

White House Interview Program

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INTERVIEWEE: GERALD WARREN

INTERVIEWER: Martha Kumar

[Disc 1 of 2]

MK: When did you come in? Did you work in the campaign?

GW: I didn't work in the campaign. I walked into the White House for the first time on January 21 early in the morning. I had come in on the red eye. I was advised by a very wise person who had been through this before to skip the inauguration festivities because I wasn't a member of the team. I wasn't in the campaign. I was told that I was going to be initially viewed as an outsider who wasn't in the trenches with the [Richard] Nixon folks so I should go in as quietly as possible. So I did. That turned out to be true. I was a newspaper editor. I wasn't identified as a Nixon person. I had to overcome that within the staff.

MK: How does one do that?

GW: I think just by quietly going about your work and learning the ropes of the White House staff, how the White House staff works and doesn't work, which is a very difficult thing for people coming in for the first time to do. The White House, as you indicated earlier, has a rhythm to it and there are certain people who have that metronome in their head and know how it's supposed to work, like the clerk downstairs in the White House. There's always someone in each office, some secretary in each office, who has the key, who knows how it works. The difficult thing is to find that person and then, in the case of a Republican administration replacing a Democrat or vice versa, protecting that person and saying please help us. Each of us going in, in those circumstances, seems to make the same mistake. They move these people away as if they were [Lyndon B.] Johnson loyalists. Well, she may or may not have been but she knew how the place worked; she was willing and eager to share that with us. It took us about a week of stumbling around before we brought her back in to a prominent position in the press office.

MK: Was that Connie Gerard?

GW: Yes. And then the [Jimmy] Carter people made the same mistake after [Gerald] Ford left. They moved her clear over to the EOB [Executive Office Building]. We all tried to tell Jody [Powell] don't do that, keep Connie there and listen to her because that's the only way it's going to work for you. He brought her back and sure enough he learned from her. It's amazing how we all made the same mistake.

MK: What ways are there of trying to not do that or to limit it?

GW: I think you must trust the people that you are replacing regardless of the circumstances. Whether you were opponents in the campaign or whether you're just political opponents, when they're going out they probably will be willing to tell you the truth about how the operation works. We were willing to tell Jody the truth. I wasn't there at the transition but I called him and offered my advice. He finally squeezed me in for a quick drink. I told him to

keep Connie; he made some crude remark which I took offense to but I came back to him; I said, "You really are making a mistake if you don't lean on her."

The Johnson people were very good and told us precisely some of the problems that we were going to face. Of course, at the same time they also just cleaned out all of the bookshelves and everything else. It was bare when we walked in, no references, no anything; it was all gone. We tried not to do that to the Ford administration.

MK: The Presidential Records Act makes it difficult to leave stuff. We've tried to figure though and have talked to Sharon Fawcett at the [Office of] Presidential Libraries about what kinds of material can be kept behind trying to keep some core documents. What kinds of documents do you think are core to the Press Office and to Communications?

GW: Well, presidential documents, the official record of the previous presidency, are very important for a new person coming in to refer to. I very quickly was identified as the liaison to presidential documents. So I had [to] approve the transcripts and the write-ups of the various things that went into the presidential documents. And I knew from nothing; I had never seen one before. I didn't know how it was supposed to look. So I had to very quickly go to school and figure that out. Now that is one of the people that you have to identify very quickly when you move into the Press Office: one, who is the Connie Gerard, who has the key to how everything works? Second, who is the John Rathsord, who is the clerk, who can tell you how you deal with bills, how you deal with Congress, how you deal with commissions, how you deal with all those things. Third, the presidential documents. Fourth, the usher, how does it work; how does the house work; presidential correspondence, how does that work; the telephone operators, how does that work; and the Archives, how does that work. If you can, a press secretary and his chief deputy and others who are going to make up that office should identify those people before they move in and begin to talk to them. They will learn that they need to rely on those people. At first when the clerk says, no, you can't announce that bill because it hasn't been delivered or one of the procedures hasn't been carried out, you're inclined to say the hell with you, I'm going to announce it anyway because it's to my advantage to do it now. But you find very quickly you can't do that; you have to follow the long-established procedures between the House and the Senate and the White House.

MK: Who did you talk to before you came in?

GW: No one. I just stumbled into all of these things. I just blindly—we just made some terrible mistakes until some people came to us individually and said you shouldn't do it that way, you should do it this way.

I'll never forget one of the biggest mistakes we made. In the rush to get the sub-cabinet announced—the Nixon Cabinet all had been announced on the "Today" show so that was easy. We then put out pro forma press releases just to make it official. But the sub-cabinet hadn't been announced so there was a rush from every Cabinet department to announce these nominations. I'll never forget there was a big push to get the Undersecretary of Interior out. Someone from the Personnel Office handed me some paper and said here's the information on so-and-so; we need to announce that at the eleven o'clock briefing. So I gave that to a secretary—it might even have been a secretary—and said type this up without looking at it, without putting it into accepted press release form or anything. So she typed it up; we ran it off. I handed it out before I even looked at it which, as an editor, I know better. But the pressure was on. So we got it out. The hoots and the hollers from the press room; it was wonderful to hear. Jack Horner came in and said, "You want to pick this up

- again; you don't want this to go out." It was the guy's financial records. It wasn't even his resume; it was his financial background. Terrible.
- MK: Were you able to pick them all up?
- GW: Yes. And Jack wrote a little piece; he was sympathetic to us at the *Star*. He worked for the *Star*. He was sympathetic to us as newcomers, not politically but as newcomers. So he didn't make it as bad as it might have been. But it shows you some of the mistakes you can make.
- MK: Did you talk to anybody from the Johnson White House?
- GW: Yes. We talked to Tom Johnson a lot and George Christian. It wasn't until later that I met the other George [Reedy?], [Bill] Moyers. But Christian and Tom Johnson were very helpful.
- MK: What kinds of things did they tell you about?
- GW: Well, first they told us you better get Connie back in the number one position in the Press Office if you want it to work and listen to her, which we did. The press secretary wants to put his own secretary in that position; it's a prestigious place, which we did. Then they were very helpful telling us about foreign travel because we moved in at the end of January and in February we made our first foreign trip. The President wanted to go and reestablish the U.S. relationship with NATO [North American Treaty Organization] countries and with NATO itself and particularly with General [Charles] DeGaulle with whom Johnson had disagreed; they just didn't get along. So we were scratching around trying to put together a presidential overseas trip which is not like the campaign plane at all. So they were very helpful as well as Jim Hagerly who had been [Dwight D.] Eisenhower's press secretary and who was at that time working for ABC, and so was Pierre Salinger from the [John F.] Kennedy days. They all responded to Ron Ziegler, the incoming Press Secretary. Then I dealt more with Tom Johnson with anyone else because we had similar titles. He was very helpful to me.
- MK: What was your title?
- GW: Deputy Press Secretary. I kept that title in the year I worked for Gerald Ford. I wasn't in the Press Office because it just wouldn't do to have a Nixon—I had been the Nixon spokesman and briefer for the last year because Ron Ziegler had lost his credibility and was unable to brief the press on a daily basis. So I did that for more than a year, the last sixteen months almost. Jerry terHorst who is an old friend of mine said, "It's in your interest and my interest for you not be out front." I said, "I couldn't agree with you more." So I had an office over in the EOB and my first job was liaison with the Nixon group out in San Clemente. Then when Ron Nessen came in and took over for Jerry terHorst, he asked me to assume the duties of Director of Communications, which I did without the title. And that was the right way to do it under the circumstances.
- MK: Larry Speakes had a story about you during the time when you were doing the briefing. I know at some point he was working for the counsel, I think.
- GW: He was brought in to follow Jim St. Clair around the Senate. Sinclair was a constitutional lawyer who was brought in to handle the tapes case. He was up in the House and the Senate all the time.
- MK: Sort of an early Lanny Davis.

GW: No. It was more protection; he wasn't the spinmeister as Davis was. It was to report back to us what Sinclair had said because there was no way to monitor what he was saying. So Speakes was brought in to do that.

MK: He was saying he remembers one morning you came in and were not looking forward to the briefing. The briefings were just terrible day after day; it was awful. He remembered you said coming into work you were coming to an intersection and that if you had proceeded through that intersection a truck would have hit you and you wouldn't have had to do the briefing.

GW: Right.

MK: Do you remember that?

GW: Yes. And ended up in the hospital; it would have been wonderful.

MK: What was the briefing like? You had credibility.

GW: Well, as an individual I think I did have credibility but as a spokesman for the President it was terrible. I was able to do it—we did a number of things right, I think, and one of them was when Al Haig came in and took over as Chief of Staff for Bob Haldeman he instituted what he called the deputies meeting. There was a seven o'clock staff meeting which I attended because I was the briefer but then I also attended the deputies meeting where whatever orders or decisions made in the seven o'clock meeting were translated out into the bowels of the White House and therefore out into the Executive Branch. It was called the deputies meeting. At that meeting we talked about the issues of the day. The economy was a very big issue; energy was a very big issue. There were a lot of domestic things that were happening in the Nixon White House that were just forgotten because of the white heat that was around the Watergate visit. So I would prepare all those things and then I would get the one or two paragraphs from Ron Ziegler who was then acting as an assistant to the President who had sat with the President that morning saying these questions are going to come up about Watergate. Then what we said was the President said this, period. We didn't go beyond that. Ron had stubbed his toe over an incident where he became upset and he said some things that appeared to be personally insulting to Kay Graham, Mrs. Graham, the publisher of the *Post*.

MK: At a briefing?

GW: Yes. Things that were unacceptable then in today's political climate may not be unacceptable because there was a lot more political vitriol allowed from the White House podium during the impeachment proceedings than there were during the proceedings leading up to what would have been the impeachment of President Nixon. So you couldn't do that in those days. You couldn't have a James Carville or a Lanny Davis or even the official spokesman swinging away at individual reporters or newspapers or congressmen or senators; you just couldn't do it. So we kept it very brief, this is the President's position. Then I would stonewall. That term was really originated and gained great currency during that time.

I'll never forget [Gary] Trudeau—I can laugh now; it wasn't that funny then—had a series of strips about the White House. It was always the White House says, the White House says. He even had these statements coming out of the White House with no person involved. But

the theme that linked them all together was a stone wall that was being built around the White House. Every day it got taller and taller and taller. It was really very clever.

