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INTERVIEWEE: ROBERT HARTMANN with comments by Roberta Hartmann

INTERVIEWER: Martha Kumar

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MK: It's on the record except where you'd like to go on background or off the record. I'll send you the transcript to go over to make any corrections and additions you might want to make.

RH: What's the end result of this going to be?

MK: There are going to be several things. First, in the spring, we will release what we call *The Standards of a Successful Start* which would be maybe eight elements that are found in successful transitions, things, for example, like planning, advance planning and what kind of planning that might be. And we'll take quotes from various interviews.

RH: How far back are you going?

MK: To the [Richard] Nixon White House. So it's six administrations and it's seven offices that we're looking at, plus the White House staff generally. The offices are Chief of Staff, Staff Secretary, Press [Office], Communications, Personnel, Counsel and Management and Administration. So they represent a variety but all of them in common have their importance to a successful start Then we will have the materials related to the offices available for incoming people once it's known who they are. Once they're appointed then we'll provide information to the people coming in. There may be some information that we provide to transition teams, if the transition teams start early. If there's early planning then we'll try to give information at that point.

Then after the new administration comes in, the interviews will be released publicly.

[Pause]

RH: It's an interesting day up there.

MK: You had a lot of the participants. So that's the use we're going to make of it. Parts of it before the election and, then after the Inauguration, it will be all of it. And the material will go into the presidential library system. Now the libraries together don't have oral history programs that try to develop comparable information. Ours we're hoping will be useful for scholars and for others going back in administrations.

In the [Gerald] Ford Administration, you had a very different start than any other. We're looking at both transition and governing. Tell us how you came in.

RH: We had no time for transition. One day Ford was Vice President and the next day he was President. If anybody didn't like it, tough. What we had was a natural conflict between the Ford's vice presidential staff and Nixon's leftover staff because, when Nixon got swept away in the whirlwind, his staff was just sitting there wondering what to do. Of course, they thought, and probably with good reason, that they knew more about running the White House than we did. Except that they weren't running it anymore. They had difficulty getting

that through their heads. Their anticipation was that a vice president who runs around, slavishly doing the will of his master all of a sudden becomes the master. He doesn't give a hoot what anybody else wants except, "What do I want?" This happens every time a vice president succeeds, whether he succeeds by act of god, Act of Congress or simply by running for election and winning.

Nixon was spared this thanks to Jack Kennedy. He didn't have to take over from [Dwight] Eisenhower by the election route because he didn't win in 1960. And in retrospect he was much better off when he finally did win in his own right rather than to take over as the anointed vice president. That is what [Al] Gore is trying desperately to escape.

MK: How did the Ford Administration make that transition as far as personnel were concerned? When you come in, having no transition time, how did you get rid of the old group and bring in your own?

RH: We had a rather brutal war in which our side said the Nixon folks must go and their side said we're the only ones that know which way is up, you'd better listen to us. Now, in retrospect, I'm entitled to be broad-minded. Normally I am only as forgiving as the Bible requires.

MK: Shame on you.

[Laughter]

RH: So there was some merit on both sides of that argument.

MK: There are strengths to both sides. How do resolve that, keep them for a while, or you were selective? How did you decide?

RH: By bleeding. The side which bled the most lost. As time passed and people were tested in the new arrangement, it had the effect of survival of the fittest. It was messy sometimes but, in the end, we ended up keeping the good people and letting the other ones go or they took off on their own.

MK: Was that true throughout the Executive Branch?

RH: The great bulk of federal employees are locked in and don't change very much. It's just the upper crust to a large degree, the managers, the ones calling the shots. Those who simply obey, I guess, go on and on like the babbling brook, permanent career government workers. Fortunately, they keep the government going regardless of the confusion at the top. They just go ahead and do what they were doing all the time. That's a great blessing in many ways because otherwise there would be no continuity at all.

MK: Well, you still have several thousand people that you can appoint. Was there any thinking it through, in the days before taking power, knowing that it was going to happen, figuring out how to get hold of the government and mark it with a Ford stamp instead of a Nixon one?

RH: Well, going back to the Eisenhower Administration, the number of appointive positions has gotten smaller and smaller and smaller and the number of career people has gotten larger and larger. In the case of Ford and Nixon, it was a rather unusual situation because the one president was departing in disgrace and his appointees and followers carried some of this guilt or blame. Perhaps it wasn't just, but it was true. So being an old Nixon hand was not a badge of honor. Loyalty was not its own reward. The way it worked out, we tried all kinds

of experiments in order to put Ford's stamp on this administration which had only two and some years to go before another election. We managed to put our people in at the very pinnacle of the White House, but we didn't manage to transform the whole character of the administration, simply because there wasn't time.

Nixon had been a Washington creature for quite some time. Ford had been a man of the Hill and that, as you know, is a very different cat. The partisanship on the Hill is deep and sometimes savage but it's well muted with gentlemanly phrases and sometimes genuine affection. It's a big club in one sense. They will rally against an outsider whether of their party or another one as long as they don't belong to the club.

MK: What about in the White House? What's the difference between the spirit in a White House and on the Hill, sort of the nature of White House work life, the environment?

RH: People in the White House are transient whereas the Hill people go on forever until they retire or die or become lobbyists.

MK: In taking over the government, what did you establish as the priorities and how were they established?

RH: I don't think that was ever addressed in that precise a fashion. It was, what do we have time to do today and what are we going to do tomorrow if we have time even to think about that. We had a recession coming at us at the speed of a runaway train, and we had the extremely complicated mess of how do you clean up after an untidy presidency. You don't just ride down the avenue and shake hands and say thank you for what you've done to heal our land, good bye. Bring up the plane, please.

