put together a little cocktail party. So, many of the leaders that he had in the various communities in the state came from the ranks of Junior Chamber politics, which is a pretty good training ground. They're active, young business leaders in their local community and sort of new blood when he had to build a statewide organization, and I helped in that quite a lot.

The other night Pat [Patricia] Nixon was kidding me about, she never forgets seeing me in a parade in Whittier. I don't remember whether it was just prior to the primary election or--it was election eve of the primary or the general, and I think it was the primary. I got a bunch of Junior Chamber fellows who wanted to make this parade a little more active, and we dressed up like Indians. She remembers looking out of the back of the convertible and suddenly seeing me with war paint over my chest and a feather in my hat and dancing around a fire we had built in an old dish pan [laughter]. It was to kind of, you know, liven up the idea that we were all young and vigorous, and we had a young candidate.

I came back to Washington--well, I was transferred (promoted actually) to a new job in San Diego about September of that year,

1950. I went down to become a feature writer and an editorial writer for the San Diego Evening Tribune, and about the same time, I was asked to come back to their Washington bureau for two months. So, I was in Washington during most of the final part of that campaign. I don't remember the date I got here except that I was here one day, and the first story I covered was the attempted assassination of [Harry S] Truman by the Puerto Ricans at the Blair House. During the time, it was between then and 1950, he'd ask me about things I'd covered. I had a chance to interview [Douglas] MacArthur in Japan, and I'd covered the Bikini atomic bomb tests. So part of this, I think, was the exchange of information I had learned on some of those assignments, part political tasks. He built during that time a great relationship with every weekly editor in his district; there were about five dailies and the rest were weeklies. He would have breakfast meetings with them, and he continued to do that even when he was Senator. So, my role on that was informal.

1952--I was at home. We were then living in La Jolla, and I was an editorial writer for the San Diego Union, being groomed to become editorial page editor for it. I was listening by radio to the [Republican] National Convention when I heard that he, the rumor and the fact that he had been nominated for Vice President. A short time after, when he came back to California, I was approached either through Jim [James E.] Bassett, who was his press secretary at that point and is now at the Los Angeles Times, or Murray Chotiner and asked if I would head up the publicity campaign in California for [the Dwight D.] Eisenhower-

Nixon ticket because he [Nixon] had the responsibility for California. It was part of, besides running for Vice President, why, he was responsible for the organization there. He then talked to me and talked to my publisher at a dinner party at the publisher's home. The publisher was James S. Copley.

It was agreed that I would take a leave of absence and go to Los Angeles for the campaign, which I guess by then would cover about a three month period, and organize the state-wide campaign from a public standpoint on behalf of the whole ticket, and then in [unintelligible] because he would be in California frequently. My role in that campaign was to be with him and to set up the events when either he or General Eisenhower would be in the state, and that was how I first met Jim [James C.] Hagerty [President Eisenhower's press secretary] in that capacity. My assistant at that time was Peter Kay, whom I borrowed from the Alhambra paper as sort of a young protege of mine and who is now on public television. You see him comment after the Watergate things, for example. So that was the basic role there and on through. I was with him [Nixon]--at the time of the Checkers speech I was running the press room at the Ambassador Hotel, and all the time when he came back for that; I was not at the studio with him. I joined the two Nixons and I think probably Rose Woods and Murray Chotiner. As soon as he [Nixon] got back we started fielding what the public reaction had been, and I could tell him what the press reaction had been. So I was with him in that part of the crisis there until we went to the airport and put him on an airplane to fly on to Montana.

JRN: How did you feel the initial reactions were, public and friends?  
Can you remember back that far?