MK: In watching the briefing say starting right at the beginning with [Monica] Lewinsky or doing the fund raising, did you see some of the same kinds of things, the kinds of dynamics?

GW: I did. The dynamics were similar. The approach of the [Bill] Clinton White House was entirely different than the approach of the Nixon White House. There was Chuck Colson back then and others who tended to take the offensive but they didn't do it any way with the sophistication or the skill that the Clinton White House war room did with Carville and others. They were so much better equipped at that. They took the offensive immediately and they carried it out throughout the White House, in the spin sessions with Carville and others, from the podium, from the President's office. It was all very well coordinated and very slick and very well done. They pulled it off because through that offensive, that positive offensive they were able to, I think, turn the tide of the American people because there was no counterbalance; there was no offensive from anybody else. Everything that happened in the Congress particularly came out looking heavy-handed and ham-fisted that the President was able to say, see, this is what they're doing to me.

The Nixon folks almost from the start were put on the defensive. It was a defensive maneuver almost every day after that. So while the dynamics were the same, the approach was different and obviously the outcome was different.

MK: In that kind of situation, does staff run for cover?

GW: Some did. Life goes on. The legislative liaison office still has to deal with Congress and the domestic council still has to deal with those executive branches and with those congressional committees that fund them. So we tried to keep that rhythm going. That was a part of why we had the deputies meeting. We knew the entire city was captivated by Watergate and, particularly when the hearings were going on, everyone was watching. We knew that but we still felt, Haig particularly felt, that we needed to charge the Executive Branch with enough tasks every day so that the product would continue to come in. And it did; I think it was very smart.

MK: Did you get publicity for it at the same time?

GW: No. I'd walk in the briefing and say I have a major announcement on the energy front. Yawn. The wires and the networks would move it back to their offices but the specials, the newspaper reporters, wouldn't file on it at all unless it somehow counterbalanced or figured into the Watergate discussion. So the first question is always, what about the tapes; what about this; what about that; what is the President saying about what this senator said; he called him a liar or whatever. So I would just give them my paragraph that I had been authorized to release and that was it. It was terribly difficult because you had to stand there and let them vent some spleen because they were upset; they wanted more. The metaphor I tried to live by in those days, which sometimes was difficult, was that there was sort of a channel, think of it as an air tube between the White House Press Office acting for the President and the press acting for the public and the information had to keep flowing through that channel even when it was cluttered and clogged up by Watergate. And we tried to do that. It was difficult to try to do.

MK: You had to do a lot of angioplasty.

GW: Absolutely. I didn't even know what angioplasty was then, but we were doing it. Putting those balloons in there.

MK: An early case. In the Clinton White House it seems that they kept a separate track mostly because of the President himself. The President just got out there every day. They would give him things and he would read it.

GW: He commanded the podium and he commanded the tube [television].

MK: They thought even in the caption of a picture that probably Monica Lewinsky is going to turn up but if they had a scene of him at a podium and then they put a cardboard thing behind it and it would say "budget surplus" so when somebody in the public was reading the newspaper they would see the President and see budget surplus so they know what the thing was of the day. They always seemed to be able to crank out those things.

GW: That's very smart because he was able to appear presidential. President Nixon sort of retreated and didn't come out that much. When he did, often the picture that resulted was an unfortunate one. Remember that terrible press conference he had? I don't remember now which one it was but there were pictures in the papers the next day about an angry President and an angry press corps facing one another.

MK: Is that the one with [Robert] Pierpoint?

GW: The picture I remember is Clark Molenhoff who was a legendary reporter for the *Des Moines Register* and somewhat sympathetic to President Nixon.

MK: Because he had worked in the administration.

GW: Yes. Later. Not at that time. But he was so angry that I thought he was going to have a heart attack. His eyes were bulging. It was just miserable.

MK: One of the things that's so different in the Nixon administration is right off there seemed to be a sense that the White House needed to be reorganized and needed to be reorganized in a way that you set up relationships outside, relationships with the party, relationships with the press out of town and relationships with groups, with interest groups, even though that doesn't come about until the Ford administration, but it still developed there.

GW: No. It started with Nixon.

MK: Yes. It did, yes.

GW: There were people who were subtly identified to deal with various groups.

MK: There had been some of that before but it really seemed to be organized. Where did the initiative for all that come from and was it thought of together as a group?

GW: I don't know the answer to that. I do know that the President wanted contact continued with—well, the whole idea of Herb Klein taking that position was worked out with the President and with Bob Haldeman and John Ehrlichman and others. He would deal not only with the Executive Branch, helping them with their communications flow, but he would also deal with editors and publishers around the country who didn't have representatives necessarily in the national corps and didn't have access. So he would create an access point

- for them and also set up briefings for them, which were very successful over the years. The same thing was done with mayors and governors. They extended the legislative liaison idea to elected officials out in the countryside and that worked very well. The same thing was true with minority groups. I know the President started this one and that was an outreach to the arts community. He wanted to do something for the arts because they had been sort of stifled since the Kennedy administration had left, and he did through Len Garment. He, I think, more than doubled the money for the National Endowment [for the Arts] and Len was the liaison point for that.
- MK: When you have these different contacts, how do you judge the success of them? How do you know how they're working?
- GW: I don't know. I assume it is in support for the President's program. These people then activated some support in their constituencies for the President's program. That's one way to measure whether they're successful or not.
- MK: In the press area what did you do to measure the success of the meeting with newspaper editors?
- GW: I think Herb—I was never involved in that during the Nixon administration. I was involved in a few of those meetings in the Ford administration. But the success I think had to be measured on whether or not they understood the message that was being pushed in the media, whether or not there was clarity about the President's programs and what he was trying to do. What they then did with it is fine; it's up to them as long as they understood it and didn't distort it. Of course, they wanted people to support it through their newspapers and there were a lot of editorials that resulted from these briefings. The positive ones were sent around and appeared in the White House news summary, which is an initiative of the Nixon administration. So that was one way to measure it.
- MK: Where did the news summary come from?
- GW: Whose idea was it?
- MK: Yes.
- GW: I don't know. If you could ever sit down with Pat Buchanan, he could tell you. Or [William] Safire might be able to tell you. I'm sure Safire could tell you. And maybe even in one of his books or in Ray Price's book. You remember Safire's book, *Before the Fall*, and then Ray Price's book, the history of the Nixon Administration as much outside of Watergate as you could do that. I don't know whose idea it was but I think it was the President. I think he wanted it known that he didn't spend a lot of time reading newspapers and watching television but he reacted to what was happening through his news summary.
- MK: Was the news summary something of an action-forcing mechanism for him, he went through it and then would see what kinds of news and pictures he wanted to see generated by the end of the day?
- GW: I think it was more of a chance for him to react to what was being said, "this is wrong; contact so-and-so and get this corrected," that sort of thing.
- MK: How long had you known Nixon before you came?

GW: Actually as a reporter I had met some of the Nixon staff as far back as 1960. Because my boss at that time was Herb Klein, my editor, and he had introduced me to Nixon in 1960. Then I got to know him a little better in 1962 when he ran for governor. In 1968 I covered the conventions; I actually was city editor at that time and I ran the coverage of the convention. So I got to know Ziegler. I had known him briefly in 1962 but I got to know him better in 1968 during the convention. So I knew quite a few of those folks somewhat, not well but somewhat.

MK: You came aboard with Klein?

GW: No. Herb when he left told Jim Copley, the owner and the publisher, that he would not raid the staff of the *San Diego Union*. I like to think that he might have asked me to go had he not made that decision or had circumstances been different. I know there was another member of our staff, Peter Kaye, that I know he would have wanted to have on.

MK: He came on with Ford and was the spokesman—

GW: Actually he came on first with National Public Television and covered Watergate, as a matter of fact, with Robin McNeil and Jim Lehrer, and then went to work in the Ford campaign. But he [Klein] swore to Jim that he wouldn't do that. Then he did not recommend me because of that to the Ziegler folks. When the decision was made to make Ziegler press secretary, and Herb Klein director of communications, it became clear that there was a dearth of journalism experience in the campaign press office staff. So they went out to look for someone as a deputy who had newspaper experience, primarily. They would have accepted television experience, but I think they were really looking for newspaper experience.

So they did not go to Herb for a couple reasons. I think Ron being the younger, more aggressive person didn't want a Herb Klein person as his deputy so he didn't go to Herb. I think there was some jealousy there at the beginning. But he went to Castanet and to a mutual friend of ours in the PR [public relations] business in Los Angeles whom I had known for a long time and so had Ron. He suggested he talk to me as a person who could be independent and journalistically experienced. So he did. He asked me to come back and talk to Ron at the Pierre Hotel in New York during the interregnum. I did and we had a long lunch. I took the red eye back and we had a long lunch and then I took the red eye back home again right away. But he announced me the very same day; [he was] a very impulsive fellow. He announced me the very same day. One of the questions was, "You're working for me now, not for Herb. You understand that, don't you?" I said, "Yes, I understand that. I don't want to stop being friends with Herb Klein, because I admire him greatly." He said, "That's fine. But you're working for me, and not for Herb." He wanted that very clear.

MK: He hired his own staff? He didn't have to go through Haldeman?

GW: He took me up to see Haldeman and I chatted with Haldeman. He took me in to see the President-elect and I chatted with him. He had remembered me. So it was all greased on that end.

MK: Say in Haldeman's case and the President, did they ask you anything about your perception of the job?



GW: Not really. They asked me if I was ready for it. "It's not the same; you're working for us and not for the press," that was the whole tenor of it. I said I understand that and I tried to make the point that while I recognize biblically you can't serve two masters and politically either you had to understand the needs of the press and serve those needs. You won't fulfill their desires obviously because you're working for a president, but you have to know their needs and know how it works. And I think that was understood. As I said earlier, there was a great suspicion of me throughout the White House staff because I was one of "them." Almost immediately I recognized this growing animosity between the President's staff and the press even though at that time the President-elect and then the President was getting very good press. He was getting very good coverage. He was really on a honeymoon, so to speak.

MK: Is there a tendency in a White House to think that it should be just 100 per cent positive and anything less is—?