So I don't think that the Ford/Nixon situation makes a wonderful case here for establishing principles. I hope it's unique. I hope we don't have to go through another of those again.

I don't know if you were up in the Capitol at that big "do" they had to honor Ford a couple months ago—

MK: No. I heard about it.

RH: —in the Rotunda. It was interesting because this was the Congress loving one of its own before he dies. They're going to lay him in state out there but that won't be much fun. So they arranged to have one [a reception] and the best speeches were all made by Democrats to see if they could pluck off a few Ford admirers here and there. It was really a very entertaining and even sometimes moving thing. As one who fashioned most of the words that Ford used during his presidency and before, the best speech I've ever heard him give he absolutely stood up there and ad-libbed it. Why? Because he was under the dome of the Capitol and he had no inhibitions about could he make a speech and he wasn't trying to impress anybody. They were all impressed already. They were smothering him with love. He stood up there and reminisced and he went on and on. Then suddenly he remembered he had a script somewhere and he turned quickly to his bunch of papers and gave an ending which wasn't him at all. But it looked good in the *Congressional Record.*

MK: Was there a feeling of camaraderie among the Ford people when you took over the White House?

RH: No. They felt they were still in charge. The Nixon people thought they were still in charge and we thought they should get out and go away.

MK: Among the Ford people, the ones from the Hill or the Vice President's staff, what did you all do in preparation in the days before?

RH: Well, very little because we were too busy. In a sense we were having to learn our jobs all over again because the muscles that you use in being president are different from the muscles you use in getting your way in the Congress. We used to debate a lot about—there are two essentially different forms of organization which apply to government as well as the church or a university or a corporation or whatever. One is the spokes-of-the-wheel theory. King Arthur and his roundtable, the Pope being the chief among his bishops sitting collegially. And then there is the pyramidal, diagrammed way that dictators, armies, and corporations operate.

MK: So those are the two models you worked with?

RH: We used to talk about them and, unfortunately, what we wound up with was trying to do it both ways at the same time. Nixon had been very much a do-it-yourself guy sitting on top of the pyramid telling [H.R.] Haldeman[and] [John] Ehrlichman to do this, do this, do this and then not bothering with the nitty-gritty and just expecting it to be done. Ford was more inclined to the congressional preference which is to sit and talk about it and kick it around and persuade one another, give a little and take a little, add a little, subtract a little and sweeten it up a little. Finally you all get drunk and say what a great day we've had and dissolve in non-partisan joy.

So there was quite a different tone. Now there's also the fact that in relatively modern times, maybe starting with Eisenhower and Nixon, the role of the Vice President has changed quite considerably and indeed tilted toward the Executive Branch of the government. They started having an office downtown and representing the President in places out of the country—if for no other reason than to get rid of them. All these things were virtually unheard of in the old days. The Vice President ran the Senate and that was all, and he wasn't allowed to speak, allowed to vote once in a blue moon and he had really no power except the power of a chairman to keep order in the place. That's what the Vice President used to do. Artemis Ward and all the humorists had the wonderful Mr. Dooley, who said the sole duty of the Vice President is to pray for the health of the President.

But nowadays the Vice President has become more a part of the Executive Branch than the Legislative Branch. He really never becomes a senator. Senators do not acknowledge peers easily, except other senators. Ex-senators have a little lower status, but members of the House have none at all. A senator has his place in the scheme of things and he knows exactly what it is. He has his constituents to take care of, on the one hand, and he has his colleagues to take care of, on the other. The Vice President has none of these duties for which he's really needed. Anybody can preside over the Senate.

MK: Did Ford give directions in considering the different types of staff, the three different models and the benefits of each one? You were saying he used them in different ways. What was the discussion beforehand and then how were they used?

RH: Well, he explained to the staff, both his old staffs and his new staff, his philosophy of getting things done. And he said that he tended toward the spokes-of-the-wheel, collegium idea and tended to favor it over the czar-on-top, passing orders down from on high. But in practice,

he tried to have a little of both. It didn't work very well because some people were headstrong and took the ball and ran with it as hard as they could; others were happy to just rock along and try to keep the waters calm. The people that surrounded Ford tended to resemble them in their behavior and their patterns. Leaders surround themselves with people who are models of themselves. That's the best kind of subordinate.

MK: Now, in Reagan's case, he surrounded himself with people that were different from himself. For example, when he brought in Jim Baker, he brought in a person who was a Washington person; somebody who knew Washington well and had a lot of networks.

RH: Well, that was a smart thing to do.

MK: So, in a sense, it complements his own strengths.

RH: Reagan followed the Washington model of the presidency, in which he reigned, he presided. Most things got done and, if they really got too complicated for anybody else to settle, he would listen to it and pass judgment; everybody would say "Yes sir, General" and go on from there.

MK: Did Ford feel that the strong model of the chief of staff as a czar figure, it would model the Haldeman experiences—

RH: That was part of it.

MK: —and he wanted to symbolically get away from that? So the staff became a symbol as well as a resource.

RH: Members on the Hill, in general, really don't need anybody. It's nice to have them but they could survive in most cases if they were the only one there.

MK: And they did.

RH: It meant a lot of extra work but then things wouldn't get so messed up either. They don't need to go to school to learn how to be a representative of the people because you learn that only one way and that's by getting votes or not getting votes. Every part of the country differs in how you go about that. So each one is an expert in his own thing just by virtue of being there.

Ford really applied the good old legislative principle of let's compromise a little. That isn't a very good way for presidents to operate. He would discover that from time to time and he would blow his stack and pound on the table and say, "This is the way it's going to be!"