HGK: Yes. Press reaction was good, and it appeared to me that the stories were going to be fair, from what I could see. The thing I remember most startling, we wondered what the public reaction would be, and also what would happen from the Eisenhower train. We were up in this suite in the Ambassador and answered the phone, and a man said he was calling from Miami, that he had been trying to get through to his Western Union office and couldn't, and so he thought he would just call to tell the Senator what a great job he was [doing] and how much he was in support of him, that he knew the American people would. This was really the first public thing that we had heard. And then there were other calls, and we got reports on the telegrams, and we started checking on the telegraph offices. You could tell by, almost immediately that there was an overwhelming outpouring of support for him. About that time then they tried to call in, and they were having a hard--the Eisenhower people were having a hard time calling in because the switchboard of the hotel was so jammed. And he [Nixon] was becoming impatient because he hadn't heard from them. When they finally, one of them did call in, he talked to Murray Chotiner. Murray can tell you this story better. Why, he [Nixon] decided he wouldn't talk to them for awhile. So you ought to ask Murray about that because he would be the first hand participant in that.

I then went back to my newspaper in San Diego. In 1954, I helped by traveling with him on a short stint a few times. I

kind of observed things and in a consulting role. I also would talk to him frequently when he would call me and ask me about what things I saw during the--not just the campaign--but during all that. You could figure that during all of the off years when there wasn't an election, I would hear from him frequently, as with Bob [Robert H.] Finch for example. We would have telephone conversations back and forth. When I was in Washington, I would sort of headquarter out of the Vice President's Office. As I progressed in my own career, I'd be back here more than before. But not as frequent--it just became more frequent as it went along.

1956--I had a number of conversations with him when he was trying to decide whether he would run for reelection. I am sure he had them with a great number of people, and these were mainly by phone. I felt he should run. Then, I covered the 1956 Convention as the head of a news team in San Francisco, but I also would spend time with him and with the people who were all concerned. We were sort of part of their group of friends now, with both the Eisenhower people and the Nixon people. Our problem then was the Stassen situation [Harold E. Stassen, former Governor of Minnesota, and Presidential contender in 1948]. I don't remember whether it was, no, I think it was later: Stassen once called me and asked me to help organize his slate in California, which was one of the most amazing calls I ever had [laughter]. He got me out at a little place in the desert. Obviously, I didn't. At any rate, I--it was an informal thing and not part of the formal organization.

After the convention, he [Nixon] asked me if I would take another leave of absence, and assist his--become part of the campaign staff as assistant press secretary; Jim Bassett being the press secretary. He then called my--when I agreed that I would do it if it was agreeable with my publisher, he called my publisher, and he agreed to give me a leave of absence to do that. And so, we then had a very small staff. I came back to Washington and organized the press activities because Jim Bassett was deeply involved in the campaign organization and some of the speech writing, because we had so few people. So, I basically did the press secretary activities, although he was my senior at it, and he had a.... We all had to help out in everybody's job, and that's been the case--Rose has helped in so many jobs; Bob Finch has, and the rest.

1958--he asked me again to help when he was campaigning for candidates across the country. I again did so in about that same role. One of the things you might [ask me] about some other time because I was just reminded of it this week, and I might forget sometime later: the climax, I think, in the 1956 campaign for him was a two-day span which we, near the end of the election, which we followed. The plan that I had come up with was to have a nationally televised intercollegiate press conference. We invited student editors from all across the country to Cornell [University] where we arranged for them to have sort of lectures on the Presidency all day by Clinton Rossiter and others and to cover an actual White House press conference or Vice Presidential press conference. Then they had an hour's television show, and

it was a very tough thing. These students had been given questions by their professors and everything. He did it very, very well. I think it was the highlight of that campaign. By the time we were there it was also the most chancey thing. The election was basically already won because [the] Nixon and Eisenhower team was far ahead of [Adlai E.] Stevenson and [(Carey) Estes] Kefauver, and Kefauver was a complete dud. So there are a lot of things in connection with that: the airplane almost crashed when we landed, we just missed the hanger; there were a lot of these anecdotal things that you might put in sometime. Another one, when we were at the Brown Hotel in Louisville during that campaign where the barber thought he was leading a bookie raid. What reminded me of all of these was that I was in New Haven, which followed the day after the Cornell thing, and students in New Haven were prepared to blast him with water bags, and he talked them out of it during his speech there on the New Haven green. They were angered because young Republicans had thrown beer cans at Adlai Stevenson the week before.

