

Ruth Young Watt

Chief Clerk, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, 1948-1979

Interview #2:
Truman-era Investigations
(September 7, 1979)
Interviewed by Donald A. Ritchie



Ruth Watt with unknown witness, ca 1951. *Senate Historical Office*

Ritchie: The last time we talked about the first year you were with the committee, when it was a special committee. At the time you were hired you were told it was just a one-year job, but at the end of that year they set up the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, early in 1948. Did you have any second thoughts at all about staying on with the committee?

Watt: It never occurred to me. I enjoyed what I was doing because I always liked being in finances; even at the hospital I had worked on donations. No, I liked it. It was an adjustment of course from doctors to senators when I first came in 1947. They kept the people on from the War Investigating Committee that they wanted and the rest they let go.

Ritchie: Was there very much of a rearrangement of the staff or staff assignments?

Watt: No, not really. Many of the men had left. Some of them had been on it for a long time, from 1941 to 1947--that was quite a long time

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back then, but now to me it seems like a short time! There were several people from Maine that Senator Brewster had put on the War Investigating Committee, they were not kept on. There were some people from Michigan that were added. There were one or two of them who had been on the Surplus Property Subcommittee which was merged with the Permanent Subcommittee at the time it was set up. There were five people on there who were transferred to our payroll, and a couple of them were from Michigan as I remember it. Of course, Senator Ferguson had been chairman of that Surplus Property Subcommittee.

Ritchie: And now he was chairman of the Permanent Subcommittee.

Watt: Yes. And you could only be chairman of one subcommittee of a committee. Back then it was true too after the Reorganization Act of 1946. They kept all the girls on, and Bill Rogers, and Francis (Frip) Flanagan who was assistant chief (held been on since '44 on the War Investigating Committee). And there was a good friend of mine who was hired from Maine, but he left to go to the Pentagon, I think he became general counsel over there,

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Fred Coughlin. Then there were two or three people that Bill Rogers had brought down, and two left. They started off with some people from Senator Ferguson's office; but we did not have a large staff. It sort of petered out. There were about 26 or 28 on the War Investigating Committee when I came aboard, and it was down to probably 15 or 16 when the subcommittee was set up.

Ritchie: When they set it up as a subcommittee, did either Senator Ferguson or Bill Rogers instruct the staff as to what the purposes or the scope of the Permanent Subcommittee were going to be? Was there any sort of getting together and beginning again? Or was there just a continuity from the old special committee?

Watt: It was really a continuity, because we got the functions of the old committee with the addition of one of the sections of the Committee on Expenditures of Executive Departments, it was section XII or something like that, saying that we were to investigate malfeasance, wrongdoing, and all that sort of thing in the executive departments. it was set up to investigate the executive

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departments actually. That's all our function was the first two or three years.

Ritchie: Because you were part of the Committee on Expenditures in the Executive Departments.

Watt: Of which Senator George Aiken was chairman.

Ritchie: Was there any relationship between the subcommittee and the full committee? Or were you independent?

Watt: Well, there were some functions of the subcommittee that have to go through the full committee, like putting people on the payroll. It has to be signed or approved by both. The money resolutions are approved by the full committee, but we made our own budget and we had it all set up, but the full committee has to pass it on to the floor of the Senate. Subcommittees have no authority for any legislation of any kind.

Ritchie: So if it suggests legislation it has to go through the full committee?

Watt: Anything. A resolution is a Senate function, and we've always been under a resolution. We have to be renewed every year. We call ourselves permanent, but we're not. If they decided that they didn't want to continue us, why we've sort of had it. You expire

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at midnight on the date that the resolution has set. It used to be January 31, now it's February 28 or 29.

Ritchie: What about issuing reports and other publications?

Watt: Publications are approved by the subcommittee and then by the full committee. A subcommittee cannot file a report to the Senate, it has to come from a full committee.

Ritchie: But other than that, the actual functioning of the subcommittee was done independently?

Watt: We were pretty independent. When the committee was set up, why of course, the full committee thought they should have the say-so over the subcommittee, and our chief counsel made it very clear that if he was going to function he was not going to be under the thumb of the committee staff members. So we started off right away as a separate entity, except for the things that legally we had to do through the full committee.

Ritchie: And it stayed that way?

Watt: It stayed that way up until Senator Sam Ervin took over as chairman. That was when Senator Allen Ellender died and Senator McClellan had to give up the chairmanship of the full

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committee. Then they started little by little chipping away, so that now the subcommittee has very little that it can do on its own. They have to go through the staff of the full committee. I mean to say all except for the actual investigating and hearings.

Ritchie: In terms of investigations?

Watt: Investigations. Well, the subcommittee can approve an investigation. Filing reports, of course. But then there are little items like you have got to go through them to get parking stickers and equipment, especially all those little things which you could get without question before. The staff is hired by the subcommittee chairman, but officially the full committee chairman hires them.