MK: Do you think, by the nature of congressional staffs, they do tend to be ones where they do mirror the representative, probably the representative more than the senator because their staffs are so much larger, but they are choosing people that are like themselves because they're going to have to be dealing with the people a great portion of the time which a representative is very good at doing?

RH: Well, you don't pick someone who is too much like yourself, because then they will run for the job and take it away from you, as sometimes happens.

MK: Well, they do run, but not usually against the person they work for. But you're right. That's an interesting thought.

One of the things we're interested in is in the whole notion of a White House staff: what is it that it brings to a president? You say for a member of Congress, a House member for a long time, they can get by pretty much on their own. A president can't get by on his own.

RH: No.

MK: What is it the staff is going to do? What should a president be thinking about when he's putting his staff together? What should he be expecting from it?

RH: He should expect people to be working for him or, to put it more elegantly, for the country, rather than to promote themselves. Now this is kind of hard to find, and particularly among the kind of people who are attracted to political life because people attracted to political life are intensely competitive. They're not cooperators; they're not coordinators. They're conspirators. The congressman's first thought must be that the top guy on his staff isn't going to run against him some day. So he doesn't pick the kind of person who is likely to do that. Nobody who is going to run against the President of the United States. Even vice presidents have a hard time doing that, maybe an exceptionally hard time. I would say that picking an ideal staff is just a matter of trial and error until you hit upon a combination that works for you. I'd find it impossible to write any general rules about it. However, the pyramid principle of leadership does work better in government positions because only one person has the real power anyway. The Speaker is the Speaker but everyone he is the speaker for is just as powerful as he is.

MK: In fact, they vote and he doesn't.

RH: Well, he can but he usually doesn't.

MK: He can, yes, but he doesn't.

RH: I lost where I was starting now.

MK: On the staff, why a pyramid structure is appropriate for a White House because there's only one vote, there's only one principal.

RH: That's right. And the principle of the pope is the first among equal bishops; the principle of the knights of the round table who all sat the same distance from the king. Those two principles don't work. The principle of the circle with the one real ruler in the middle doesn't work as well as the principle of the pyramid where here's the czar and god's in his heaven and all is right with the world. I think, however, that's a difficult game to play. It takes a certain amount of diabolical skill, the kind that Franklin Roosevelt enjoyed. He really just loved playing with this art of managing people, and he did it superbly. Ike did it too but Ike did it according to his life's formula which is the code of military justice. It's much more structured and the way you get ahead is much more fixed. But it works because everybody knows where his place is. Politics is more unsightly. Sometimes people don't know where their place is and they have to be put in it. Most politicians, by nature, are averse to this. They don't like it. It makes them uncomfortable.

MK: How do you move from a system where he thought he was going to do the spokes of the wheel and then getting to a system where you have some central control, where you have a strong chief of staff? How do you move from one to the other?

RH: Well, that's it. You have a chief of staff who will be your son of a bitch. I really can't answer your question. In political life you have to make decisions and you don't have a whole lot of time to make them and you just pray to god they're successful and, secondarily, if it's possible, also right. But, as Lincoln said, it makes no difference if a whole legion of angels swear you were right. It makes no difference if you're wrong, it won't do you any good.

MK: Were there particular incidents that occurred where Ford thought that having some control would work and then that led in to task forces on a particular thing that led in to the development of the chief of staff? Or he just decided that—were there mistakes made where things weren't properly staffed?

RH: Yes. There were mistakes but I can't think of any catastrophes.

MK: I'm just trying to figure out how did he learn here that you had to go from one system to another. What was the trial and error part of it?

RH: I don't quite get the question. Are you asking me how I learned it?

MK: No, how Ford learned it. In watching Ford, how did he seem to learn? He started out thinking that the spokes of the wheel was going to probably be the best model and then moved to a strong chief of staff. How did he make the transition? Was it events? Were there specific events that occurred where the staff system came up short?

RH: I think he, in part, got fed up with not being able to discipline this unruly mixture of Nixon's old people and Ford's old people from the Hill and Ford's old people from elsewhere. And frankly he found that he—I won't say that he couldn't handle it but he had much more important things to do. So he finally brought [Don] Rumsfeld in and Rumsfeld, as one might expect of a good politician, brought [Dick] Cheney in and let him be the SOB. Rumsfeld wasn't going to make any enemies if he could help it. So Cheney made all the enemies and Rumsfeld got all the applause.

MK: Did it fall to Cheney to get rid of the Nixon people?

RH: We never really got rid of the Nixon people. If you look at the Ford Cabinet in the last days of his presidency you'll find that virtually without exception they are all Nixon people.

MK: What about in the White House itself? You got rid of Nixon people there, starting with Alexander Haig.

RH: Yes. But not many. He got rid of Haig. He sent him off to NATO [North American Treaty Organization] which was actually a good career move for Haig. I'm sure that he must have gotten a little tired of not only doing everything Nixon said but doing everything Kissinger said and everything everybody else wanted and was happy to get back where you know who the general is and you just salute him. Whether you like him or not, he gets the same kind of salute.

I really think that if Ford had another four years in which he not only had time but also had the cachet of being a real president—a vice president who succeeds is never really president.

Some do it better than others. I suppose succeeding a martyr is a little different. Take the two Johnsons. The first President Johnson didn't amount to much. He probably was an excellent man but he never amounted to much. The second Vice President Johnson turned out to be an excellent President. In many ways he probably was better equipped to be a successful president than Kennedy was. Kennedy had his father's money and a great deal of charm but his experience in government was modest, serving in the Senate, four years in the House. It was just the average Washington political career. He was never famous for anything he did in the Congress or the legislation that he got through. He was famous for his PT boat.