GW: Among some people, sure. There was a bit of—you saw it later in spades, much later with Newt Gingrich: "It all has to go my way. It all has to be done my way." There was some of that among the members of the press, not the President, but some members of the staff. But it wasn't until later that the real animosity broke out. It wasn't triggered by Watergate; it was triggered well before that. It was triggered by the Vietnam protests. That's when the "them versus us" feeling set in in the White House; it was really cemented in the White House during that time because people were mystified at why they didn't recognize that this man was trying to get us out of Vietnam honorably and the youngsters in the street, the youngsters marching around the White House complex throwing stones over the buses, didn't understand that. The press corps didn't either because the press corps, many of whom were veterans at covering Vietnam and of an age where they sympathized with the protesters, they didn't understand it either. It was tough.

MK: Did people within the White House ask you to explain to the press and get a sense of how it operated?

GW: Yes. Talk to them, find out what's going on, that happened a lot. But the individual reporters, even though I had an individual rapport with some of them and even though they felt I had some credibility because of my experience as a newspaper person, I wasn't trusted by them thoroughly either because I had lined up with the Nixon group. So the Nixon folks at first didn't really trust me and the press didn't either. I've lived with that all my life. It's just something that stayed with me after I left the White House as well.

MK: How does one live with that, the tension of having both sides suspicious of you?

GW: First of all, you have to win over the White House staff and you don't do that by any untoward declarations of fealty to the President; you do it simply by exposing them to what you think are the best practices of dealing with the press corps and telling them how it's much better that we get our story out in a way that is understandable and clear. That couldn't always happen because many times the President didn't want it to be clear; he wanted it to be fuzzy. But sooner or later, I was able to convince the key players in the White House that, even though we weren't going to release the completed whole story, I at least had to know what was going on and what the underpinnings were. I had to know what the discussions were leading up to a presidential decision so I could stay out of trouble when questions were asked. I tried to tell them it doesn't help for us to be just putting out a presidential statement of two paragraphs and then stonewalling them which I had to do often.

MK: When Herb Klein came in, was there an understanding in some way that that office was created for him—

GW: Yes.

MK: —because the President needed to have him or felt as loyalty he should have him but he didn't really want him doing the press work?

GW: Yes. Beyond that, he had come up with a really good idea of helping the various spokesmen in the branches do their job better.

MK: Was that Klein's idea?

GW: Yes.

MK: Hagerty had done some of that.

GW: Some of it, but he didn't set up a separate office, an assistant to the President.

MK: Hagerty really was a one-man band.

GW: And so was Salinger.

MK: But Salinger didn't have the same kind of portfolio.

GW: He wasn't as sophisticated.

MK: No. Hagerty really was. The vacation when he went to Denver; there's an announcement every day of appointments and this and that, boards and commissions. You'd think that Eisenhower was working all day long if you didn't see the golf pictures.

GW: If you didn't know he had bowel trouble.

MK: That's right. And a heart attack and all the rest of it. All that came out.

What kinds of things did Klein do and how did it relate to the Press Office?

GW: He would call and say "HEW [Health, Education and Welfare] is making this announcement at this time; you should be aware of it" or he would call and say "could you call so-and-so over at HEW and coordinate these two things." Again—I'm sure Ron will readily agree with what I'm about to say—there was a mistrust between the two offices because the White House always thinks if it's really good news, we should announce it or if it's really bad news, they should announce it. You have to break that down; you have to—Mr. Nixon was pretty good about that. He didn't want everything coming out of the White House for various reasons, at first because he wanted to build up the Executive Branch but later on because he just didn't want to be involved with some of these things that were happening.

MK: What about policy? Is there a tendency during a crisis to reach out into the departments to get things to announce?

GW: There was and sometimes they were reluctant to do so. Remember that the main focus other than the key domestic initiatives such as the civil rights initiative which was a difficult

one for the President because he had begun to develop that base in the South, the Republican base in the South, and worked very hard at it, and then when he came up with a civil rights plan which was actually the first quota, the Philadelphia plan, he had to be very careful about how that was announced. So it had to be announced at the White House because it was his decision, but he didn't want any discussion in the White House about that, so they gave me two paragraphs. I went to Ehrlichman and said, "We've been through this before; there are always backup questions. There are always follow-up questions. I need more." He said, "You're not going to get it." So I went to the guy who worked for Ehrlichman, "I'm not talking to you." No one would go beyond those two sentences and it was very, very awkward. So I kept pushing it back to HEW, back to Bob Finch's department, and they weren't that much more forthcoming than I was. But it was tough in some cases.

Now, in the environment, it was easier because when we created the Council on Environmental Quality we brought those people over to the White House and announced them there and had briefings there. That worked out pretty well. But much of my time was spent dealing with the State Department and with Defense because so much of what was happening was related to Vietnam, all the way up to 1972 and January of 1973 when the war ended supposedly. And then from 1973 on it was all Watergate.

MK: Was Wednesday a down day for the President and the White House didn't make news that day so the departments tended to use it?

GW: You know I was never told that, don't make news on Wednesday. No one ever told me that.

MK: The President, didn't he sort of take Wednesday and do internal things, things that would not be public?

GW: That's the first I've heard of that.

MK: For some reason I think both he did that and [Ronald] Reagan did it too.

GW: You know the guy who could tell you that would be Dwight Chapin who really handled his schedule more than anybody else, or Steve Bull. Steve is probably more accessible in Washington than Dwight. Dwight is up around New York I think. But that is a concept that never occurred to me. There were days when he had hardly anything on his schedule. Generally it was felt that it was leading up to a rather large announcement; he was working on something, a press conference or a speech or a trip or a visit. But I've never heard the theory that he took Wednesdays off. I never heard that.

MK: In the sense that he just didn't do public stuff. So if you were a department maybe you could make news on Wednesday because then you wouldn't be stepping on the President which you wouldn't want to do.

GW: I never heard that.

MK: Can you tell me what you did with the Vietnam story, what percent of your time it took and what the whole process was?

GW: Quite a bit. Our briefings were staggered. State went first and then we went, the White House, and then Defense followed up. Defense was a cleanup hitter. Dan Hencken was terrific. He was very knowledgeable and handled things very well. There was a lot of

coordinating going on with them and then we brought in a deputy to work directly with the National Security Council staff. The first one was Bob Hodek who later became ambassador to Ethiopia. And he wanted that of all things. He wasn't sent there as punishment; he really wanted that. That worked very well. But they would come in and they would give us guidance on what various departments were going to say on various issues. Then we would want to talk to Hencken or Bob McCloskey at State or Ron would himself just to get a sense of it before he went on. There was a lot of coordination back and forth.

On tough stuff we would want Defense to handle it first; then we would have to take the questions. I remember one incident—I can't give you the time but it was 1971, I think—somehow we were in discussion with the press about troops in Cambodia or in Laos, particularly in Laos. Somehow we were led to make the statement both at the White House and at the Pentagon that no U.S. military personnel had been involved in combat in Laos; we were there to advise the Laotians. Then some widow in Los Angeles got from the Pentagon a citation for her late husband who was killed in combat in Laos. Then all hell broke loose trying to explain that. It was one of those things that had [Henry] Kissinger tied up in knots and had the Pentagon tied up in knots. It was very embarrassing for all of us. There was a lot of backward and forward, and we eventually laid it off on the Pentagon: you handle it; you caused it, you handle it. There was a lot of that going on.

MK: But would the press take that?

GW: No. When Hodek left the White House to go back in to the foreign service, we had a party for him. We had a cake decorated with this quote, "Guidance from Hodek: White House will refer to State; State will refer to Pentagon; the Pentagon will no comment". And that happened a lot.

MK: So you worked out very closely exactly how you were going to handle those things.

GW: Yes.

MK: What kinds of material did they provide you with each day and what kinds of discussions did you have with them? Did you do a conference call?

GW: Ron did a conference call to begin with, yes. Then there were a lot of follow-up calls. My calls generally were between myself and Jerry Friedheim, who was Dan Hencken's deputy. Occasionally I would sit in on a conference call that Ron would have with Hencken and McCloskey just to get a sense of where we were and what the focus was, what the story line of the day was going to be from our standpoint. There were times—we got hung up once after this combat death in Laos. As it turned out, it was a man who was defending the people. The place was being overrun by the Viet Cong and he was there and he helped defend it against the Viet Cong and was killed. So it was all very innocent but we should never have said in the first place that no one had been involved in combat because inadvertently he was. That wasn't his mission but he was. Then we got involved in trying to name everybody who was in Laos or who had been in Laos and what their jobs were. Then you get into the numbers game. We never should have started that. The numbers that the National Security Council had and the Defense Department agreed upon turned out to be wrong, as we should have known they were going to be.

MK: Numbers always are a problem.

GW: So we got involved in the minutiae that we never should have been involved with. But generally it was this is going to be announced at Defense, and State will take this position; if you don't want to say anything on it at the White House that's fine; we'll handle it over here. Or, if you do want to say something, work out what you want to say, and then get back to us; let us know so we'll not be blind-sided by what you say. So much of it was coordination.

MK: Were the spokespeople in State and Defense chosen by the White House?

GW: No. Herb might have had some input, I don't know, but they weren't chosen by us. Bob McCloskey was a foreign service officer. Dan Hencken had been in the Pentagon press office for some time as had Jerry Friedheim, who succeeded Dan. They just came up through the ranks. So I don't know of any instance where the White House dictated who they should have at either State or Defense during the Nixon years. Herb chose them in almost every other department, found people for those places. Sometimes they were people that were already there, like Justice. You need some institutional memory at Justice; you can't just bring a new person in and expect them to understand how that place works.

MK: Wasn't that difficult, especially since it had been a Democratic administration?

GW: Not really. They were civil servants. They were generally not political appointees. I don't remember if we ever put a political appointee in the Justice press office; we may have. But the guys I dealt with were guys that had been there for a while.

MK: I think in today's world it would be very difficult.

GW: It would be different.

MK: How did you prepare for the briefing and what did you all regard as the central purpose of the briefing?

GW: Well, I had perhaps a different view on that than anybody else because of my experience. My view of the central purpose of the briefing was to respond to the fullest extent we could to the needs of the press. We spent an awful lot of time figuring out what their needs were that particular day. It was fairly easy as time went on. You knew that half the questions would result from stories that were in the *Times* and the *Post*. But there were also things that came up on the radio wire or in one of the papers around the country that we monitored that would spark questions. So the major part of my day, early day from seven o'clock on, was preparing the answers to those questions. So I would go out into the White House staff and out into the bureaucracy to get them to respond to those questions and then to put those answers through the Domestic Council and the National Security Council to polish them, to make sure they fit with the President's position on various issues. Now that was the way I viewed it.