Now since they had a bill passed two or three years ago where you have a staff member on a payroll that is working with the chairman--remember that went through with all those high-priced people--now when you swear them in there is a square on the form where you have to indicate whether or not they are working for another senator or for the committee only. For instance, we have minority people and

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majority people, and the funds are separate, too. A certain amount of funds from our budget, a third, is set aside for the minority salaries. When they put them on the payroll a letter comes from Senator Charles Percy requesting they be put on the payroll.

Ritchie: Did the full committee ever attempt to veto a staff person or any action of the subcommittee during the time you were there?

Watt: The only time they ever did it was because of one person. You see, we have to get a security clearance for everybody on the staff, and it turned out that one individual was unacceptable.

Ritchie: Was that an action of the full committee or of the subcommittee?

WATT: That was the subcommittee. What happened then was that Senator McClellan was chairman of the full committee and the subcommittee. So things for the full committee would come to him, but the full committee staff would not see them--they would just come to me to put it in my file, in my safe. But if someone else had been chairman it would have come through the full committee. For instance, when Senator Ervin was chairman,

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it would have gone to him rather than come to Senator McClellan as chairman of the subcommittee.

Ritchie: But for all intents and purposes the subcommittee was independent in its actions?

Watt: Very. Right down the line.

Ritchie: From the beginning when William Rogers said that he wouldn't work there under any other circumstances.

Watt: Yes, that's right. Right up until 1972 when Senator Ellender died and Senator McClellan became chairman of the Appropriations Committee. Up until then we were very independent. I signed vouchers and the chairman of the subcommittee signed. The full committee never had to be involved at all except for putting people on the payroll. So when Senator McClellan became chairman of the subcommittee and Senator Ervin was chairman of the full committee, I no longer could sign vouchers. So I told Senator McClellan he'd been demoted, because he was signing where I'd been signing for thirty years!! But the finances were completely controlled, and I was very careful to clear everything to make sure it was legal. You know, these

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investigators would get a little out of line sometimes if you didn't check after them.

Ritchie: Did they have to vote separate appropriations for each investigation?

Watt: Oh, no, no. We had a lump sum. We would make a budget up the first of the year, how much we thought should be for each one. Then if we found an unusual investigation that was going to take a lot of money, about August we'd ask for an additional appropriation, which happened quite a few times. Then that was just added to what we already had.

Ritchie: Did the investigators have to come back and file a voucher for everything that they had done, or were they given a free reign over what they could do as far as spending was concerned?

Watt: They knew what they could do, and they couldn't go over it. There were certain rules they couldn't go outside of. For instance, you have so much a day per diem, and its in quarter day. At first it was a flat rate if you were on an investigation out of town for three hours or twelve or twenty-four it was the same amount. Then Bob Brenkworth,

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when he became Financial Clerk, put in a resolution that changed it to a quarterly basis. They waived some of those rules that were passed for finances on the floor of the Senate, the Rules Committee always consulted with the Disbursing Office Financial Clerk actually because they were more familiar with it. Some were a little ambiguous. One of them I never could understand was the witness resolution that said "reasonable transportation" or words to that effect, per witness. Well, they interpreted it as if you took your car a witness had to keep track of what he spent for gas and oil and that's all he got. Staff and senators got so much a mile. If he took a plane, we paid for it. But if he took his car and came across country he had to keep track of every nickel. Of course, he was getting paid per diem, which you get paid from the time you leave home to the time you got back home from Washington, if it was a reasonable time. If you spent a couple of days on vacation you wouldn't get paid for it, but I had to figure that out and use my judgment on that. The men

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were not allowed to rent cars in Washington, nobody can in the Senate. You can rent cars out of town, you can pay for cab fares. Your hotels and meals have to be included in the per diem. Now it's \$35.00 a day. And hotels are \$30.00 and \$35.00, you have to eat on your own. Since I've left they receive a little more, it's \$40.00 per them and you have to submit your hotel and food bill in order to get the \$40.00. In different cities you can put in your actual expense and they subtract it if it goes over the \$40.00 or \$45.00, different rates in different cities.

Ritchie: How did things work in general? For instance, at the beginning of the year when you were planning your budget, did they map out strategy for the rest of the year, that they had in mind that they were going to look into several areas?

Watt: Well, that all had to be included in the letter to the Rules Committee in order for you to get the money.

Ritchie: And did the staff get together to work as a team on these things?

Watt: On the budget?

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Ritchie: And on planning what the committee was going to be doing for that year.

Watt: Just the chief counsel and the senator, I don't know of anyone else. But they knew pretty much what they were working on, and what had been finished. They would put a background in the letter to the Rules Committee on what they had done all year and what was continuing and what new ones they were going into.

Ritchie: When they decide on a particular project, when they decided to follow through on something, what would they do? Would they call in various investigators? Did they have a permanent staff of investigators or did they hire people specially?

Watt: Well, if it was a big hearing we used to use the General Accounting Office people for many years. Then we hired some from other agencies on reimbursal, we reimbursed the agencies. Usually when they set up a hearing--of course, nowadays nothing is done unless the minority approves.