MK: Was there a conscious effort to go back and look at the transition between Kennedy and Johnson? Here Johnson comes in all of a sudden. You all come in less all of a sudden. Was there any looking back to that experience as you prepared?

RH: Not really. We'd all lived through it. That's the best study hall.

MK: Was there any sense that the President was going to need to build up political capital, that most presidents come in with it from an election but that Ford did not have it? Was there a sense that he'd have to build it up before he could expend what he had just by virtue of taking over in a bad situation?

RH: He was thinking all the time that he was going to have to run and be elected in his own right in order to get done a lot of things he wanted to get done.

MK: Where did you feel, if he had been elected, he might have been successful whereas without election it was difficult for him to make his will felt? Were there any incidents that you can think of or pieces of legislation?

RH: No. As a matter of fact, we were so busy dealing with various crises that I can't think of any planned program like Lyndon's [Johnson] Great Society. LBJ [President Lyndon Johnson] never confided in me but I covered him for a long time while I was a newspaperman. I took people up to meet the Vice President and I witnessed several occasions where people were getting "the treatment." Believe me, it was a work of art. You can't help but admire somebody like that. But I don't think there was any conscious planning by Ford. Ford, undoubtedly, if he'd been elected, would have done a lot of things that were his own ideas and not just carry on somebody else's. He would have moved the Republican Party further in the direction of Senator [Arthur] Vandenberg's international view instead of the old Bob Taft isolationist view. But it moved that way anyway. The world moved that way.

MK: It did, yes. That's true. In your case, in your dealings with Ford as president, did he talk to you about what he wanted from you as he was president and you're working for him?

RH: We talked all the time, early in the morning and late at night. Of course, when he was president I didn't have the exclusive access to him that I had had before. While he was having his shower, I would be mixing the martinis and I would be watering his if he had to make a speech. You never get that kind of a relationship with a president no matter how close it's been in the past. Well, there was Ted Sorenson and he was very close to Kennedy but he wasn't as close as Bobby [Kennedy].

MK: Before Ford came in, did he talk to you about what he would need from you once he became president?

RH: No. His mind didn't work that way: this is what we've got to do tomorrow. He was more like the captain of the football team giving a pep talk in the locker room at half time, than he was like a philosopher king. I had just been with him for so long and I had hung around on the House floor and in the cloakroom and late at night and early in the morning. I expect he told me things that he didn't tell anybody else but Betty [Ford] about what he thought of people or what he was planning to do. But this relationship changes. Every president has a few close cronies or aides, but they're like the queen's favorites or a Cardinal Richelieu.

MK: How does that fit in to a strong staff system? What does a chief of staff think of that?

RH: Well, the power that a chief of staff has is exactly in proportion to the nature of the president and how much he is willing to turn loose. He can have very little and be purely mechanical in carrying out things, or he can really come to a lot of decisions himself and prevail upon the president that this is the right thing to do. I must say I haven't been close to enough variety in this relationship to be very smart about making general principles out of it because I think a chief of staff has different degrees of power and influence depending on the chemistry between the people, the circumstances of the problems they're facing.

MK: See how they work. If you have a strong chief of staff, then you have other people that have access to the president that's not dependent upon that staff system. Or did you have to go through that staffing system?

Say you were writing a speech for the President, would you go through either Rumsfeld or Cheney? Would they talk to you about what the President had said or is that something you just do directly with the President, discuss with him the speech?

RH: I would talk with him every day. He'd say, "I have to make a speech," and, "I think maybe we have to go with some idea along this line," very vague and general. I'd come back with something on paper. Then eventually we'd get it down to the point where we'd circulate it to other people, either in a meeting or by paper shuffle or both, depending on how important it was. A State of the Union message, everybody got their licks in.

MK: When would that start, the preparations for the State of the Union message?

RH: Well, about November, maybe sooner. November, December, January is about right. But this is one in which you're just the spokesman for a lot of different people. The President is the salesman for all the ideas that all of his cabinet people and departments, all the ideologues and influence peddlers want to get in there. Everybody wants to get in everything but the garbage and kitchen sink. The job of writing a State of the Union speech is largely one of deleting from the great mound (garbage is as good a word as any) that's piled in front of you. It's deliberately a collective effort. He is not supposed to be speaking his own thoughts. In the State of the Union, he's speaking on behalf of the government. And he may get a few of his own things in, but it's deliberately a collective effort. It's an awful pain in the neck. Fortunately, it only happens once a year.

MK: Was it seen as sort of the primary point in the year where you laid out what you were going to do for a twelve-month period?

RH: Well, the government takes a surge when Congress reconvenes and the season starts. It has another little spurt at the end, quite different in character. But, yes, I would say the State of the Union is an important road map for what the president wants to emphasize which comes

around annually. Our government is a strange mixture of such diffusion of power that nobody has very much, and nobody has as much as they would like to have.

MK: Or they think they have coming in....

RH: We have a Republican king who has acquired much more power than the Founding Fathers ever would have been willing to give him—unless he was George Washington. By making that exception they made way for more exceptions which most presidents have been eager to take advantage of. By and large, it's worked pretty well.

MK: When you were writing, what kind of backup did you have for people helping you do things?

RH: We had a ton of people. I was literally responsible for everything that was put on paper in the President's name. I had to sign off on these things so there would be no glaring inconsistencies in them—nothing would be taking him by surprise when he read it in the paper in the morning.

I forget where we started this now.

MK: We were talking about what kind of backup you had on speeches, the number of people you had working for you and what kinds of things they did?