At any rate, to kind of get back to the structure. In 1958 we were doing it on behalf of Senatorial candidates. We had a great handicap because of the right-to-work law, which was on the ballot in a number of states. In California there was difficulty in the Goodwin Knight-William Knowland battle, which he would try to intervene in. A number of us had talked particularly to Bill Knowland to try and get him not to jump into that. We finally on that, I remember one climactic time on that. We got into, I believe it was in Ohio, perhaps Columbus, on a Saturday afternoon

and the Gallup poll came out with a final report which showed Republicans losing badly. He'd [Nixon] been getting a lot of reports which were more optimistic from state chairmen, and he had me stay in the hotel all afternoon with maybe Rose or someone, and we called state chairmen and really interrogated them. We found out that we were going to lose badly in a lot of states, and he had made the complete fight for it because Eisenhower couldn't at that time.

On the first of January 1959, I became the editor of the San Diego Union. I had had a succession of other titles in between when I last described it. About March he asked me to come back with my wife on very short notice, and we flew all night on an old TWA airplane, a Constellation. He asked me if I would take another leave of absence and come in full time onto his staff between now and the election in 1960. Bob Finch had already come back on the first of January, and I talked with Bob and Rose principally and with the [then] Vice President. I agreed that I would if I could get clearance from my publisher again, but I said I could only do it if we could delay it until June, because I thought I ought to spend a few months as editor before I took a leave of absence; although I had in effect had been the editor prior to getting the title. I had the executive editor and an associate editor, and I was running the paper. So we agreed to that, and he talked to my publisher again later, and I came aboard in June or July--and I believe that it was in June--of 1959.

The principal staff then was Bob Finch and myself and Rose

Woods and General Don [James D.] Hughes, who was then I believe a major or a lieutenant colonel, Bob [Robert E.] Cushman who was then a colonel. Charlie [Charles] McWhorter came aboard at sometime about then. Later, a fellow named Coke [Colgate] Prentice, who is around here yet. That was at the start.

My principal job at the start was to organize us to make a trip to the Soviet Union and to negotiate with the Soviets and to work out things with the State Department and to organize all of the press arrangements and get the press plane. I got considerable help and advice from Jim Hagerty in that. So, I did that, and I then took the press plane over, and he took the Presidential airplane over, leaving from Maryland. We took the first intercontinental Boeing 707--that was its first flight--and we set up the record which existed until very recently for New York to Moscow, although it was delayed some by the Soviet pilots who wanted us to circle a few extra times. And so, I was with him constantly during the time in the Soviet Union. The first moment when we walked down the streets of Moscow with people looking at Pat Nixon because she looked different: her shoes had pointed toes. [Unintelligible] being with all of the officials they had.

The "Kitchen Debate" in some ways came--the televised part--because of the fact that I ushered them into the television studio. I had had a lot of pressure from Ampex, which did video tape, and from RCA, whose studio it was, to have them see themselves on television, and then show [Nikita S.] Khrushchev what we could do with video tape. They presumably would talk

about the trip and the weather. So, once they were in, Khrushchev then did the thing which resulted in what was televised back here later. We went across the place, and he went into the actual kitchen where the newspaper televised "Kitchen Debate" took place, the real one and the tougher one, really. I was trying to arrange things, because, as I said, we had no staff. On that trip we had basically Cushman, Hughes, Woods, and Klein. All of a sudden I could tell something was going on in the kitchen, or in this passage between houses. The only way that I could get through the newsmen was to go in the kitchen window. There was somebody standing nearby me at that point, which turned out later to be Bill [William L.] Safire. I didn't know then.