Ritchie: But back then they didn't?

Watt: We didn't have any minority people for many years, as far as staff was concerned, up until about 1972 or '73 we only had two

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minority people, and none up until January 1954. Everybody worked together and there were no politics involved. It was just an investigating committee and you were for motherhood and against sin!! Everybody was in the same boat. But after the McCarthy problems, why then the senators said we had to have a minority counsel, that was in January 1954. I'm way ahead of the story now, we ought to get to that later.

Ritchie: While we are talking about investigators, one name that comes to mind is Carmine Bellino. He worked for the committee right from the beginning didn't he?

Watt: He came on in October of '48, was on the regular payroll until about 1953. Then he was off and on, because he was not into Communism too much. He did one investigation up in Alaska, as I recall, Palmer-Alaska Airline, but other than that he didn't do too much work for the committee in 1953 and 1954. He went on somewhere along the line on a contract, because he had worked on another subcommittee that had contracted him, it was a labor subcommittee that Senator James Murray had. So we copied it after that and put him on a contract basis,

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which meant that we paid him by the hour when he worked, and paid his expenses. That was a new wrinkle. Then he left us and went on the payroll of the Rackets Committee, because he was a great Kennedy man. Then he left and went to the White House to work up there as a consultant to President Kennedy. Then he came back and worked on a contract basis with us for a while. Then when Bob ran for the Senate he dropped everything and went up there and campaigned for Bob in New York. Now he's working for Senator Teddy Kennedy. He worked on the Watergate, of course, and then retired. Then he was off for a while and went back. I don't know if he's on contract or regular payroll for Senator Ted Kennedy's Judiciary subcommittee.

Ritchie: He was an accountant by trade, wasn't he?

Watt: C.P.A. One of the best in the business.

Ritchie: Was that the general type of person who would be an investigator for you, someone with an accounting background?

Watt: Well, accounting is a very important part of it. He can look at a sheet of paper and see if there is something-wrong. He's amazing. He is so involved, he is just married to

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the idea of the Kennedys. I've never seen anybody so devoted in my life.

Ritchie: Was that from the very beginning when John Kennedy joined the committee?

Watt: It was Bob. You see because John Kennedy was on the Labor Committee, and the Rackets Committee was made up of four from each committee. That's how he happened to be with us. Four from the subcommittee and four Labor Committee members, when that was set up in 1957.

RITCHIE: What type of a person was Bellino? How would you describe him?

Watt: I liked him very much. If he found any wrong doing he could go after it. When we were in investigating he could really find it. He was unbelievable. I liked him and his whole family. Of course, Angie Novello was Carmine's sister in-law. Angie came to work on the committee through Carmine in 1955 and then Bob took her as his secretary in 1957 or '58. But I think he is a delightful man.

Ritchie: Did he have a crusading spirit when he got into those cases?

Watt: It was a job for him. Held work until 4:00 o'clock in the morning. He's an

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amazing man. He's still going full speed ahead and he's somewhat older than I am.

Ritchie: We talked about some of the staff members, I also want to talk about the first two chair men of the subcommittee. Ferguson became the chairman . . .

Watt: He was on the full committee and the chairman had to be someone from the full committee.

Ritchie: So he served for the first year.

Watt: He was a Republican and it was the 80th Congress, and a Republican Congress. We also had Senator Edward Thye, who was a one termer, Senator

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John Bricker, and Senator McCarthy, and then there were three Democrats, Senator Clyde Hoey, Senator Herbert O'Connor, and Senator McClellan. That was the first subcommittee.

Ritchie: Would you say that Ferguson was an effective chairman during that first year?

Watt: Yes.

Ritchie: In getting everything set up?

Watt: Yes., he did a good job. And Bill Rogers and Fripp were the ones who did the work on the committee and set it up for the chairman, whatever he wanted. That was the year of the convention, when the President

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was up for reelection. President Truman of course had once been chairman of the committee, and I remember that Charles Patrick Clark came on to help write the report in 1947, which was just a lot of wasted money because he didn't do anything anyway, but he's the only one I think had served on the committee when Truman was chairman. Anyway, when President Truman came to the Capitol one time, the first time I had ever seen him, there was a girl who used to work for Senator Kenneth McKellar that had been close to some of the girls who worked for the committee when Truman was chairman. I was standing over in the Capitol when he came through, and she was so glad to see him she didn't think about it and she dashed up and tried to shake hands with him, and the Secret Service people were all over the place. She wasn't thinking at all. I was so impressed, here this man had been in the Senate for many years and you could talk to him without any problem, and all of a sudden he's not available. You can't do this anymore. That was my first experience with how protective these people have to be.