Then there were other things that we wanted to dominate the day on, such as the President's official schedule, his domestic travels or travels around Washington, highlighting an issue, highlighting a policy, highlighting a person or whatever. That was something we were not being reflexive but we were being proactive in trying to get out front. And you did that in different ways. We had a very expert advance office that was able to put the President in places that highlighted things. We did it first and then Reagan did it better than we did it.

MK: Of course, as an actor, he had such a sense of scene. You just can't beat that.

- GW: So there were those two things and implicit in that is defending the White House and defending the President from charges that were made or were embodied in questions. I used to tell the members of the White House staff there are no bad questions, there are only bad answers; the worst thing we can do is get angry at the question or the questioner and forget that we have to get the truth out or—this was before we knew what spin was—at least our side of the story.
- MK: It's very much the same in a way. Maybe some of the techniques are different. There's more sophistication now on figuring out just what will sell, what's in the public mind. You had two briefings a day?
- GW: It started out that way.
- MK: When did it go to one?
- GW: It was in the Watergate time. In times of stress we were always late for the eleven o'clock. So you have a briefing at twelve or one; you don't want to come right back and have another one. So you would have information opportunity at two o'clock, three o'clock, four o'clock, whatever. You would set the time. Then, if there's anything to announce, you'd hand it out at that time and you'd update the President's schedule at that time and give them the schedule for the next day, so far as you could at the time, and get all of that out.
- MK: That was the afternoon?
- GW: That was the afternoon. Sometimes we'd just post things. Then I would wait for them to come into my office and say what about this, what about that; then I'd have to deal with those things.
- MK: Would they come in together?
- GW: Sometimes they would. And then they would demand to see the Press Secretary. If I was told to handle it, I would keep them down there where we were, right off the Press Office.
- MK: So you were in the lower press.
- GW: I was in that first office right outside the press room.
- MK: Do you remember the discussions about creating that press area and what went into it?
- GW: I remember some of them.
- MK: Can you talk about that?
- GW: Sure. The first idea was to move the press over to the Executive Office Building and connect it to a briefing room, where the pool was, by underground tunnel. When the word got out among the senior correspondents in the Washington press corps they were outraged that we were further isolating them in the EOB; then we're treating them like laboratory rats and summoning them through a tunnel and not have them in the White House; they've always been in the White House; it's their right to be in the White House. Even the good guys from our standpoint, not partisans but objective members of the press who were veterans, were aghast at this idea, so it was dropped and they were squeezed in that area that they're in now.

MK: The quarters are small.

GW: They would have much more comfortable quarters in the EOB but it wouldn't have worked. They couldn't stake out the West Wing. It would be more difficult. The idea was to sort of sanitize that area. You would have avoided all the messy stand-uppers and that sort of thing.

MK: Was the idea behind it not one just of organization, how to get the press better quarters, but to get them away from seeing who the visitors were that were coming in?

GW: Get them away from the West Wing. Get them out of the West Wing entrance, where they used to see everybody who came into the White House, except for those who would come in downstairs or through the diplomatic entrance. And so they wouldn't fall asleep in the White House furniture in the entrance to the White House. One reporter from a major Midwestern newspaper used to fall asleep after lunch every day out there. Ambassadors would come in, visiting dignitaries.

MK: Who was it?

GW: I'm not supposed to tell you that.

MK: Okay.

GW: He's no longer alive. He was a wonderful, old guy with the *Chicago Tribune*.

MK: I guess they generally would be a messy lot, particularly after television comes, because you have so many wires and everything. If you've seen the briefing room recently it's—

GW: I haven't seen it recently.

MK: Well, there was a pool agreement on the use of cables, that fell apart, so now everybody has their own cable. So when you cable the East Room it's a set of eight cables, and they would lay them out and pull them back for each event. Although recently I think they've agreed on a way of having the cables sort of hung around so they don't have to be laid out and pulled back the whole time.

GW: What a mess.

MK: But the laying of cable is—I was very surprised; I followed that operation one day. It just shows the difficulty of taking the White House, a nineteenth century building—

GW: Can you imagine if I were press secretary and said, "All right, boys and girls. We're going to make it easy for you. We're going to lay cable and all you have to do in the East Room is plug in and this cable will go where you want it to go." "That means that you control our cable." "Well, we put it in." "Well, that means you can cut us off." They wouldn't like that a bit. I can imagine there were the same discussions when they made it more sightly out on the West Lawn where they do their stand-ups where they buried cable.

MK: Yes, they did bury cable, but they buried it in the area that is across that little driveway. They were in the process of doing that when the Lewinsky story came, and they moved everybody over to the other side while they were getting that done. Then when the Lewinsky story came, one of the things that was clear is you could actually confine people to that area. If

they had been on the other side they would have been up to the steps of the residence, because there were a huge number of people that came. They came from all over the world.

GW: When Barry Goldwater and John Rhodes and Hugh Scott, the Republican leader in the Senate—John Rhodes, leader in the House—visited the White House on August 7, I think, at which time Barry Goldwater told the President if impeachment came to the Senate he would have one or two votes maybe, everybody in town knew that they were there because you can't keep something like that secret. If they come from the Hill to the White House, people know about it. So Ziegler said I want you to take them out to meet the press after this is all over. So Bill Timmons and I and this wonderful attorney from Phoenix whose name escapes me right now—he was on the staff, a great help—we walked them out. I remember going out the door of the West Wing and there they were. The whole yard was filled with the press crops.

MK: Was it in front of the door where the Marine is now?

GW: On the White House side. Not on the west side but on the east side of the driveway. That's the only place you can handle those folks.

MK: That's where the cables are—

GW: The microphones were all there. Somehow the *Post* had a photographer up in a tree, I guess, or way up on a tall ladder, shot down showing us coming out of the White House and the crowd. It ran six columns by twelve on page one of the *Post* the next morning.

MK: How many people do you think were there?

GW: Hundreds. Hundreds of people. And then that wasn't the end of it. There were people outside watching. The fascination from the public was amazing. Day and night there were people out there watching, expecting something to happen.

[Interruption]

MK: The briefing today is, I think, substantially different than it was at that time.

GW: It must be.

MK: A couple weeks ago—I think it was a couple weeks; it might have been last week—at the top of the briefing there were not many people and [Joe] Lockhart joked that they were going to give frequent flyer miles for people who came to the briefing. Now, with C-Span, people can watch it back in their offices on a delay, or they can get a transcription that comes from the Federal News Service, I think, that's fairly quick. Since it's often put off for one reason or another—

GW: How big is the delay on C-Span?

MK: It depends on whether the House is in session. It's not a set amount of time. But if the Congress is out, then it can come on pretty quickly. They'll do [Robert] Rubin's briefing first, and then do Lockhart's. They tend to do both of them, actually. Often what happens now is, news is dropped, because of the nature of the cycle, just all day long.

GW: Whenever it happens, it happens.



MK: Yes. Because then they have to respond to it and they also will just bring people out. Now because of all the cameras on what is called “Pebble Beach” that are just on all the time—there must be twelve or sixteen of them—they can just take somebody out. For example, if something financial is happening, Rubin sometimes came out and talked to, say, the CNBC person. So you can get it into a specialized stream very quickly. Gene Sperling comes out a lot. They have a lot of people who come out.

GW: What we would have to do is tell the wires that we were going to bring out a Treasury type or an economic type and then give them a couple hours so that people could come in who wanted to come in from Treasury to cover it. So there was a delay. We would do that; we would have briefings over there both domestic and foreign but we would have to give them plenty of time, plenty of notice.

MK: When you had to put calls out, you actually had to physically make calls to all of these—

GW: We would make the calls. The secretaries would get on the phone and we would get on the phone and call people.

MK: How many people would you call?

GW: Well, I should have brought a call list. It’s an eight-by-ten sheet printed on both sides of the regulars. On one side were the regulars.

MK: Could you Xerox it and send it to me?

GW: If I can find it. I gave most of my stuff to the Hoover Institution; some of it is tied up with the Nixon Papers. Some of it is at the University of San Diego; they wanted my San Diego papers, and they have that. I don’t know that I still have a copy here. Connie would have one. Have you talked to Connie?

MK: I did for *Portraying the President*. I haven’t talked to her since then. Is she living in the Washington area? I remember she got married.

GW: That didn’t last very long.

MK: Is she back to Connie Gerard?

GW: Back to Gerard, living on the Hill, living in the same apartment on the Hill. And her mother was with her. I don’t know if her mother is still alive.

MK: Good. I will call her.

GW: She would be very, very helpful.

MK: She’s very, very nice, very helpful; just excellent. Well, what they do today is just pagers. So you get paged for all sorts of things. And now the pagers read things so you can read on the pager. So it’s much easier to get hold of reporters.

GW: How do you get something into that system? Do you have to do it individually?

MK: No. You just blanket it. You do the whole thing at one time.

GW: I'll tell you how advanced we were not. It wasn't until Bill Roberts came in from the Hill with radio and television experience with the Ford administration—

MK: I remember him.

GW: —that we put announcements on a telephone answering thing. So if you wanted to know what the President's schedule was you called a separate number and the recording would have it. Before that, in the Nixon years, the girls [inaudible] would have to go through the President's schedule and answer any questions they had. So we didn't have any of that stuff. We were still putting out the briefing by almost antiquated reproduction. I was still reading the briefing on—

MK: Ditto paper.

GW: Yes. Almost. Then they would take that and make corrections on it, my corrections, and then they'd run it through this thing. It was not automated but it was electrical so it would run fast. But sometimes on our trips we would have to crank it because we couldn't get the right wattage or whatever.

MK: Did you have a voice recording that had the pieces of the President's speeches or anything like that?

GW: No.

MK: I think Carter was the first one that did that.

GW: I think so too.

MK: AP [Associated Press] is used now as then, too, to put things in to the bloodstream quickly because you can get it so much farther. CNN, you can use internationally. You can target things now. To give you an idea of how fast things are, the morning after the TWA plane went down, the President had—there had been no presidential response the night before. I think it happened maybe at eight-thirty or nine. So there was no presidential response. So at the gaggle that morning at the top of the gaggle—

GW: That's before the briefing.

MK: Yes. The gaggle in a sense is the first briefing. It's informal. I think particularly in a partisan environment it is an opportunity that can take some of the heat out of the relationship; negotiation can occur over when the President is going to come out to speak and that sort of thing which can't be done on the record.

GW: And then there's an early response too if he wants it on the record.