RH: When he was the Vice President, he really only had two. Of course, we sometimes got voluntary offerings. But since we were responsible for correspondence and state documents, the public papers of the President, all those had to be edited and scrutinized.

MK: The weekly compilation of presidential documents.

RH: There's no end to the detail that's involved in the words department. Everybody wants to get in on the act but not everybody wants to do a lot of work. That's the essence of government. If everybody wanted to do as much work as they want to get in on the act, we'd have a constant revolution. I think it all works pretty well. It's obviously not a model of efficiency.

MK: How many speeches would he give in a week? How many did you have to prepare? And what other kinds of remarks? Were there any general guidelines?

RH: No, except that he considered it to be a cardinal sin ever to say the same thing twice. It had to be different every time.

MK: What about during the campaign? Did you have one speech?

RH: —it did tend to run together there. But you're changing audiences if you're not changing words. He didn't want to give the same speech twice, even a perfectly good speech, even when nobody had heard it in that part of the country.

MK: Except reporters. If one were to give the same speech, I think reporters would report that.

RH: They're part of the reason why he wanted something new and different every time.

MK: Although they recognize that there is a campaign speech that's given.

RH: They do in campaign season except that now the campaign never really ends.

MK: What is different now? You say the campaign never ends. How is that different from when you were there? What are the different aspects of it today?

RH: Well, there are two. One, you have this—what shall I call it—C-SPAN mentality where you have twenty-four hours a day, they've got to have something going, whether there's anything going on or not. At the time of the Lincoln-Douglas debates they could say the same thing in each debate and the audience was different. Only people close up to the speakers' platform could hear what they were saying anyway. So they depended on the next day's papers to find out what the argument was all about. The papers all differed in how they reported because of what they wanted to emphasize for themselves. So now you get instant gratification, instant communication of instant baloney. If you try to please them with something a little different, or something a little new every time he opens his mouth, it puts an awful load on the mimeograph machines, let alone the brains of his aides.

MK: How many people worked on speeches?

RH: In the Ford White House, I guess, we had about fifty people in the words department. They were not all speechwriting. The people who actually contributed to speeches would be eight, ten, sometimes less, sometimes more.

MK: What did the other people do?

RH: Well, we had a big research department. We had to have instant information and, if you can't find it in the World Almanac, somebody's got to go dig it up. We had a big correspondence section which—there's only so many form letters and a lot of mail that has to be thoughtfully answered. Those were our biggest departments.

MK: Had the contours of that office been established in the Nixon White House and you pretty much kept the same kind of structure with research as a part of it?

RH: Yes, except that President Nixon—Nixon used to have a pad of legal foolscap. He would doodle on this and write down ideas. Nobody could read it but he would go over this with somebody and they would come back with the structure of a speech. But prevailing thought and some of the phraseology would be Nixon's own and this would be expanded into a forty-minute radio or television speech. But Ford was more content to let somebody else structure the thing to get certain ideas stressed. He had no pride of authorship as far as phrases are concerned.

MK: Do words once they're uttered by the President become the President's words?

RH: Yes.

MK: Sort of in the thinking in speechwriting, in recent years speechwriters have—not so much in this administration certainly in the Reagan Administration, Peggy Noonan had a lot of visibility for her work.

RH: My ultimatum to the other speechwriters always was that the function of a ghost is to be invisible. I still think that's a good rule. Ford was an extremely good debater on the floor of the House. He was in his own element surrounded, as far as he was concerned, by a wall of friends. He could handle himself in debate. He didn't stammer or stutter although I have a

theory that he did have a speech impediment when he was young and that he worked himself out of it.

MK: Did he ever say that?

RH: No.

MK: What leads you to that conclusion?

RH: I don't think it was so much a speech impediment. I think he was tone deaf. He can't sing. He mouths the Star-Spangled Banner but he has no idea what the tune of it is and he doesn't sing at all. I expect he does the Michigan fight song or something like that. But he has no idea of a tune.

MK: But he can dance.

RH: He has a great sense of rhythm. A football player has to have a sense of rhythm, especially if he's in the backfield. He was the center and he was also the captain of the team. He has a good sense of rhythm but he has no sense of tune. I don't have a very good one so I can recognize it in other people.

[Interruption]

MK: At what point did you talk to him about the speech about the pardon, when he was going to speak to the public about the pardon? When were you brought in on that and when did you have a sense that it was coming as an issue?

RH: Well, I was in on it all the way except when Haig insisted on speaking to the Vice President alone. Then he would call me in right after Haig left and tell me everything.

MK: Have you read *Shadow*?

RH: Yes.

MK: And that's pretty much the account of how it happened. Is that pretty accurate?

RH: Yes. I think it's—after their initial stuff in the *Post*, they got out a book, *All the President's Men*, was the name of it.

MK: Yes. And then *The Final Days* was the second one.

RH: Yes. That was about the whole Nixon Administration.

MK: The end of it, yes.

RH: Ford was President already and told everybody in the White House he wanted us to cooperate. [Bob] Woodward was always the front man for that team. [Carl] Bernstein was not an extrovert the way Woodward is. I didn't know him very well but I got to know Woodward pretty well. Woodward has always been quite accurate and fair to me personally. He doesn't violate confidences. He'll get the facts in the story somehow but he won't hang them on you or make it obvious. He's got enough sources that he can spread the blame

around. As I said, the Ford people were instructed to be very cooperative and tell Woodward and Bernstein the truth, let the devil take the consequences.

MK: When did the President say that? Was he president at the time or was he vice president?