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Then in November of that year, Harold Beckley who had been superintendent of the press gallery back when Truman was in the Senate (they had a poker club, certain ones who played poker, Truman, Beck, and others) invited me down to Union Station the Sunday night when Truman took his last trip on his Whistle Stop. It was less than a week before the election. There were about ten people standing down there to see him off. I went up with the Beckleys because they knew him, and I'll never forget Beck saying, "Well, Mr. President, how do you think it's going?" And President Truman said, "I think we've got them on the run." And I thought, "Oh, he has to be kidding." So the next week, after the election, he came back with a big parade. The whole town turned out for him. I was standing at the corner there by the subway entrance as he came through triumphantly reelected.

Ritchie: Quite a change.

Watt: It was such a contrast. It made a great impression. Of course, that was during my early years down here and I was very much impressed with everything. But I thought it was a very interesting sidelight.

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Ritchie: With that election the Democrats took control of the Senate . . .

Watt: Yes.

Ritchie: . . . and the subcommittee. Did you worry at all that would effect your position?

Watt: That was the first and only time I've ever done any politicking. I went to every one of the senators on the committee and told them I'd like to stay. So, (much later) Senator Hoey told me he had no intention of letting me go. But the girl that I replaced was back, working on the full committee on a temporary basis.

Ritchie: Oh, I see. You had replaced a Democrat and she now came back to the committee.

Watt: Well, she was a dyed-in-the-wool Democrat and she had made the mistake of making some remark where Senator Brewster heard her that she could never work for a Republican, or something like that. So when she had appendicitis she went to him and asked if he wanted her to resign or take leave of absence, he said, "Resign." Otherwise she would probably have been kept on, if she had used her head a little better.

Ritchie: But you had always tried a nonpartisan approach.

Watt: I always made no bones about the fact that I was a Republican, but I never played politics, because I never had any reason to. I always felt my value to the committee was gone when I played politics. For many years there were no politics anyway. And I always stayed clear of them.

Ritchie: Did any other members of the staff change? I guess the Michigan people must have left, if they came with Senator Ferguson.

Watt: Gradually. Bill Rogers stayed on for a year. He was of course a Republican. And Frip Flanagan was the assistant. And then a man named--we called him "Doggy" Hatcher-Colonel Hatcher came up from North Carolina. Then there was a man named Thomas who came on, he was a lawyer but he didn't plan to do any work. Senator Hoey said, "I'm sorry but I had an obligation to his family," or something; so we got some of those that year. Then Jim Sheridan stayed on, and Jerry Alderman, and the girls all stayed on. I can't remember who else we had beside those people, because when Senator Hoey took over we only had fourteen on the staff the entire time he was chairman.

Ritchie: It was a small staff, and he kept on most of the people who had been there.

Watt: If they left, why he replaced them. But fourteen was the most we ever had. Of course, when Ferguson was chairman we had about eighteen.

Ritchie: All I know about Hoey are the pictures I've seen of him, and he seems like a funny little man.

Watt: He really wasn't, he was tall.

Ritchie: He wore an unusual costume.

Watt: Oh, he wore that from the time he was twenty two. It was a long frock coat and had the wing collar, and the suits were grey or black. He was about six feet four. He lived at the Raleigh Hotel and he used to take the streetcar to work, and lie would hang onto the strap with those coattails flying! He really was a fine man, but he was really! He always wore a rose, and when his wife was living she always gave it to him every morning for his lapel. After she died, his staff had the rose there every morning, I always used to think: "what a nice thing." But we are skipping that year with Senator Ferguson. There were several things I wanted to mention about him, and the hearings. For instance, we had hearings on Ilse Koch.

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Ritchie: That was the Nazi case?

Watt: Buchenwald. They called her the "bitch of Buchenwald." There was one hearing we had in executive session, around one of those great big hearing tables, this was ten years before the new Senate Office Building came along. And we came into the hearing, there were about six senators there, and we had a witness who had been a prisoner of war who did laboratory work. Anyway he was a professor in New York State, I don't know if it was Syracuse or up in that area, I can't remember his name now. They had in the center of the table a foot-high head of a German prisoner. It was a shrunken head, which the Nazis had forced him to work on in the laboratory. It was the most gruesome thing. This huge table with the little head in the center. And the hair of course was down long, but the rest had been shrunken. Gruesome. Then they had lampshades of tattoos of soldiers, from their chests.

Ritchie: It must have had quite an impact on the committee.

Watt: It did on me I know! This was thirty-one years ago and it was so vivid I can still see it. Some things you can go to bed and see in your sleep, and this was one of them.

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Ritchie: Had the committee been prepared for this, or had it just been brought in?

Watt: I suppose the staff and Senator Ferguson knew, because he always knew ahead of time, you have to tell your chairman what's going on. But Senator Ferguson said to the witness: "Did you ever know this fellow?" (pointing). I suppose he had to say yes, I don't remember what the answer was, but he naturally had to work on him. It was one of the things that you don't forget. Then there was the first hearing when Senator Ferguson first took over. It was really on export control and so on, and they discovered this William Remington, who was apparently working with the Communists. He was working in a

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government agency and they knew about his activities, but then he quit and went to another government agency and they had no liaison with other agencies. If you have a file on someone here and they go to another agency, unless it has changed very recently, they just start out cold as if they had never worked before. And this happened. Then Elizabeth Bentley, who was a card-carrying Communist, identified him

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as being a Communist. So he was tried and went to prison.