At any rate, in that campaign I served as the press secretary; I was also Assistant to the Vice President and we'd use that for governmental purposes more. The key strategy would be worked on by Bob Finch and myself, later Leonard Hall. Jim Bassett helped Len Hall some. Of course, Rose was always a key part of this. So, we stayed there throughout the campaign, always with very little staff. I traveled with him the whole fifty states. Bob Finch and I pretty much ran all of the convention arrangements, as to his personal part, not as to his convention strategy--including trying to explain what happened the night he saw [Nelson A.] Rockefeller.

JRN: Who thought up the individual handshake photos? Life magazine later reprinted the whole spread of Iowa delegates--that wasn't bad.

HGK: I don't know. It probably was one of those things that comes out of a brainstorming session. I had the responsibility for arranging them all, but I didn't.... We had some advancemen who would help, like Bob [H.R.] Haldeman, who became the chief. I nicknamed him "the chief frogman," and he was the chief advance man who would have had to do a lot of the physical things as we went forth. I'm not sure what month Bob came with us. Bob Finch and I had to do a lot of the things in primaries where we wanted to make it look as if we weren't really campaigning, but we were going to be damn sure we won by big margins. Because we were playing the Vice Presidential role.

After the election I flew with him to Key Biscayne where he had the meeting with President [-elect John F.] Kennedy. There is sort of a funny series of stories about Saturday night, which was the lowest night in his life, which we could grin at some time, and how we suddenly got into a series of phone calls from Herbert Hoover, the past President, to including Joe [Joseph P.] Kennedy, Eisenhower, Jack Kennedy, and Nixon, all in one phone booth at various times during the dinner. I stayed with him until I delivered him to the Capitol on Inaugural Day, 1961. That was my last official duty: to bring him and a small pool of press into the Capitol. He went down on the platform to watch Jack Kennedy be sworn in, and I went into Ev [Everett M.] Dirksen's office and had a drink. We left Washington the next morning to go back to San Diego.

He came back to California, and we would see each other socially, and we would talk as friends again on the telephone or

seeing each other, occasional lunches. I remember once, I guess it would have been later meeting for dinner in San Clemente, I think it was the first time that he had been in the San Clemente Inn. I think that was later, before he went back.

When he was trying to determine whether or not to run for governor, there was considerable pressure on him by Len Hall and Cliff [John Clifford] Folger particularly to run. They felt he needed that as a forum. I took a fairly neutral stance for a long time in it; I don't remember what everybody else's position was. Finally, when he was going to make his decision—I think he had really made it, he got about seven or eight of us together one evening, afternoon and evening, at Trankas [?], which is above Malibu, a home owned by Mrs. Brock. We talked things back and forth, and he decided that he was going to run and we all finally decided unanimously but it was that way. We stopped in for dinner at a seafood place along the beach in Malibu. Then he went on home because he wanted, before he made a final decision, to talk it over with Pat Nixon and the two girls, and they had a family discussion for the next twenty-four hours before he decided.

I had not planned to take a part in that campaign because I thought that I had been in too many of them, and [I] did not take part in the primary. After the primary, it became apparent that there was a lot of difficulty, and that he was going to have a real uphill fight. So, when he asked me again to come back in September, I took a leave of absence, and I did come back and took over the press activities. Bob Haldeman was the campaign

manager, so there were about again, small, there were about three or four of us who were the principal strategists in the campaign. We would meet at his [Nixon's] home frequently, which was then in Truesdale Estates and in our campaign headquarters on Wilshire Boulevard. I traveled with him everywhere he went during that two month period. The so-called "last press conference" was my press conference which he interrupted.

JRN: Had you already begun it?

HGK: Yeah.

JRN: Then he walked out?

HGK: He walked in.

JRN: Unexpected by you?