MK: That's right. And they don't allow—they have recorders, people can have their recorders but they can't use the sound. They can just use the text. So [Mike] McCurry at the top of the gaggle gave the President's response. At the end of the gaggle I was walking from his office down to the lower press office--there's a monitor that has CNN on all the time—and Wolf Blitzer was finishing his standup. I thought how is that possible; he can't be out there; I saw him in the room. But after McCurry gave his statement he went out the other door and just split out the back door and out on the lawn, and here he was finishing up his statement as the gaggle was finishing. It just gives you a sense of the speed. And, of course,

- what comes with it is the problem of error, of trying to haul back mistakes. Was that something that even in a slower technical time was a problem?
- GW: Was it ever. The biggest was on that—I don't think it was that trip; I think it was a later trip to England, not that February of 1969, but a later trip to England. Harold Wilson was the prime minister. So the President met him at Mendenhall Air Force base in England, wherever that is. The subject was Vietnam I'm sure, if memory serves. There was a huge gaggle of European and British press as well as traveling press corps, 150 or so. I'd have to go back and check the record on which trip it was. It may have been that first February trip. We had a transcriber who had obviously been on other trips with other presidents meeting with other prime ministers. So he transcribed the arrival remarks, the exchange of remarks between the President and the Prime Minister Harold McMillan. I read it and didn't catch it. It was supposed to be Wilson. It looked all right to me. I wasn't thinking or I was overworked or whatever. We handed that out in the hangar where the press were gathered and the roars were unbelievable. Then we sent the girls out to try to get them back but of course we couldn't. The British took this as a personal insult; we insulted the Labor Prime Minister by calling him by the name of his Tory predecessor. There was no way to recover from something [like that]. It made the press and there was a cartoon in one of the tabloids.
- MK: What kind of news did you put out in the briefing, in your main briefing? You were talking about the schedule and the other stuff in the other—
- GW: Well, the President's schedule was always a part of it, who he was meeting with, what they were going to talk about and the trips that were upcoming; any nominations, any bills sent to the Congress, any bills received from the Congress; any veto or signing; and then whatever domestic or foreign initiative he wanted to put out at that particular time.
- MK: Would you most often start with a statement?
- GW: Yes. Almost always. There were times when we said we'd go directly to questions and that usually was when they were itching to ask. You knew they were going to come.
- MK: Today, because news is put out all day long, what happens in the briefing is the news has already been announced before the briefing comes. So then the briefing starts often with no statement and it takes a political bent pretty quick. Part of what's happened is I think the acrimony that exists in the briefing really comes out of the fact that there is not a lot to announce. So you end up then in reaction to what occurred earlier. With the kind of acrimony there is with the Hill then—
- GW: Well, there's a lot more politics being played out of the White House press office than we were allowed to do even if we wanted to. We didn't. But you responded politely to the Hill. Whether you felt that or not, you never took them on.
- MK: Was there any discussion of doing it the other way?
- GW: Not where I was involved. I'm sure there were. I'm sure Colson wanted Ziegler to go out there and raise hell. But, by and large, that just wasn't done. When he did question the motives of the *Washington Post*, it ruined him.
- MK: How did it ruin him?
- GW: He couldn't brief anymore. They went to him and said, "Ron, you made a terrible mistake."

MK: Who did?

GW: The members of the press. “You’ve made a terrible mistake and it’s affected your credibility.”

MK: Do you remember who from the press?

GW: No, I don’t.

MK: What had he said?

GW: I don’t even remember.

MK: It’s funny, because I don’t either.

GW: He said in effect that there was a vendetta by the *Washington Post* to [inaudible] the President of the United States; something that would be very mild today.

MK: Yes. I remember his saying that it was a third-rate burglary, which actually had been in response to a question. I don’t remember whose question it was.

GW: I don’t either.

MK: But it’s always kind of a caution—

GW: It happens like that, though.

MK: —when you say Ron, that it was a third-rate burglary.

GW: Bob Pierpoint asking in the briefing—that third-rate burglary briefings was in Key Biscayne. We were mystified by that; we couldn’t figure it out.

MK: The burglary?

GW: Yes.

KK: That’s right, because it occurred when he was in Key Biscayne.

GW: But the other one, Pierpoint asked him the question—I don’t remember the subject now; you probably do—“Ron, does that make that policy inoperative?”

MK: I remember that.

GW: And he said yes. So inoperative became a quote from Ziegler.

MK: [George] McGovern on [Thomas] Eagleton was asked if he backed him a 1000 per cent and he said yes. One always has to, I guess, be wary on those. How long did the briefings last?

GW: You try to get them over quickly but I was out there for an hour and a half. They didn’t like this; the people in the White House thought I should have been much more curt and peremptory. I just let them vent, get it out. I just stood there, lit my pipe and took it.

MK: Did you have ways that you could play the room?

GW: You try, but it didn't work.

MK: So you can get a breather here and there—but during the worst of Lewinsky, which lasted for a long time, there are reporters that come from abroad and you know what questions they're going to ask. There's a Japanese reporter that's always going to ask about the Japanese economy and the Dow Jones reporter is always interested in issues that relate [to the market]. Do you remember, I think it was the day of the grand jury testimony, "I hate to do this, but I have to get a reaction to the fall of the rupiah." And there were a couple of Irish reporters that came in and did it with them. Then there were specialty people like from *Congress Daily* and others.

GW: Yes. We would do that from time to time. It didn't work; the others would interrupt. I remember at times we would go to Sarah McClenden and she would always have a question about policy or about somebody doing something stupid and did the President know about that. People resented Sarah but I always thought she was wonderful because she was pointing out problems in the administration that the White House probably had no idea about. I tried to avoid the bomb-throwers like that wretched beast—

MK: Les Kinsolving. You know, he's back again.

GW: I know. I hate to say this about a former man of the cloth but I must believe to my dying day that he is evil.

MK: I remember when he came back, I think it was one of the first days he was back, somebody said who is he? I thought, memories are short but they would know before long if he was going to continue to come.

GW: Then there were reporters who had special interests, whatever [inaudible]. And occasionally the subject is changed by someone else, whether you like it or not.

I'll never forget we were in San Clemente, briefing at Laguna, the Surf and Sand [Hotel], during the Supreme Court deliberations about the tapes. Everybody wanted to know how the President was doing and how he was feeling. He had just got back from the Middle East trip and it had become known that the President had suffered an embolism in the Middle East. What was he doing? Was he walking on the beach? Well, he was but we didn't want people to know he was walking. How did he feel? Is he in touch with Jim Sinclair in Washington? Is Sinclair coming out there? All these questions. Then from the rear of the room came this voice, "I want to know about the clot. Tell me about the goddamn clot," and it was Hunter Thompson. Hunter was covering this and his photographer was the now famous—

MK: Annie Leibowitz?

GW: Yes. All he wanted to talk about was the clot, because he thought that was the most important thing happening; the President of the United States has this thing in his blood that can kill him; let's talk about that. Actually no one else wanted to talk about it. Later I thanked Hunter for doing that. Then when I went back to the *San Diego Union* and Hunter was off some place being fired by *Rolling Stone*, he was in Manila or some place, the former President was taken to the hospital, Long Beach Naval Hospital, and almost died of this

embolism. I get this call, collect, from Hunter Thompson, in Manila; naturally I accepted the charges. He said, "See. I told you. It was the goddamn clot that was important." Wonderful character. Wonderful character.

MK: How many people within the White House got copies of the briefing?

GW: All the major offices. The Counsel's Office, the Domestic Council, the Council on Economic Policy, environmental people, liaison people. Anybody with the rank of deputy assistant on up got it.

MK: How fast were they out?

GW: Not too fast in those days because I had to read proof on them while I was doing other stuff. I'd be on the telephone answering a query. The wonderful stenographers would hang on until I finished and then I'd run them off. Finally, toward the end, when I started to brief more, I turned that job over to Tom Decair because he was very conscientious. But I had to train him and get him to the point where I trusted him because I knew how important it was to get that right. Not that I always got it right.

MK: Especially abroad, it can have some real problems.

GW: The main push on getting transcripts out was always on the press conference and on the speech. What we did on a press conference was put it out rough and dirty so everybody got it. Then I would go over the whole thing and then we would put out the official copy. Everyone was told this was a first draft, dirty copy. Sometimes if it was really hot I would watch it in the stenographers room so as soon as it came out of the typewriter I would get it. We always had three or four stenographers and people there to help get it ready. Major speeches; press conferences.

MK: When did you discuss having press conferences and what were the general arguments about whether to have one?

GW: The argument that Herb mounted was always to have one, regular press conferences, so the press would let the emotion out, wouldn't carry the emotion around. That's how it was described by him, and Ziegler came to that position, too, that it would be a good idea to have a press conference.

MK: But presidents seldom take that advice.

GW: Right.

MW: Why?

GW: I don't know. They get busy. They'd rather not think about it. It does take a lot of preparation.

MW: What kinds of things went into it?

GW: Everything. The briefing book which Pat Buchanan did in the Nixon years and which I did for the first year of the Ford administration—Margita White did it after I did—was very, very complete. Every domestic agency and State, Defense and Treasury would send in their ideas of what the questions were and their proposed answers. The foreign stuff and

intelligence stuff would go through the NSC [National Security Council] and they would tweak it. The other stuff generally would come straight to Buchanan and he would have to tweak it by coming to other effected agencies or he would get the same question answered from different agencies and he would have to work out the differences. Then it went to the President who put in his two cents worth in and then it was revised again after that. Ford never did that. Once we sent it to Ford, he never sent it back.

MK: Was it kept current?

GW: No. You tried to but it's kind of hard to go into the agencies for answers that they know are not going to be used.

MK: Did the President feel he was vulnerable? Was it the vulnerability?

GW: I don't know. He may have. It was agony for him, I know that. You could see it in his face. It was very, very difficult.

MK: What kind of personal preparation did you do with him? Did you do Q&A?

GW: No, not the way Reagan did. They may have done that once but I was never involved in it. I was never involved in sitting down with the President and going over the answers. Even with Ford I was never involved in it.

MK: Did you get questions from reporters? Did they give you questions?

GW: Well, the questions they were asking on a daily basis that were yet unresolved to their satisfaction. You try to anticipate how that question would come at you and what would be the form. It wouldn't be the same identical question; it would be somewhat different. So you wanted to try to anticipate what that would be, the right answers for it. Rather than what is your position on such and such, you'd try to expect the twist. You sometimes were successful, mostly not.