Ritchie: That was the first Communist hearing that the subcommittee held?

Watt: That was the first, and it started out as a loyalty hearing, if I remember correctly.

Ritchie: And that was while Ferguson was still chairman?

Watt: It was a loyalty program, the way the loyalty program in the federal government worked. But then this Elizabeth Bentley got out of the Communist Party and went as a teacher in some convent down in Louisiana--of course the Communists were after her. This William Remington, he was about six feet tall, and young, and very handsome. He was imprisoned and the inmates murdered him. He went to prison about 1948 or 1949.

Most of our people in those years, like Francis Flanagan, had been with the FBI; Carmine had several years with the FBI; so a good many of our people that were hired were ex-FBI agents, and had the experience already. They didn't have to be trained, which was great because we didn't have a school over there. And Senator McClellan pretty much followed that, he

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wanted experienced people, not to have to train them. It was very valuable to the committee and we didn't have that many problems. You do have problems if people go out on their own and do things that they don't know that are wrong. We were lucky on that. We had one man, who I think had been CIA or OSS.

Anyway, the Remington case was kind of sad. He worked in the Commerce Department and one time played a large part in what goods should be sent to Russia and so on. Back then we didn't trust them, even though they were allied because of the fact that it was one of those things to survive, I suppose for them to survive at least.

Ritchie: So one of the first hearings in 1948 was the investigation into Communism.

Watt: The loyalty program.

Ritchie: But most of the investigations of the subcommittee in '48 and '49 and really right on to the early '50's were really focused on mismanagement in the executive branch, corruption.

Watt: That's the only authority that we had.

Ritchie: And you had actually sort of stumbled onto the Communist issue in an investigation of export controls?

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Watt: Yes. That reminds me also, if we start an investigation now the minority is advised of it. We never have been able to have a hearing that isn't voted on and approved by a majority of the full subcommittee, not the full committee, the subcommittee. We can have an investigation without any problem as long as the minority has been advised. The chairman could authorize the staff to go ahead with a preliminary investigation. So that is a protection for everybody, if you have a majority of the members of the subcommittee voting to hold the hearings. So if things don't turn out right they're all equally to blame.

Ritchie: The one set of hearings that got the most publicity in that period were the "5 percenters" hearings. They were all over the newspapers.

Watt: Well, they involved the White House, you see, and General Harry Vaughn who testified. John Maragon, who came over from Italy and started out as a bootblack or something and became very influential and was buying presents for government officials, was a subject. We had quite a few executive sessions with him. He seemed to be the key at that time for the

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information. I remember one day we had an executive session in Senator Hoey's office, because we didn't want the press to know about it. We had hearings in senators' offices because that was the only way to keep it away from the press. Anyway, sometimes they got wind anyway, and they'd be standing together at the door. So John Maragon had been testifying in the Senator's immediate office, and he said: "I don't want to go out there with all that press. What will I do? How can I get out of here?" I said, "You'll have to just wait." I said, "I'm going to put you in the Senator's bathroom, and I'll come back and get you when they are gone." Well, I went back to my office and forgot all about him. About an hour later I remembered. So I had to dash back upstairs and he was still there! I told him he could go now. Then that evening I was over in the Capitol and he was holding a press conference over there. They had caught up with him. But that was funny; putting him in the bathroom and forgetting about him.

Ritchie: Were meetings held in executive session sort of fishing trips for the senators? Were they trying to test out the witnesses?

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Watt: Well, in many cases they would have an executive session to find out--they had rumors and they had people giving them information--and they'd find out under sworn testimony if it was true. And if it turned out they were not involved and they were innocent, why they would protect them. Once you get into an open hearing people ask you questions that put doubt in the public's mind. It was a good protection for the witnesses.

Ritchie: The "5 percenter" hearings seemed strange to me because it was an investigation by the Democratic administration by a committee that was controlled by the Democrats. And yet it had a Republican counsel who was very persistent in pursuing one of the closest friends the president had.

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Watt: Yes, and it was funny because Charles Patrick Clark, who ran into Bill Rogers at the Mayflower one night and almost got into a fist fight. He had been in the office earlier that day and asked him not to hold the hearing. And it was entirely up to the chairman.

Ritchie: And Hoey went along with them.

Watt: Sure. He was for motherhood!!!

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Ritchie: They had apparently gotten a tip from a reporter that originally got them started on the investigation.

Watt: Really? I don't remember how it started, because we've had so many different means. We've had anonymous phone calls, anonymous letters, letters of complaints. They come from all directions. Other senators would refer things to us; reporters. I don't know who it was who gave that one, but we've had several newspapermen who have given material to the chairman and the chief counsel, and they'd go in and look into it.