HGK: Totally unexpected, because we had agreed earlier that morning that.... See, I announced his concession in 1960, and we worked up a wire, and I went down, and most people thought I handled it quite well—including Jack Kennedy, who talked to me about it. [In 1960 I had talked with the press about] what had happened, how he felt; about a conversation he had with Julie [Nixon Eisenhower] that morning explaining to her "you win and lose," and I just, I was sitting there listening to him. So, we agreed to do the same procedure in 1962. Bob Haldeman, Bob Finch, and I went in to see him about seven o'clock that morning. About midnight he'd felt, O.K. he ought to go ahead and just concede the election, and we talked him out of it. In fact, I put the telegram he had written in my pocket. He then was concerned about being thoughtful to the workers, and we talked about that. He wrote a wire for them, and we had that typed up. He said to

me, "Don't tell me, Herb, that you want me to see the press, because I just don't feel like it. I haven't had sleep for forty-eight hours; you ought to do it." So I said, "Well, that's what I came in to tell you: I thought I should." So, it was a point of agreement. Then we went in, we had a cup of coffee, and I went down to start holding this press conference. He went across the hall to start thanking the staff people who were there and very broken up.

About this time, two or three things happened, I think. One was, one fellow who was very emotional started crying on his shoulder. About this time, two other old friends who came in and said, "Damn it, Dick, you can't let the press push you out the back door," because we had some tall people at the end of the halls who were just going to go out the back and go home, and they didn't want to go through the photographers and all this. I was holding this briefing, and the next thing I saw was Bob Haldeman waving at me, so I thought this was the signal. I said, "The Vice President has just left to go to his home." About ten seconds later, I heard applause coming across the hotel lobby and emerging through the door is the former candidate for Governor, and so then he made the statement. Then I walked him back to the car, and he's quoted pretty accurately as saying, "God damn it, Herb, I knew you didn't want to, but I just had to say what I felt and get it off my chest." And, I could understand that.

So, at any rate, I went to Mexico [laughter] for a vacation. We, in the time between then, we were still very close friends, and we would talk frequently in, first in Los Angeles, then,

whenever I was in the east, I would go by New York and meet him at the law office or something of this nature. He called quite often on Sunday afternoons, which would be late New York time; he would call maybe at two o'clock on Sunday afternoon. Why, he would call Bob Finch and myself and ask us what we found going on. We'd just sort of exchange information we had from coast to coast. So, that was basically it during those intervening years.

Then, he got organized for the campaign. I didn't know whether I should be a part of it or not until Bob Haldeman asked me if I could meet him at the Los Angeles Airport for lunch one day in maybe May, after the primaries had been going. He said that the press thing wasn't working out in the direction that they needed, and that he really wanted me to find a way to come back. So, I thought about it, and he talked to me; then, the candidate talked to me. This was most difficult because I had done it so often, and I decided if I were going to do it, I'd have to basically figure that I ought to resign, rather than particularly keep somebody else sort of on the hook or running the paper while I'm off. So, I thought, well, I'll take a short leave of absence and see how I really like the structure, and, if I feel that I should, then I'll go ahead and resign, which is what I did. I joined the campaign on the first of June, 1968. Meanwhile Bob and I decided that Ron [Ronald L.] Ziegler who had worked for me in 1962, and who had also been close to me during the intervening years while he was working for Bob Haldeman, he'd come down, and I sort of trained him what newspaper operation was when he would be calling on an account at Sea World. So,

[Haldeman and I decided] that he ought to be there also as my assistant.

I arrived in Key Biscayne in the middle of a hurricane, which we could barely get in. The candidate had gone out to Walker's Cay and was stranded out there with some of the press corps, which was also out there, and they couldn't get back. I remember having a long session in the middle of the rain storm with John Mitchell and Bob Haldeman at the Key Biscayne Hotel. After that weekend we went to New York. Haldeman had found apartments for some [of] us in a hotel called the Wyndham Hotel.