RH: I think it was when Ford was President and they (Woodward and Bernstein) were writing the book. It was after all the stuff in the *Washington Post*. Everybody they asked to talk to was supposed to see them and be honest with them. They were going to find it all anyway.

MK: That was the President's thinking?

RH: No, that's what I was thinking.

MK: Did he say why he wanted White House people to talk to them?

RH: Well, if you're sitting in the White House and a matter of news is being pursued by reporters, somebody has to talk to them openly or they'll just talk secretly. You might as well do it openly. President Ford wanted to establish the fact that he was not using devious devices. His was an open White House, more or less, if I may use that expression.

MK: What was a day like at the White House then? What time did you go in? What would you have read by the time you got in?

RH: I was going to say it was about twenty-three hours long. I stayed up all night writing the "long national nightmare" [speech] and when I finished I got in a White House car and went down there.

MK: Where did you write it? Upstairs in your study?

RH: Yes. The only escape you could get, aside from things like Easter recess, was to be sick. There were no weekends really. Your parties were work; they weren't fun. If you were going to a White House party, you'd be in charge of this table, or your wife would be, or both of you would be You had to keep everybody seated at that table happy and see that they spoke to each other and so forth. Social fun was very limited because it was all work.

When he was Vice President, we had some good parties, but when he was president it was all work.

MK: Did you work on Saturday?

RH: Yes. Saturday, Sunday, the Fourth of July.

MK: What time would you get in to the White House? Did you have a car that picked you up?

RH: The car usually picked me up and got me in there about seven o'clock I think, on ordinary occasions, so that I would be there when he came in.

MK: What time did he come in?

RH: Seven-thirty, sometimes earlier, sometimes later. But you had to get up pretty early to get there ahead of him. But it was important to be there when he wondered, "Where's Bob?"

MK: So did you see him early?

RH: I usually saw him as soon as he got through with his intelligence briefing. One could not get in the way of Henry Kissinger, you know. Henry is a great character.

MK: When you met with the President, what would you talk about?

RH: It depended on what the day's business was. Of course, you would talk about anything unusual that had happened or sometimes you'd hash over something that happened yesterday but there was very little time for that—yesterday was over. We would talk about what was likely to stir the waters a day ahead and what stuff was on the calendar for that day that had to specially marked, a foreign visitor or a political meeting that was noteworthy. It's kind of hard to say. We talked about what the President wanted to talk about.

MK: So was he using you as a sounding board for some things? Did you talk about—was there a theme, for example, during a day that you wanted to put out to news organization?

RH: No.

MK: Some particular message that you wanted to get out?

RH: Not on a daily basis. Every once in a while there might be something that we were bearing down on hard, but no.

MK: If you wanted to get a particular message out, what kind of circumstances would there be of when he would be particularly interested in doing so, saying we want to get this story out today? What kind of circumstance would that be and how would you do it?

RH: Well, you just do it. He doesn't operate by finding one piece of seed and nurturing it until it grows. He's much more practical and pragmatic in his approach, this is what I want to say and you want to get moving on that corn price problem, whatever. Of course, everybody in the government that has visiting privileges with the President is always trying to sell him something. And he'll usually say he'll think that over or think about that and see what he can do, avoiding a quick commitment.

MK: Did he ever ask you to talk to reporters? Other than Woodward and Bernstein, did he ask you to talk to other reporters?

RH: To specific reporters?

MK: Yes.

RH: No. Not really.

MK: Or to news organizations? What about news organizations?

RH: No. I would always tell him who had bought me lunch in the best restaurants.

MK: Would he ask you what they wanted to know?

RH: [Rowland] Evans and [Robert] Novak took me to lunch and spent a lot of the company's money. I would always say in advance, "I'm going to have lunch with Evans and Novak or both, what do you want me to tell them?"

MK: Would he tell you something?

RH: Sometimes. Or, conversely, when I came back from the lunch, I'd tell him what we talked about and what I told them.

MK: Who were some other people you met with?

RH: You name them. They're all trying to get in. Of course, they all had their favorite sources of information. I wasn't everybody's favorite. But having been a reporter myself I knew all these people pretty well so they would be inclined to try and get an answer out of me first. I would usually oblige them with something. It might not have been very interesting.

MK: Did you meet with television people as well as print?

RH: Sure. They were the biggest thing on wheels in our day.

MK: For television, would it be the anchors of the news programs or their White House correspondents?

RH: Both, depending on how important the guy was.

MK: For example, Walter Cronkite.

RH: Well, he was like the king and the king's messenger did all of the hard work and then he spoke it.

MK: He had an interview with Ford. He came in to the White House and did an interview with Ford.

RH: We pretty much let the Press Secretary handle that. I dealt with these people on the basis of passing out information but not formal interviews.

MK: Was it information where you were giving them background on an action the President was taking? For example, on the pardon. After the pardon, the President did it and the speech was given, was there an effort then to have people talk to various reporters and explain, give further background on it? Did you meet with people like over lunches?

RH: Well, there really wasn't much about the pardon except the fact that it was a pardon. One day there was no pardon, the next day there was a pardon. It got a little messed up because he was being questioned about it and he didn't want to answer. So he hemmed and hawed and said a lot of things that he later had to explain. But the pardon was a fairly simple matter. Either there was or wasn't a pardon.

MK: Well, the type of pardon isn't simple. It's not just a pardon for specific things. It was a pardon of any kinds of things Nixon did. It was just a blanket pardon.

RH: There are various kinds of pardons and a presidential pardon is a unique kind of pardon. This is too long a subject and I'm not a lawyer but the problem we had over the pardon was

that Ford misspoke himself or wasn't clear in what he did say. He gave the impression that he was not going to do anything about a pardon. In fact, there was almost a clamor for a pardon. We've forgotten that now. After Nixon quit and went off to California, he still had some friends left. He had—

MK: Twenty-four per cent, I think.