But the "5 percenter" really was a big one. They passed some legislation on it, as I remember; if you were in government and had a top job, if you retired or left government you could not practice before the government legally as a lawyer for a year after you left. Jess Larson was one of those people, as an example, who was head of GSA at that point. He went to Canada for a year and practiced law and then came back, so he was not involved with government.

Ritchie: Do you recall when General Harry Vaughn came to testify during that investigation?

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Watt: The only thing I remember is his cigar. He and Senator Karl Mundt and Senator James Eastland, they were all smoking big cigars, and I remember Senator McCarthy was allergic to the smoke. He never smoked. Senator Hoey didn't smoke in general, because it was not dignified or something. Anyway, the place was all smoked up with all that cigar smoke.

Ritchie: Going back to the old newspaper clippings, I noticed that while Hoey was the chairman of the committee., almost every headline was something that Senator Mundt had said, or Senator McCarthy had said. The two of them really seemed to dominate the hearings, or at least they had the best press.

Watt: You get that now, too. You get Senator Percy, who is our ranking Republican. Why it is, I don't know. Senator Nunn now is getting good press with Armed Services, but last year when he was chairing our hearings, Percy had more press than he did. Why it is, I don't know.

Ritchie: Perhaps the minority members can make more charges than the majority members?

Watt: Yes, probably that's true. I don't know. I really hadn't thought about it.

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Ritchie: Was Mundt a particularly aggressive man when it came to those investigations?

Watt: He always took a great interest in all of the investigations, and he and his staff did their homework. They knew what they were doing.

Ritchie: He certainly got a tremendous amount of press, I was surprised, much more so than the chairman did.

Watt: But if you will notice down the line, of course Senator McClellan always got good press, but Senator Mundt was ranking with Senator McClellan, he had good press. And when Senator McClellan was chairman and Senator Irving Ives was vice chairman, he was never that forceful. I think it depends upon your personality, how much press you get.

Ritchie: Was there very much grandstanding on the part of the senators, sort of playing to the press and the galleries?

Watt: This is hard to answer. I think they're all hams. They have to be to make it in public life. Like someone said the time that General MacArthur made that big speech before Congress, somebody said, "There's a lot of ham in everybody that's in public life." I think that's the answer. But they have to

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have publicity to get reelected. Otherwise, how do people know what they stand for? Since the advent of TV and the radio of course.

Ritchie: The 115 percenter" hearing was very successful. Maragon went to jail eventually, and Truman was badly hurt by the scandal involving General Vaughn.

Watt: There is an interesting sidelight on John Maragon. When he got out of prison, he hadn't been out too long when Senator McCarthy took over as chairman, and at every executive session we had, John Maragon would be standing outside the door. As the witnesses came in he would say, "Now, you tell the truth. You don't want to have to go to jail the way I did." He was right there. And he didn't show malice toward anybody.

Ritchie: How long did that last?

Watt: A year or two. The first year anyway, I don't remember the second year, but I remember up there in Room 357 I'd come up to the hearing and there he would be standing outside the door.

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Ritchie: That's very interesting. I wondered, in terms of all those headlines about Mundt and McCarthy, if Hoey was all that strong a chairman? Did he allow other members of the subcommittee to take charge? Did you have a feeling about that?

Watt: No, not really. There was some rumor, just gossip, but when Senator Hoey took over some where along the line I heard--you see, Senator McClellan was chairman of the full committee, and Senator McClellan and President Truman were not the closest of friends. It was my understanding, and I don't know if there was any truth to it or not, that President Truman had asked Senator Hoey to take the chairmanship of the subcommittee.

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Ritchie: So that McClellan wouldn't be chairman?

Watt: Although Senator Hoey had seniority. I don't know why Senator McClellan was chairman, because Senator Hoey was ranking on the subcommittee. I know what the answer was. A chairman can take a subcommittee if he wants it. It's up to him who gets the chairmanship. McClellan could have taken it if he wanted to. Senator Hoey was ranking on the subcommittee when it was set up. I suppose Senator

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McClellan got on afterwards. But from 1949 to 1952 Senator Hoey was chairman. Senator McClellan got off the subcommittee when he became chairman of the full committee in 1949. He got off the subcommittee and appointed someone else on it. He was not on that year. Maybe that was because Senator Hoey took the chairmanship. Of course, Senator McClellan at that point was a meek little senator. You never heard anything from him. I made a statement for his library that you wouldn't have noticed him. Meek. I thought, "Gee, is he a senator?" Later he developed gradually into a great senator. But at that point I was not too impressed. But I know Senator McClellan and Truman had not gotten along. See now Senator McClellan came to the Senate in 1943, and Truman was chairman since 1941, so he'd been a senator for some time. He was quite senior to Senator McClellan.

Ritchie: Truman came in 1935.