On Tuesday it was the primary election day in California. I went to the, I agreed to do a commentary on it or answer an interview on it on NBC. Remember, there were a lot of new people in this campaign, and I had known John Mitchell only very little. I didn't know Len [Leonard] Garment at all, and they kind of wondered whether I could do television and this sort of thing. I remember meeting Len at the Yale or the Harvard Club--one of those--where I was going to go while he was going to ask me some questions, and I think he figured out I could answer questions. So, I did this show about midnight Eastern time, and I went back to the hotel. I was watching television, the primary results in California, when I saw the assassination of Bobby [Robert F.] Kennedy. I then was lying there wondering whether I should call the candidate right away or whether it was better to let him sleep in, because there wasn't anything that he could do about it. It was not clear at that point, if you recall, whether it was a fatal wound or just was--total confusion. So, I decided to

wait a little while. I waited maybe about an hour, and then I decided that I better talk to Bob Haldeman, who was in the apartment just below mine. So, I called him on the phone and woke him up. He watched, we were trying to decide what we should do, and finally we decided that I should call over to the Nixon apartment. It turned out that Julie and David [Eisenhower] had been sitting up watching the same thing I did, and they had already told him immediately, so he was aware of it. I was, it was a pretty traumatic beginning of a, from a Saturday to a Tuesday, when you are coming into a campaign.

My role in that campaign was as manager for communications. We decided to structure it differently so that I was not trying to run the whole public relations apparatus and everything that happened on the airplane and to use a variety of spokesmen on the airplane, to have Ron Ziegler.... He's the press supervisor; I'm the press assistant, and he could report to me. We had a lot of, by that time you had telephone on the plane, and you had what we called the flying carpet, which was xerox, so you could go back and forth. So, we did it on that basis. I traveled with him some, and sometimes I went out as a spokesman on my own, but mainly operating out of New York and all parts of the country. There was a senior strategy board which was headed by John Mitchell and included Dick [Richard G.] Kleindienst and Len Garment and two or three others I don't recall at the moment.

I was in California, of course, for the election and the wind-up of it, and then we flew back to New York for that election night. Then, the next morning--and all through that

night my job was to keep.... Bob Finch and I set up a system in 1960 where we, through our sources, felt we could get information even more accurate and faster than the television computers; they might project something, but we could find out when it was more likely to be true, because television projections, if you recall, change. So, we had that kind of a system set up there, and I spent that night making announcements as to what we felt and what the candidate felt, and what information I had on states which they didn't. I guess I saved a lot of parties, people told me later, because I was the only voice of cheer on the air: it looked for awhile like [Hubert H.] Humphrey was going to win. I would do that about every hour or so: go down with the networks or with the whole press. And then, the next morning, why, of course, he made his statement. We went up to their apartment, and the group had champagne. My wife had seen me like for a half hour that night, I think, when I went down to sleep in the room we had. She was being host for a lot of people that I was supposed to be, because Bob Finch and I were getting this information, and I would go down and do it, and Murray had some system too.

He [Nixon] then went to Key Biscayne, and I went back to our headquarters to get things organized in the Nixon transition basis. During the transition I operated my office there, and I set up one in the transition headquarters in the new EOB [Executive Office Building] over here.

We talked sometime during the first three [or] four weeks as to what the press structure should be, and sometimes I talked

with him, more often with Bob Haldeman, John Ehrlichman, and Bob Finch and myself sort of talking it over and with Ron Ziegler some. [We] decided that it would be good to follow the kind of thing which we had evolved as a novel thing in the campaign of having a two-part press structure. I felt that Ron would be a very good Press Secretary. The President also felt comfortable with Ron; it was kind of a mutual decision. It gave me a lot more freedom and a chance to create this job. I didn't have to move each moment with the candidate which I had done [for] a lot of years. You know, it was sort of a mutually agreed-upon thing, but we couldn't figure out exactly how to work it out except that Ron would be the Press Secretary. We finally came up with the way that we could do the things that he [Nixon] wanted, which was to have a close liaison with the [Republican] National Committee and use my political things that way, as well as working with the Departments. I felt there ought to be an outside thing with the press across the country, and so we came up, mutually agreed on how this office would function in a very basic way and [on] its goals. We met on a Saturday afternoon in the Pierre Hotel and sort of agreed this is how we would do it, and had a long talk there about it, and how it would work, and we were very enthused about it. We then adjourned because there was an important event coming up: it was the SC-UCLA [University of Southern California vs. University of California at Los Angeles] football game, and it was being televised.