MK: Did reporters ever say to you, if the President wants to talk about subject X, I have a question for him on that?

GW: That happened.

MK: Were things set up in such a way that you knew where everybody was seated, you could put them in a particular place?

GW: Yes.

MK: Did he work from a diagram?

GW: He may have gone over the diagram in advance. He didn't take it with him to the podium. He wanted nothing on the podium. He wanted to be known as someone who responded without notes, without guidance.

MK: Did that go back to Eisenhower and maybe the contrast with Eisenhower?

GW: It may have.

- MK: Hagerty was there and you can see pictures of Eisenhower in the Indian Treaty Room with Hagerty by the table, sitting at the table, and he would said, "Is that right Jim? What do you think about that, Jim?"
- GW: No. That never happened. In those days the President was able to amend the record before it went out.
- MK: But he was on television; it's just that it was used later.
- GW: I know.
- MK: Hagerty did not want to let it out until he could go over it. What were the advantages of press conferences from the discussions that took place about them?
- GW: Well, you deal with a lot of subjects at once. We liked it—sometimes you have a problem getting the President's staff to tell you what his position really is on a certain subject. This focuses it. He's going to give an answer and then he's stuck with that answer. We'd lean on that answer in subsequent briefings or we'd amend it or whatever. It gave us a baseline to work with. From the White House standpoint and the staff, there were things they didn't want him to talk about and there were things perhaps they wanted to push, programs that hadn't been announced yet that they were working on, pet programs, that sort of thing. It was advantageous to have that mentioned at a press conference which really highlighted it.
- MK: Did you feel that the President had any difficulty getting visibility, say, before Watergate came on? Did you have to think through things in a way—?
- GW: You did. You must remember before Watergate came along—and a part of Watergate, I never really separated it from Vietnam; Vietnam was a part of that. It was [on] his mind when he launched the cover-up. [Inaudible]. So Vietnam dominated everything. And it was very soon in his administration that [it] turned sour, that the mobilizations began. So you had to put everything in that context. How do you get something out that is not related to Vietnam and get it some visibility? It was very difficult.
- MK: What were some of the techniques you used?
- GW: Well, we did pretty much the same thing that's being done now. He would go give a speech to a friendly audience. In one case I remember he gave a speech to an unfriendly audience, because he knew it would be covered. And then dramatically he threw away the speech and told George Meany and his hierarchy what he really thought. It was down in Bal Harbor, [Florida]. [Inaudible]; it was all done for effect, but it worked. We got the President's position out and we got visibility for it. [Inaudible] focus was [inaudible]. It was kind of a dramatic moment.
- MK: Was that the President's idea?
- GW: I don't know the answer to that.
- MK: Did you find you got better press when you traveled?
- GW: Yes. Travel focused the mind on the issue you were trying to get across. He'd go to another city to make a speech for an education office—this is what the President does today—or he would go to a group of businessmen and talk about the economy, energy crisis, that sort of



thing; focus the attention. John Ehrlichman started a series of domestic briefings around the country. Major Cabinet heads would be there for a full day briefing in a general area. It might have been Kansas City or wherever.

MK: How many? More than one?

GW: Yes. And the President would come in at lunch or after lunch and visit with the press. That was well covered and allowed him to make some points and explicate his policy. And it worked very well. The one time it didn't work, oddly enough, is when it made the biggest news of all. We were on our way to California in July of 1971 and there was a Domestic Council-arranged briefing for business types in Kansas City. We stopped there. The President is very nervous. When he makes unusual demands on his handlers it's when he's under great pressure and stress. His demand here was he did not want the press in the room when he made the speech. All we could put in the room was a minimum pool, not even a normal pool, a minimum pool; the rest of the press corps had to listen to it over the hotel loudspeaker system. They had to do that because White House communications had not been alerted to this so they couldn't set up their own system.

MK: The mult, yes.

GW: So we're in there. Instead of a domestic speech he does one of his classic tour de horizons of the world; where all the pressure points are. The White House press corps, infuriated by having been kept out of the room, didn't look for the nuances in the speech and they missed it. They were angry, very angry. I remember Jim [inaudible] slammed his notebook down and said, "That's the worst speech I've heard by a president, ever." I wasn't in on the inside either. I didn't know what he had just said either. I was doing my job and answering questions from the press, getting the transcript out, worrying about care and feeding, worrying about getting the filing done and all of that. And there wasn't anybody in any meetings except him and Kissinger.

When we got to San Clemente, I went into the press office in the Surf and Sand Hotel in Laguna Beach. The switchboard was alive. The people who had gone in first to set it up said, "Every Brit in Washington and most of the Asians in Washington are coming to San Clemente. We don't have rooms for them all, but they're coming anyway because they know something's up. What's up?" I didn't know what was up. I went back and read the thing and I did notice that there was some unusual phrasing that I hadn't seen since 1968. But I didn't know. It was at that time that Kissinger was touring the Far East and he was in Islamabad. I was briefing the press that day and I went in to see Haig who was sitting in for Kissinger—Haig was Kissinger's deputy at that time—and I said, "There's a strange thing on the wire about Henry getting sick in Islamabad. Henry never gets sick." He said, "You're walking on eggs out there. You take what the Islamabad embassy said and don't you stray from that. Don't raise an eyebrow; don't do anything. Just repeat that a hundred times if you have to. Just repeat it." I said, "Come on, Al." "That's it. That's all you're getting." So I went out and there was general hooting and hollering about Henry getting sick; Henry never gets sick; Henry doesn't have a stomach. Henry doesn't even get jet lag. But we got away with it, and then it was the next day we announced Henry was coming back and was going to make a major announcement. The President went down to Burbank studios at NBC to say we're going to China next February.

The thing was that our press corps was so angry, because they were deprived of their access, that they missed this whole thing. The Brits didn't miss it. They saw it in his formulation of the tour de horizon, that he was re-emphasizing China, as he had done in that famous

foreign affairs piece he had done while he was out of office. They sensed that. They didn't sense enough to make any predictions on the air or to go with it but they knew they ought to be there to see what was going on.

MK: Do you think that one of the problems here is that members of the White House press corps are people who are generalists? It's a general assignment beat in a way, and mostly a political beat, so you don't have the training, say, in economics, or in foreign policy.

GW: That's right. But a guy like Deakin—

MK: Deakin was strong in economics.

GW: He had been around the block a lot. He covered [Harry S.] Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson. If anybody out there would have known, he might have known. He made all the foreign trips. But he was angry.

MK: So care and feeding of the press corps is a very high priority.

GW: Is it ever! That's how I spent my day and night.

MK: What was your day like? When did it start and what were its rhythms?

GW: Well, the early part of the Nixon years, I was always in by seven. I'd go through the papers.

MK: Which papers did you read?

GW: The *Post*, the *Times*, the *Sun*, the *Journal* and then the wires, the overnight wires. So I would gather the questions I'd think would be asked. Then we'd have a meeting, Ron's first meeting of his staff, in the morning, to talk about the prospective questions. He would give us, me usually, go find this out, find that out, call him, et cetera, and then prepare for the briefing. And I would get answers to all these questions and submit them to Ron in memo form. He would [inaudible] and take them into the President, at least to Haldeman or Ehrlichman or Kissinger and then go on from there.

MK: What time would that be?

GW: By ten. I'd have that all done by ten o'clock. Then he'd say, "Go out in the briefing room and see what's going on; talk to Helen [Thomas], see what she's writing." Well, I couldn't find out what Helen's writing; I can find out what she's interested in, because she's going to ask a question. Sometimes they wouldn't come in and ask the question first thing. If I went out, then they would. [Inaudible]. And you're still blind-sided sometimes. Then the last-minute stuff before the briefing, getting everything ready: do you have a special guest; do you have to get that ready; do [you] have all the releases ready; have you read them all at this time?

MK: Would you put out releases at the time of the briefing?

GW: Yes.

MK: You wouldn't put them out through the day?

GW: No. Sometimes we would post them in the afternoon or hang them out at the information opportunity, non-briefing briefing.

MK: When you were doing two briefings, was there sufficient information for two briefings?

GW: You'd try to save back some announcements, nominations, minor nominations.

MK: For the second one?

GW: Yes.

MK: The first one would be for evening papers?

GW: Yes.

MK: Did you have a special time for television, where they would come in and you'd be accessible for them?

GW: Ron developed that later on, not at first, where he would invite them in and talk to them.

MK: Individually?

GW: No. Together. Unless they had an individual query; then he would see them alone. And he would often see the wires together.

MK: That was after he went to one briefing?

GW: Yes. That one briefing thing just sort of evolved. We were so late often it just didn't make any sense to have another briefing. We would keep the lid off until mid-afternoon when we made all our announcements and we'd make sure we didn't have a special guest to bring out from one of the departments.

MK: If you had somebody to do a briefing like the Surgeon General to come over and talk about a vaccine, you would do that at a briefing?

GW: Yes. Usually if I was a really hot topic we'd do it at the beginning. If it was the Surgeon General, not declaring war on the [inaudible], something else, we'd say, this briefing is over; now we're going to bring out so and so. And most people would leave.

MK: Would they leave because they wanted to file and they weren't allowed to get up to file?

GW: Right.

MK: Once the briefing room was changed around and the new one was created, was the downstairs in the press room, the area that has radio, was it there?

GW: No.

MK: Everything was at the same level?

GW: We created that downstairs. We dug it and built it because we—.

MK: But it was done during Nixon.

GW: Yes. And it was done right off the bat.

MK: Was the mult piped in down there?

GW: Yes.

MK: And was the briefing piped in over the mult?

GW: Not to begin with. That came later.

MK: I know that becomes a problem for filing because all people have to do is stay back and then you can beat everybody.

GW: That's right.

MK: What else happened during your day?

GW: Well, we were always planning a trip of some sort. We were always taking people early on in to the President's office to photograph a meeting, into the Cabinet Room to photograph a meeting with the Cabinet, or presidential remarks to somebody. Or you were taking them out to the Rose Garden or the East Room while you were preparing for briefings and doing your other stuff. That just had to be done. That was a part of it.