Watt: Did he? See there's almost ten years. But there was something there that made Senator McClellan not take it, because he could have had it if he wanted it, because he was

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chairman of the full committee. Now, I don't remember if Senator Hoey was chairman of anything except the subcommittee. But he was a very easygoing senator as far as the subcommittee was concerned. There was never any controversy, let's put it that way, as far as he was concerned. I never thought about the fact that there were stronger individuals because it seems to be always that the chairman is directing and the others have the chance to say anything they want to. They can be controversial if they want to. But Senator McClellan could get pretty rough with them, when he knew he was right. You know, when he had his facts in front of him. Of course, some of the senators went out and did research on their own and found out things that we didn't know, that the staff didn't know. Or he might have someone on his personal staff working on things, too.

Ritchie: So they didn't always share the information they got?

Watt: Even now they come in with information, personal information, that we don't have. They come in and spring it on you. But that's the way it goes.

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Ritchie: In looking at the papers, the "5 percenters" hearings got the most publicity of any of the hearings. And it seemed like after that was over the subcommittee took a low profile for a while.

Watt: Senator Hoey had one hearing a year.

Ritchie: One hearing a year?

Watt: We had little ones, but look at that schedule.

Ritchie: Yes, by comparison there were very few.

Watt: We had one in Jackson, Mississippi. It was while Truman was President and the Mississippi people would not admit that he was the head of the Democratic Party. I think there was a William Boyle who was chairman of the Democratic National Committee. Anyway, the Democrats down there decided they were going to have their own Democratic Party. So they were taking charge of Post Office jobs, and they were selling them. That's what our hearing was about. And there were these little people from out in the country who had been through the fourth grade who came in and testified that they had paid for their jobs. They were postmasters from all these little towns in Mississippi. It was quite interesting.

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That was the only out-of-town hearing I ever went to. I went down there and the hearings lasted three days. When I returned I realized that I had not gotten permission from the Senate to meet. I had been kind of excited about going out of town. And when they got ready for the trials, they threw one case out of court because I had neglected to get permission of the Senate to meet.

Ritchie: Does the Senate as a whole have to agree?

Watt: Yes, on the floor of the Senate. If the Senate is in session you have to have permission. Now the rules have changed over the years. Now you are able to meet until the Senate goes into session and until the end of the morning hour. Then you have to have permission to meet if you go in the afternoon. Many of the senators prefer to have hearings in the morning and not go over into the afternoon. Senator Ribicoff, for one, always has tried to have hearings in the morning except in an unusual case. Senator McClellan would go all day. Senator Jackson, unless he had something on the floor, would go all day. Senator Walter "Dee" Huddleston, when he

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was chairing the hearings for Senator Jackson, would go in the afternoon. And Senator Nunn did that last year and the year before, when we needed to. But as a rule they prefer not to. I think that was the reason that they instigated this ruling about getting permission to meet. In so many cases now they meet on the floor at 9:00 or 10:00 O'clock in the morning that you always have to get permission.

Ritchie: What did the subcommittee do if it wasn't holding hearings?

Watt: We were writing reports, and investigating, but not holding hearings. We were always investigating things. Many times you would investigate some agency and they would correct it themselves, so you didn't need to have hearings. The

fact that the subcommittee was there and it was looking into things, they would correct the things themselves. It was very valuable.

Ritchie: But certainly nothing that would generate any kind of press attention or publicity.

Watt: No, nobody was supposed to know about it. Because you are supposed to have a vote of the subcommittee to hold a hearing. But

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they would investigate--there was one agency I think it was the Maritime Commission--they were investigating their finances, the fact that they hadn't been collecting money or something. I think they got several million dollars as a result of it. It was not made public, we didn't have hearings on it. We were just investigating it. it justified our existence for that year.

Ritchie: At the same time, in the 81st and 82nd Congresses there were investigations going on all over the place. According to the papers there were record numbers of investigations in both the House and the Senate in all these other committees and subcommittees. But the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations was . . .

Watt: Fairly quiet. Well, Senator Hoey was not a big hearing holder. We were pretty quiet except for that one year.

Ritchie: I was surprised because my image of that period is the Kefauver Crime investigation and all the other investigations, and when I went back to look at the investigating committee there were so few hearings!

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Watt: Well, the Kefauver time was 1950 and that took up the whole year. Nobody paid much attention to anything else. I think the first televised hearings in the Congress were the Kefauver hearings, and the next ones were the Army-McCarthy. We had just a little televising, I think Channel 5 had some live televising of the Rackets Committee with Dave Beck and those people, but very little otherwise. Those only were the two big televised hearings until the Watergate came along.

Ritchie: Tell me, was there any feeling of resentment or competition among the staff of the investigating subcommittee that someone like Kefauver was grabbing all the attention?