JRN: Is that the picture on the wall? [picture of USC stadium]

HGK: Yeah. And so, he went back to....

JRN: We also hear from Tom [Thomas] Nickell every so often, I should add.

HGK: Oh, is that right? Yeah. Tom is a great friend of mine. So, we then.... Well, my wife hosted a little party with Bob Haldeman and Bob Finch and myself and Ron Ziegler and two or three others, with some UCLA, maybe Ehrlichman, and some SC people. And he [Nixon] went back to his apartment, and he would call us occasionally on a play or something. So, that was the day of my decision to come into the administration.

JRN: Who won the game?

HGK: SC.

JRN: Who else!

HGK: Victory day [laughter]. And so then, it was basically up to me to set up the office and how it was going to function. We announced at the Pierre a couple of days later, when I guess I made this "Truth will be our hallmark" statement which I thought of in the car as I was driving over [laughter]. What I tried to do in the.... I better find out when I've got to go.

[Pause in tape]

JRN: [Unintelligible] this has fascinated more than a lot of these ones about what somebody has done for the last four years. We're really hoping to get into this earlier period because these are certainly formation years for the President, and I think....

HGK: Well, I think when you look at it, one of the things you'll observe is that a lot of the decisions he's made as President stem in a deep way from experiences he's had previously. For example, as a member of the Eisenhower Cabinet watching General

Eisenhower being sure when someone presented a proposal that they didn't just look at what was the good that could come from it; what would happen if the worst came? They even told the story about the time that the decision was made to land troops in Lebanon.

[Telephone interruption]

HGK: I think that's why a lot of these things can be important.

Eisenhower, you know, heard from the NSC [National Security Council] things that would help, and then he said, "What if everything goes wrong?" I mentioned the international aspects and the economic thing he observed in the 1960 campaign, as if he and Arthur Burns tried to get money loosened up [an easy money policy by the Federal Reserve] earlier than it was. In October, I think, 400,000 people became unemployed, and that was probably the--that's one way of looking at the difference in that election. He observed from Lyndon Johnson that he didn't delegate enough, and so, he delegated considerably. And you might argue that he delegated too much in some occasions, but that was.... Based, these are my beliefs based on some of the--a man learns from experiences, and I think he learned considerably as he has gone along. I feel, based on that theory, although I sweated and cried and everything else in 1962 and 1960, that probably the best thing that happened to the country was that he lost both times, because I think, when you look at the crises that faced this country in 1968, that he was better able to do them because of his experiences over all this time. They were much more critical than they were in 1960, and therefore, I

believe that he was the man for that particular time. In the same way, had he won in 1962, he would almost inevitably been forced into the primary or the jockeying for the nomination in 1964. If he had lost that, I don't think he could've come back; if he had won the nomination, I don't think he could've won, and therefore, he would not have been a candidate in 1968. Now those are theories I have, but I think that they....

JRN: And you might still be editing the paper in San Diego and enjoying life [laughter].