Preparing for foreign trips was very time-consuming because you'd have to talk to the advance people and oversee the schedule, a tough schedule. Something always happened to surprise you. I remember Salinger told us about when we were preparing for the February trip in 1969, he told us about a fist fight he got into with one of the Italian policemen, one of those big carbonieri, because he wouldn't let the U.S. press corps go where the Italians were going. It's not big news but you want to have equal access and your people are going to be upset if the Italians are [inaudible], or whatever. We knew that, and our advance people knew that. Our advance people had what we thought was an ironclad agreement with the Italians that they would come in this way, but when the pool arrived the Italians went around this way, and the pool went in this way. They had to walk upstairs and in the back [inaudible]. By the time we got up there, the Italians were finished and there were pictures. Our guys were really upset. And it happens all the time.

So when we went back—we had two trips to Italy. One trip was an official trip to visit the Prime Minister; the second trip was to see the Pope because in those days the Pope wasn't recognized by a lot of people, including the Italian government [inaudible]. So we went back to see the Pope and on one of our visits to the Pope we snuck a microphone into the meeting with the President and the Pope. I think this was the second meeting. A lot of people in there; Rosemary Woods, a devout Catholic, and other Catholics went in. And we sent a Walkman in with a microphone. So, before the Italians were able to get out the official record of the conversation, we put it out, and they were deeply offended that we had violated the sanctity of the Pope's private office. At least we got out before the Italians for once.

MK: And the press corps must have been grateful on that one.

GW: They were. They were, indeed. But I'll tell you, all of my times in doing transcripts, that was the most difficult. The Pope's accent was very heavy, it was spoken in English in a very heavy accent. I had to go over it and over it until I was somewhat sure that we had it correct.

MK: Did you have to go to receptions and that sort of thing? Were you expected to do that in the evening?

GW: Yes. Well, if the President had an evening reception or dinner, entertainment or something, the press would be there for a certain part of it. We would have to take them in and bring them out again.

MK: Was there something every day where the President would be visible?

GW: At first there was.

MK: When did that change?

GW: It began to change in the height of Vietnam; it really got bad after Kent State. It got very ugly. Then it eased up again after the peace settlement in January of 1973. Then when Watergate broke [inaudible].

MK: Did you ever pull together the materials you would use to prepare for the briefing and send those materials around anywhere?

GW: No.

MK: Did the State Department do that?

GW: They may have. I don't know.

MK: That was something McCurry brought over from the State Department.

GW: So he did that.

MK: Yes. He did it in the White House. He did it at the State Department and then at the White House.

GW: Who used that?

MK: He would send it around to various offices so they would know what information was being gathered and what the various positions are. But he indicated that most people on the staff said that they had already listened to his briefing and they didn't care too much for it, although it must in certain forms be important, when they're looking at a policy.

GW: I think if you're into the nuances of the policy and what led up to the statement and the briefing, that would be important. We always figured they could read the briefing.

MK: Did the President respond to the briefing?

GW: He may have, to Ron. He did to me, once. It was in the period leading up to the peace settlement in Paris, December, 1972. The entire hierarchy of the White House staff took off

on vacation. They happened to all get rides on an airplane to Palm Springs of all places. Ziegler was there and I think Haldeman was there and Ehrlichman, Kissinger. Haig was in Vietnam. The President was [inaudible]. I was running the Press Office. Colonel Richard Kennedy was running the National Security Office. He called me in on a Friday and said tomorrow, you're going to announce this, and he handed me [inaudible]. He said Henry Kissinger is coming back to Paris to meet with [inaudible] because the talks had been broken off. He told me this on a Friday and we flew in a government helicopter up to Camp David where the President was to go over the questions, follow-up questions. That's the first time it ever happened to me. And the President was really open to [inaudible], understood that there would be follow-up questions. So it worked very well. Ziegler and Kissinger on the telephone in California were really upset because I was doing this. The President wanted to do this right away; they all thought it could wait until they got home. But Kennedy and I seemed to handle it all right.

The only thing that happened from a personal standpoint was I made the announcement that Friday that we were having an unusual Saturday briefing. I didn't say unusual but they knew it was unusual. They were all buzzing about it. Someone thought it was a cessation of bombing for Tet. We were still bombing in Hanoi and Hai Phong harbor. I went to a dinner party that night at the Madison, in a private room, for a friend's wife's birthday. He was giving a dinner party. I was seated next to the number two man at the Russian embassy, who was our friend's friend. I had talked to him a couple times. I was still all a-twitter about this thing I was going to do the next day, for various reasons: one, the nervousness with Palm Springs; two, the fact that it was a fairly significant thing, a lot of hopes and prayers rode on that. So this guy leans over to me and says, "I know what you're going to say tomorrow." I thought to myself he just might, but I was just struck. He caught me so by surprise. I said what if he does know; I've had dinner with this guy. I've got to come clean first thing in the morning and tell the NSC and the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] liaison that I had this dinner with this Russian official. I did. He later said he didn't know; he was trying to goad me into telling him. But he did think it was the cessation of bombing for the Tet holiday. It just struck fear right down through my marrow.

MK: How many people showed up the next day?

GW: A lot. There were fifty people. Fifty people was a lot in those days for a Saturday when you didn't know the subject. It was heavily foreign policy types, because they figured it had something to do with Vietnam. The stars were aligned. They knew that Haig was in Vietnam. They knew that something was going on over there. I was briefing them about something. And it was a thrill to make the announcement. This thing from our standpoint, from the Nixon standpoint, was over; it was finally over and he did it the way he said he was going to do it, through diplomacy, backed up by heavy bombing.

MK: Did you get a lot of questions?

GW: Yes. And it went very well, because both Kennedy and I were prepared.

MK: During your week, was there time to look at long-range planning?

GW: Very little. Just from a trip standpoint. If you have an advance team in China or the Soviet Union, you have conversations with them. You're doing long-range planning for that trip and getting the schedule set. But there is very little time to sit down and say, let's think about next week or the week after. There were groups that had those types of meetings in the White House. There was a schedule group that said all right, what should he be doing

next week; what should he be pushing; what is the line? Ron went to those every once in a while; I never did.

MK: How many people were there in the office, in the lower press, upper press and then communications?

GW: There were two offices down there, plus our little cubbyhole. So there was room for three quasi-professionals and then administrative support, three or four, down in the lower press office. So there were maybe six down there. Up above, there'd be three other professionals up there, and four administrative for backup. Then there would be the—later on we had the National Security Council deputy, who translated Henry's utterances for the Press Office. Then we had the Domestic Council guy, who had an office over in the EOB. So that was about it.

MK: The professionals, what did each of them do? You had one NSC person. Was that Les Janka?

GW: That was Les Janka. And, after Les, it was Andrew Falcabich, who then went over to the CIA with George Bush. I guess he went first to USIA [United States Information Agency] and then CIA, or maybe it was the other way around.

Well, the two guys downstairs were supposed to be my backups, doing releases, taking the press out, getting them set up in advance, getting the notices out, getting the schedule out, that sort of thing. It usually ended up that one guy and I did the whole thing and the other guy was just there. It wasn't his fault; it just happened that way. Upstairs you had an advance person, plus another administrative professional type, helping Ron's side of it, and keeping his paper flow going. The advance guy and the other guy upstairs would be very helpful in positioning the press, getting them out for a photo opportunity, getting them out in the Rose Garden, and set up early on for a bill signing, or something like that.

When we first moved in, before they built the lower office, my office was right next to Ron's. There was a doorway into my office from his office and then there was a doorway out to the hall, the hall you now take to get down below. Then there were two other offices up there. So Jim Melbourne had an office; Bruce Weilhan had an office. Jim was the advance guy; Bruce was more of the administrative type. My office; then Ron. Then Alan Woods was the young substance fellow [inaudible] domestic stuff. He had to sit out in the hall because there was no room for him until we built the office downstairs. Then, when they built that, they enlarged Ron's office. They brought him in from the hallway, took away his bathroom, expanded it a little toward where I used to sit. So they ended up with just two offices. [Inaudible]. The bathroom ended up across the hall. So it took quite a bit of his space which was [inaudible] because that office was used for the general briefing [inaudible] eleven o'clock briefing, unless it was a special subject; then they'd have it in the Roosevelt Room. [Inaudible] the Fish Room because that's where Teddy Roosevelt kept his fish and Franklin Roosevelt kept his fish. Because it was important to the Roosevelts, Nixon called it the Roosevelt Room.

MK: It does have more cachet than "Fish." You don't know if you should wear your hip boots or what.

GW: You have a briefing in the Fish Room.

MK: What did you see being the difference when you moved from briefing the press in the old informal quarters to moving it downstairs? Was there an immediate change?

GW: There was. When you're separated by a desk, it's one thing. You still feel like you're a part of the place; there's more camaraderie across that desk. When you're down in the formal briefing room and the briefer is up on the dais behind a podium, then there's a real separation. Then it's more of a feeding session than a collegial give-and-take.

MK: Did it affect the way that reporters asked questions?

GW: They became more formal, some of them. Dan Rather, when we moved down there, preceded almost every question by "Mr. Secretary." Of course, we had some wonderful characters covering us then. John Osborne [inaudible].

MK: Yes.

GW: The voice of civility in the White House press room. He really was upset at the lack of civility [inaudible] Vietnam and Watergate. Peter Lisagor very dignified but tough at the same time. But there was a sense that the Press Secretary is standing up there talking down to us; we're not a part of it anymore; we're now a conduit. I think there was an effect.

MK: Were there things that you had to do to try to buff that edge that developed from it?

GW: We tried. The first Christmas after we were in there—I don't know whether that was 1969 or 1970; must have been 1969 because we did that fairly quickly—Ron told me to go to some of the regulars who were the good guys, and tell them to stick around. This was Christmas Eve or New Year's Eve. So it was Frank Cormier at AP and Helen, Doug Cornell of AP, some of the network people. He told me there were a few people that I could not talk to. One was—off the record; is she still around—

[Off the record].

MK: That's wonderful.

GW: Finally, I said, "Ron, what's going on?" He said, "The President wants us to invite these people over to his hideaway office over in the EOB, for a drink to celebrate the season." I said neat; that's terrific. So I skulked around and talked to the good guys very quietly, and avoided Trudy. I got them over there. It almost became a disaster because he was [inaudible] man and that was fine, but it was the first time I had seen him drink. He had no capacity. He couldn't have—he was proud of Manolo's martinis. He said Manolo makes the best martinis in the world. So a couple of guys had martinis and so did he. It began to affect him. I wondered about him later on, whether he had a problem. He didn't have a problem; he was just affected [inaudible] by a drink.