RH: —a highly attractive family who were the object of considerable admiration and pity. Obviously Pat and the girls had nothing to do with this stuff. Everybody liked Pat. We had a joke in those days that Nixon's campaign motto was going to be "I can't stand Pat."

MK: I remember.

RH: Ford's problem was that what he didn't want to do was answer the question. So what he said was, "When that matter gets to me I will make a decision." He couldn't duck it because he was the only one who could issue a pardon. There's wasn't a way to bring anybody else into the act. But, rather than tip his hand as to what he was inclined to do or what he was going to do, he had to say, "I haven't decided yet." I remember once asking him why he gave that answer. He said, "Well, somebody in the press might ask me." I said, "So all you have to do is say that you haven't made up your mind yet." He replied, "But I <u>have</u> made up my mind." He couldn't lie. He was a lousy liar. Not only was he not well versed in the fine art of lying, he was morally trained that nice boys don't lie.

MK: When was that? How far beforehand?

RH: Before the pardon, he went through a period when he was just tossing the idea around, kicking it around and the whole country was kicking it around, as a matter of fact.

MK: Why not make the subject one of public discussion? Was there any discussion of that?

RH: No. It was already one of public discussion. It was all that most families were talking about: "What's going to happen to Nixon?" He was still being investigated and he had still committed crimes. His resigning the presidency didn't affect that. You don't escape liability for your misdeeds simply by changing jobs or becoming unemployed. He still had a House committee investigating the matter and he had the Special Prosecutor investigating the matter. Nixon's crimes followed him when he ceased to be President. They followed him. He wasn't purged by resigning. Now in an ordinary job, you may be purged by resigning, but not if you've committed criminal acts.

MK: Were you surprised by the public response?

RH: To the pardon?

MK: Yes.

RH: The public response, no, I wasn't surprised because what Ford had said in his press conferences was that he wasn't going to do anything—what he seemed to say was that he wasn't going to do anything until the matter came before him. Well, there was no automatic way it was going to come before him except in the sense that everything is before the President, everything that happens is before the President. If you can only beat the rap by presidential pardon then your friends, they are all trying to get you a presidential pardon.

MK: Well, who was working on his behalf? Well, Haig was, of course.

RH: On whose behalf?

MK: On Nixon's, for the pardon.

RH: Haig was working for a pardon for, I think, two reasons. It's still a controversial question. But he was, in one sense, trying to help the President, of course, to protect him from criminal pursuit and in a sense he was acting on behalf of all the President's men that weren't in jail already because Nixon didn't do all these things alone. A lot of the things that he was supposed to have done—he had to have somebody install those microphones, he had to have somebody read the tapes. He couldn't read it all. He couldn't catalog them. He couldn't find what was on all those hours and hours and hours [of tape]. Nixon obviously got so used to having those things in the office he forgot they were even there. Obviously he said things on those tapes that he wouldn't have normally said if he had been conscious of it. He just forgot about it. After all, he was the President; he could handle it. But being the President isn't as all-powerful as some people like to think. I think the Founding Fathers planned well.

RH: I never heard him use language like—

MK: Nixon?

RH: Yes—like they heard on the tapes. I never heard him talk that way.

Nixon was a poor Quaker boy whose mother taught him not to swear and not to fight wars. And he went off to war, our war, the good war. In the Navy he got in these poker games and used dirty words. He spit and cussed and drank and smoked, all kinds of things that good Quaker boys don't do.

He didn't drink like they portrayed him in that movie either because he couldn't. But he thought some of the attributes of manliness were to swear and drink and smoke cigars and things like that. He's a very complex man. I knew Nixon long before I knew Ford.

MK: Were you covering him?

RH: Yes. In fact, I knew him even before I came to Washington because he was running for Congress and for the Senate in California. I was covering him when he was running for Congress. When he was running for the Senate, he hooked his campaign with my congressman. I was living in Long Beach then. I'll put it the other way around. Our congressman hooked his campaign onto Nixon's Senate campaign. They would campaign jointly and run joint posters and stuff like that. I interviewed Nixon the night he was elected to the Senate. He'd been four years in the House. He was famous for the Alger Hiss business. He had acquired considerable attention and ran for the Senate.

My paper, the *Los Angeles Times,* was across the street from the office building where the official poll counting is done, in the middle of Los Angeles. So it was the custom in Los Angeles in those days that on election night the successful candidates, as soon as they were pretty sure it was time to claim victory, would march from the poll counting place over to the *Los Angeles Times,* up to the city room and say they were ready to claim victory, bring out your cameras. Because I'd had a little television show, I got the job of interviewing the

successful candidates and one of them was Nixon. He had just been elected a U.S. senator. That was really my first one-on-one time with him. I covered him from then on.

MK: Did you find that he had a very good knowledge of the routines of news organizations?

RH: Nixon?

MK: Yes. Was he better than most political figures in understanding what the deadlines were, what was news?

RH: Nixon was an extremely smart man.

MK: How was he smart, from a newsperson's point of view?

RH: He gobbled up and digested information—he was a fast learner. He understood the news business better than most people. I go back to the days when he got stoned in South America. I was stoned too; I got spit upon too. It's not a pleasant thing to be spit on by a mob. It looks like snow falling. The mob was up on a balcony, spitting down at the airport level. We were trying to get through the mob. And the snow was falling. It was quite an experience. Really disgusting.

MK: Did he give you news?