HGK: Yeah. Skin diving and playing a little golf and [laughter] living longer. Well, let me just briefly give you an outline of the job without any details, just for kind of an understanding. The basic thing we saw was, first, the need to be very open about it. Previously when anybody tried to coordinate the government departments (like Jim Hagerty or Pierre Salinger or someone of this nature), they would find that they would have a crisis, and they would call in all of the Departmental PIO's [Public Information Officers]. The word would go out that there was a secret meeting to put pressure on the Departments to do something on behalf of the President for a political purpose. So, I decided at the very start to say, "I'm going to meet with these people, and I'm going to be open about it, and we're going to talk about implementing the Freedom of Information Law, about how you do a better job of Departmental information." So, there was no question about what my intent was or what my direction was. I then had a very difficult time in trying to pierce the bureaucracy during the transition stage, as to hiring people into

the key places as PIO's, and I think [I] did only a fair job. Some we picked were not as strong as they should be, but we also felt that we ought to have some members of our team within those Departments in those key roles advising the Cabinet members and all. The President also wanted me to work very closely with the Cabinet and so informed them at their first meeting.

Subsequently, he wanted me to do a considerable amount of television because he'd observed.... In fact, the first moment after the election announcement he pulled me aside, and he said, "One of the things that I want you to concentrate on is doing more television like you did last night and other times." I'd done "Meet the Press" and things like that. So, he wanted me to be an overall spokesman, particularly with the emphasis on national television, and to work with television overall. I felt that there was a great need to relay what happened in government to editors and broadcasters across the country, and so [I] set out to find out the ways to do that best. Part of it was through mailings. We devised a mailing system; we had to build a mailing list because there was one that had about as many dead people as live people in most of the Departments. So, basically he gave me the goal of coordinating information, of improving how it was done, and of being sure that the Cabinet officers were having a full role of being a part of policy on the White House staff, [of] coordinating with Ron Ziegler so that we worked together closely, and [of] having the responsibility for the press other than that of the White House press corps. And the first problem then was to see how do you do this.

[Telephone interruption]

HGK: These have been the goals of the office throughout. I think I could operate it because of the fact that I came from the press, and the press felt a great deal of confidence and trust in me as someone they've known a lot of years. I also knew most of the political people in the country, and so a lot of the suspicion which had come when anybody had tried to do this before became at least, "Let's see what Herb can do". If you look at some of these cartoons, you can see there were some questions about it. But it gave me a fair chance to prove it could be done, and I think that we've learned how to do it better as we've gone along and improved it considerably. The difficulty right now is whether or not you can do it with an individual with this much responsibility; I think probably not, and the structure will change some. But, the thing that'll go forth will be the systems we have and the goals we have. It'll be a matter of more people doing it, not all under one person. And so that really is sort of the structure we worked with, and we can get into more detail some other time. I think it has worked well because of the fact of--and I've had a lot of comment over the years from editors. We got 92% endorsement in this last campaign. The broadcasters have felt like they have been brought in for the first time to meet with the President, and while there's been a lot of battle back and forth with the White House press corps in very difficult times with Cambodia and everything, we've had wide general support from press around the country. There was a Congressional sort of tribute to me the other day, and among those who praised

what had been done was John Moss, of all people [laughter].

JRN: I was at the Press Club recently when you gave your talk, and I think certainly a very warm response from your...

HGK: Yes. It sure was.

JRN: ...fellow journalists.

HGK: There have been a lot of editorials around the country which I'm totally surprised by. I think it's worked well. The White House correspondents are giving a party for me on next Friday night, and I think those are sort of signs that they feel it is a worthwhile system.

JRN: Will you be operating from Washington with Metromedia, or...?

HGK: No, I'll be out of Los Angeles. I'll be here and in New York some of the time, perhaps around the country some. But my office is in Los Angeles, in fact, it opened Monday.

JRN: Well, maybe on your trips here, we could get another hour of your time.

HGK: Sure. I'd be glad to do it. You can get me through there, and I am sure Loie will know, and the board will always know how to reach me. They always do. Well, I think I'd better get [unintelligible].

[End of Interview]

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conducted by John R. Nesbitt and Terry W. Good  
in Room 160 of the Old Executive Building  
on July 13, 1973

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