MK: What did he do or say?

GW: His jocularly rose an octave or two. He was just trying to be a good guy and that's not—as they say over and over again, he wasn't much for small talk but he was trying to make small talk with these people. There was almost a forced gaiety to it. It was interesting.

MK: How did the reporters respond?



- GW: Fine. They were touched that he wanted to do that. They were honored to be part of it. This was early in the administration. They all were looking for insights into the man, what's he really like? So something like this is invaluable to them. That's the last time that happened, though.
- MK: I was going to say: were there other off-the-record meetings that the President had with groups of reporters?
- GW: No. I don't think so, unless I've forgotten [inaudible].
- MK: Did any of that meeting come out?
- GW: Yes, it did. Later on.
- MK: How long did it take?
- GW: Well, it was talked about almost immediately. And then Ron got asked questions about, was the President drunk? The President of the United [States] was tired, he had a drink, and he was relaxing; he wasn't really drinking. I believe that, today, that was true. As far as I know he did not have a drinking problem, except that he shouldn't have drunk too much because he was easily affected by it.
- MK: Clinton has tried some off-the-record meetings with reporters and the inevitable occurs; it comes out in very short order.
- GW: [Inaudible].
- MK: There's just no off-the-record with the President. Anything a president does is news.
- GW: The other thing that was interesting was this whole question of background briefings. We were still honoring the Linley rule and things like that in those days. The Linley rule was deep, deep background briefings when you could write "the President is known to believe" but you can't quote anybody. We used background a lot for Kissinger. You may remember that the *Post* finally got its back up, Ben Bradlee said enough of that and told Carroll Kilpatrick if ever another briefing was on background he had to get up and leave; he couldn't stay; I'm not going to accept anything else on background from that damn White House. Well, that lasted about a week. There's just too much stuff going on and it's in his benefit, Carroll's benefit; he was missing too much. He had to get it second- and third-hand. I think that will always be around and, generally, it's honored.
- MK: They've been doing more and more on-the-record. When people come to the podium they make it on-the-record with their names—
- GW: That's the way it should be.
- MK: —and doing a transcript. It didn't seem to have any problems with it. They would make things not easy to cover when they had to release large amounts of information. Five hundred pages at a time.
- GW: The budgets, of course. There was always a problem with the budgets. One time the *Star* got the budget early. It came out in the afternoon and the briefing was the next day. It

drove the *Times* and *Post* crazy. We never did find out how they got it. The story that got around, that I never really believed, was that it fell off a truck. It fell off the turnip truck.

MK: What about a typist or a printer?

GW: That was a deep suspicion, the printer. It's being revised right up to the moment it goes to the printer.

MK: Did you all try to take a story and work it for several days at a time?

GW: Occasionally.

MK: How would you do it?

GW: Stressing at the briefing, or calling on reporters, saying, this thing we announced yesterday, people have missed this aspect; you ought to look in to this side of it.

MK: So the briefing would be at the top; that would be the initial strategy.

GW: Yes.

MK: So in a sense the briefing does cleanup today because—

GW: Because everything's out beforehand.

MK: Yes. What they do is say they drop the story to the *Post* or the *Times*. What that buys them is it buys them higher coverage. If it's an exclusive, it gets them better coverage. So they give it on an exclusive basis, depending on what it is. Say if it's something that deals with high tech or even medical advances, *USA Today* likes that kind of stuff; they love computer stuff. So computer stuff goes to *USA Today*. And the *Wall Street Journal* gets its kind of stuff. But they will have that; that gets on the front page, so they get that day. Often the television will take it from that, too.

GW: I think they do that better than anybody ever has. We didn't do that enough, place a story before the event. The departments did from time to time and I never knew whether Herb maneuvered that or whether it happened outside his knowledge. I think it's a really good idea. Of course, the other reporters get very upset when that happens and the *Post* gets a break on something.

MK: Today, in a way, it's just accepted.

GW: Is it really?

MK: People may growl some but it—

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MK: —maybe ultimately the Nixons will have a presidential library.

[Interruption]

MK: Hopefully we're going to be able to figure a way of putting it into the computer as well so that we have more than one copy. My concern right now is just having one copy. My transcriber is in North Carolina and so I FedEx everything so that I can have a record in case something gets lost. I've never thought anything got lost at FedEx until I read about the SAT's in California which they lost and people had to take over again.

GW: Do you make copies?

MK: What I do is, within the group of people who are studying the offices, I give it to them. When I get it, then I take off-the-record stuff—I have that as a separate transcript and then I send one that has been excised. You'll get a copy of the transcript and you can go over it.

GW: Thank you.

MK: Where were we? So they've been able to figure out how to move a story for several days. I think part of the reason is it's just a natural conflict between reporters who want something new all the time and a White House that has to focus in order to get—particularly in a time like today when people are not interested in Washington and politics, you have to make a message resonate, and that's what they've done.

GW: It's my experience and my memory that most of the leaks were not coordinated leaks from the White House. They came out of Kissinger's office or the departments. Then we were placed in a position of catching up and answering the questions like everyone else who didn't get it and trying to hold them off until the briefing. Ron wanted to control everything through the briefing. It's impossible to do that. It was virtually impossible to do that but we tried. I don't know why we never got the idea of doing it all ourselves, placing it the day before, get it out in its entirety. It makes a lot of sense.

MK: Often when you can give it on that basis you have more cards.

GW: You sure do.

MK: So the opposition doesn't come in in that story. You sort of can set it out the way you want it—

GW: Exactly.

MK: —and then have the President come in with a speech, a statement, all the relevant department secretaries.

GW: Which tends to override the opposition.

MK: And then bring the cabinet secretary into the briefing room after the event for more information. Then they do packets, too, of information, that's backup, all the statistics, so they can use that in their copy.

GW: We started doing that about midway in the Nixon administration, putting out fact sheets. It makes so much sense. It really is a service to the reporter too.

MK: It works for both sides well and then you get the story straight. Did it improve the quality of reporting, the accuracy of it?

GW: I think so. At least for those who took the trouble to read it.

MK: If you had it to go over again, going into the White House, is there anything that you would have done differently?

GW: Well, I hope so, because I sure made a lot of mistakes.

MK: What kind of mistakes?

GW: Well, I've told you three or four of them. Just mistakes of not having any experience and doing it for the first time. If you have experience, then you're not surprised by things that happen. Also, I think the specter of Vietnam, and the power of Watergate, really affected those of us who saw it, some of us more than others. Perhaps I let it affect me too much and if I had this thing to do all over again, I would try to have more of a life outside the White House than I did. Everything was concentrated around it.

MK: How many hours did you work there a day and [what] days of the week?

GW: Well, when you're in town, you work at least six days a week and when you're on the road, you work seven. During the week we were almost always there for fifteen, sixteen, seventeen hours a day, sometimes more.

MK: Even at the beginning?

GW: No. But as soon as that first trip was over. And in preparing for the trip, sometimes we worked all night. We didn't leave the office some nights, because we were trying to put this whole thing together, and we didn't know what in the world we were doing.

MK: Saturdays?

GW: Yes. Almost every Saturday. I tried to take Sunday off. But even then you were off—during Vietnam I was getting up at five o'clock in the morning and getting the wires and the networks on conference calls and announcing to them that Kissinger had just left for the Middle East or Kissinger had just left for Paris to meet with [Inaudible]. We used to do that a lot. I think this whole business that has affected some White Houses more than others and I think is something to guard against is the, "them versus us." Carter went through that; others have as well. I think the equanimity factor has to come into play here and you have to recognize that politics is important and is vital but there are a lot of other aspects in life that are important as well, and if we make too much of our own role and everything becomes so important to the exclusion of other things, then the opposition that is normal in today's politics, even a quarter of a century ago, becomes more evil, and that shouldn't happen. That shouldn't happen. You see it again now. The divisions in Washington right now are, I think, dangerous, as they were in the Watergate days. I would hope that, if I were reincarnated and had some experience in that White House, I would learn to put things into perspective a little bit better.

MK: It seems to be pretty hard for people to do.

GW: It's terribly hard because you sign on to work for a president and therefore you believe in him or her, as the case may be in the future. And you want that person to prevail; you want that person to be right, because you feel that the country has confidence in that person's guidance and leadership. I'll tell you, in situations like impeachment or in situations like the

mobilizations against the Vietnam War, where you're the target of people throwing projectiles at the White House, it's rough; it's hard to have that kind of equanimity.

MK: What are the benefits of working there?

GW: Well, the experience of being a part of the government, in the heart of the government, at its best, and at its worst, is invaluable. That experience is unbelievable. You learn so much about our country and about us as a people, about our strengths and our weaknesses and how our weaknesses are not ever strong enough to weaken the form of government that our forefathers gave us. We've seen bad policies and suspect people and all sorts of things and the system seems to be able to survive, which is terrific. To be a part of that is a great honor and a privilege, and it's an experience that you can't duplicate any place else. I suppose to members of the staff it's like they've been to war with their colleagues; they're comrades; there's that camaraderie with people in the White House then that I run into now and who are great friends. That's wonderful. I'm sure it's the same way in any White House. And that's good.

Also, to get back to your purposes, there is also a great understanding of what the present people are going through, whether you are fond of their policies or not. You know what they're going through, and you can appreciate when they do it better than you do. McCurry certainly did it so much better than we did. Much better.

MK: How did you see they did it better, other than the ways you've—?

GW: Well, I think, equanimity is one thing. McCurry kept his cool in ways that were admirable. I think his ability to use humor in dark hours was very important, which we could not bring ourselves to do, because we were so embattled and, to a certain extent, embarrassed.

MK: Do you think it's easier for somebody who comes in, within a term, to do that?

GW: I don't know. No, I don't think that's necessary. I look at Marlin [Fitzwater]. Marlin didn't have [a] great crisis; he came close, though, with Iran-Contra. But he held his equanimity and he kept his humor. So I don't think it's necessary to come in from the outside. I think being, in Marlin's case, almost a civil servant in the specialty, rather than coming in from the political side is helpful. And the experience McCurry got at the State Department is wonderful, because they really know how to do it at the State Department. They know how to maintain their cool and handle things with tact but with severity, when it's necessary.

MK: Their press corps is different and it's very—

GW: Not even Lester could change that, although he tried.

MK: Specialty-oriented.

GW: Well, what do you think?

MK: I think we're pretty finished. I appreciate it.

[End of Disc 2 of 2]