RH: Well, when I came back to Washington, anything the Vice President wanted to tell me was news. He slipped me a few things.

MK: Do you remember stories he gave you? Did he give you any exclusives?

RH: I wouldn't tell, even now. Well, there's one. He had a copy of the Yalta papers when they had just been cleared. John Foster Dulles had made a deal, or somebody on Dulles' behalf had made a deal, with the *New York Times* that, if they would print these papers in full, they could have them first. Well, most newspapers don't physically have the capacity to print all that garbage. I don't think anybody's ever read them yet. Anyway, he made this deal with [James] "Scotty" Reston [*New York Times*] and Nixon found out about it. He got hold of Roscoe Drummond who was the bureau chief for the—

MK: *Herald-Tribune.*

RH: —the *New York Herald Tribune* and with me and asked us to come up to the Vice President's office in the Capitol. It was a hide-away. Nixon had a hide-away office where Nixon met with people he didn't want to be seen coming and going from his office. So I got up there and walked in the door. There was Roscoe Drummond of the *Herald-Tribune* coming in the same door.

But there was only one copy of the Yalta Papers. So the two of us rode back to the [National] Press Building in a cab with this telephone-book size thing. Both of us had a hand on it. When we got back to the Press Building, we literally tore it in half. He took one half and I took the other half and we went back to our offices and ran through it, briefed it and traded what we had done. Nixon's motive was that he wanted—to use one of Nixon's favorite words—to screw the *New York Times.* So we did.

MK: Were there other exclusives that you can remember?

RH: I could if I tried hard. The *Los Angeles Times* was Nixon's newspaper. It was where publicity did him the most good. It did more good to get a story in the *Los Angeles Times* than it did to get it in the *Washington Post.* He wasn't getting any votes here [Washington]. And, as I say, he hated the *New York Times*. I guess that went back to the Alger Hiss business.

MK: What year was it when he gave you the Yalta papers?

RH: It was when Nixon was still Vice President sometime between 1954 and 1960. But I don't remember exactly. John Foster Dulles was still alive.

MK: Christian Herter then came in, I'm not sure what year, but it was the latter part of the administration.

RH: Herter was Secretary of State for Ike?

MK: Yes. In the latter part after Dulles died. When did you meet Ford and become friends with him?

RH: I met Ford while I was covering the Hill, not because I was interested in what went on in Michigan, but because he was in the young Turks rebellion against the old Republican leadership.

MK: Joe Martin?

RH: Joe Martin. And Ford was elected the Republican leader in the House.

Mrs. Hartmann:

The Nixons lived down the street in Spring Valley [i.e. upper Northwest Washington, D.C.]. Roberta used to run into Pat all the time in when she was shopping.

MK: Once he [Nixon] became President, were you working for Ford then, when he first became president in 1969?

RH: Yes. I was working for Ford while Nixon was still vice president, from 1966 through 1976.

MK: The whole of his presidency.

RH: I went to work for Ford in 1966, throughout his vice presidency and presidency. I had known Nixon before Ford knew Nixon. Ford remembered Nixon as a second-termer in the House who was nice to him when he appeared as a freshman. Nixon was running for president even then, when he was a member of the House. Nixon was a quick study. He soaked up information like a sponge.

MK: How would you compare the two men as far as their dealings with news organizations, with reporters?

RH: You mean Nixon and Ford?

MK: Yes.

RH: The reporters just loved Ford but they didn't get much news out of him because the minority leader of the House doesn't make much news. That's why I was hired in the first place. The young Turks in the House had just thrown all the stuffy old Republican leaders out and elected Ford their new leader.

MK: They threw out [Charles] Halleck.

RH: They threw out Halleck and elected Ford.

MK: Bob Michael?

RH: Bob Michael came along later. He was successor to Ford as House Republican leader.

MK: In looking at the way in which they interacted with reporters and the ways that they used them, were there similar or different kinds of interactions that they had, Nixon and Ford?

RH: They were quite different people, quite different types. Ford was and is a very open, friendly person, football hero. Everybody liked him. Nixon was always afraid someone was out to get him. In many cases, they were.

MK: When you were hired on, what kind of news were they generating for the [Republican] Party?

RH: I was supposed to get more play in the local and national media for the new breed of young Turks as against the old fudds. They had a very, let us say under-developed idea of how you got publicity. They thought that if you'd been in the news business, you'd be able to deliver all your friends in the news business on a platter because they're your friends. I was trying to tell them that isn't true so you might as well try to sell it at the best price possible.

So I went to work there because I was friends with all these young Republicans who were part of the new, young wave of Republicans who were trying to get some attention instead of the old masters like Everett McKinley Dirksen. Get Ev Dirksen in front of a camera and you'd never turn it off. He was absolutely wonderful but it didn't make the young people who had just taken over the leadership of the House very happy.

MK: Did Ford have regular meetings, daily meetings with reporters in his office?

RH: I don't think it was daily. You could always call him off the floor but he set up a little separate event for the House leaders as against the joint meetings that they were having. The Ev and Charlie show became the Ev and Jerry show but it was mostly Ev in both cases. There's no way you're going to out-do Ev Dirksen except to have separate meetings. So we set up a little separate meeting with the House leaders and let the Senate have their own.

MK: Was that bipartisan?

RH: No.

MK: Did you know Ford when the Warren Commission was meeting?

RH: No. I didn't have any part of that.

MK: Do you see [President Ford]?

RH: Yes. I'm on the Ford Foundation Board of Directors. He has his annual visits to Washington and we have a big party, a short business meeting and a big party.

MK: That's nice. Thank you very much.

[End of Disc 1 of 1 and Interview 1]