Watt: No, we were sort of an entity unto ourselves. In those two or four years we were socializing and had a good time. The rules were very strict about office hours. The North Carolinians are famous for that. We'd come to work, but then we'd have this "Doggy" Hatcher, he became assistant counsel after Bill Rogers left. We used to party a lot, went to the Carroll Arms after work. They'd hire a bus and get a whole bus load of us to go to a football game on a Saturday at the

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University of Maryland when some North Carolina team played. It was really quite a social four years. We didn't work very hard. We had one big hearing a year

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and wrote the report and that was it. The rest of the time we had little investigations, and we didn't have that big a staff to do anything big anyway. These other things were mostly executive sessions, like the Ilse Koch thing. We voted to have hearings on--in fact they referred it to us on a special resolution, 180 I think it was--on subversives, homosexuals. That was an executive session. We wrote a report on it, homosexuals in government. We called in people from the government. Apparently someone referred it to us, that there were homosexuals in government and it was very dangerous so far as the Communists were concerned, that they could be blackmailed and so on. So the first thing we did was go to the Library of Congress, there's a special section over there, a blue section, where you have to have a senator's signature to get certain books out of the Library. We wrote a letter over Senator Hoey's signature to have access

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and get the books out of the Library, everything they had on homosexuality. You never saw so many people reading books in your life! The whole staff was involved. Those books disappeared off my desk like that! Anyway, we held the hearings and had several witnesses. We got the District of Columbia list of known homosexuals. In fact there was an elevator operator in the Senate Office Building whose name was on the list. Of course then, whoever heard of that? You didn't talk about it. So Mrs. Smith was on the subcommittee and we held the hearings and they were on such a high plane that you could have been talking about the weather. You never heard a bunch of hearings with so little sex and so little controversy in your life. It was funny. I never heard so many days of clean, simple, innocent hearings, nothing that would have offended people in any way. In fact, we filed a report on it later with the Senate.

In 1948, Mrs. Margaret Chase Smith was elected to the Senate and she was on the subcommittee for two years. When Senator Nixon was elected, I don't know what his

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relationship was to Senator McCarthy. Of course, Mundt had been on the House UnAmerican Activities Committee with Nixon, and it might have been through him, but the ranking minority member can pick his members, and he bumped Mrs. Smith off it and put Nixon on. I guess the Committee on Committees had to elect members of the full committee.

Ritchie: But she didn't want to go?

Watt: From then on--you remember her speech on the floor?

Ritchie: The "Declaration of Conscience."

Watt: Yes, it was not too long after that. I've never known whether that had anything to do with that or not. She had a right to make her own declaration, but that was when I think the whole thing started. Nixon was on the subcommittee for two years. Then he became Vice President. That's when Rose Mary Woods and I became close friends.

Ritchie: Was she his secretary back then?

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Watt: Yes. She was on a subcommittee he was on on the House side, and when he came to the Senate he asked her if she would like to come as his secretary, and she's been with him ever since. She's a very lovely person. She lived in the

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same apartment building, at 2000 Connecticut Avenue, that I did, that's how we became friends. When Walter Watt and I were married in 1952, she and another girl, Kay Kenny, we were very close to, who worked for Senator Paul Douglas of Illinois--the two of them took Watt and me to the Shoreham Terrace for dinner the night we got married. Because we just went down to Fredericksburg, Virginia and were married and came back on again.

Ritchie: Do you recall Nixon as a member of the subcommittee? Was there anything about him that stood out in your mind at the time?

Watt: I always thought he was very nice. And the fact that I had become good friends with Rosey Woods, of course I was in that office more than I would have been otherwise. He was right up on the fourth floor above us. He was right across the hall from Senator Jack Kennedy. I liked him, but I didn't have any personal contact with him. In 1954, when he was vice president when the Democrats came back, he asked Rosey Woods, "Is that friend of yours down in the committee, is she going to be all right? Or is there anything I can do to help?" Which I thought was nice. He

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didn't remember my name but he knew who he was talking about. Then we had a meeting in his office in 1957 when under the resolution the vice president had to hold the meeting to elect the chairman of the Rackets Committee, and also the vice chairman. So when Senator Ives got off the committee because he was not going to run for the Senate again, we had another meeting to appoint Senator Mundt as the vice chairman. I had contact with him then. We haven't seen Rose much in recent years. It's so hard to get together with people you've been away from for quite a while. She's here, she's retired, but she's out in California some. I understand that he's writing another book, so maybe she's out there now.

Ritchie: She certainly dedicated her life to him and his career.

Watt: Yes. And she and Pat Nixon were very close, too.

Ritchie: There was another member of the staff at that time I was interested in, and that was Jean Kerr. Was she on the subcommittee staff?

Watt: Jeannie was between her junior and her senior year at Northwestern University. She came on

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the subcommittee as my assistnat the summer of 1947. That was when she met Joe McCarthy, but they didn't start going together until after she went back to college. He used to go by and take her to football games and so on. Then when she graduated from college she went to work in his office, which was a year or two later. They were married the year after we were, in the fall of 1953. They had a big

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wedding at the Catholic Church right off Connecticut Avenue and a reception in a big private club. I remember we went to the reception, going up the step stairs and to the receiving line were my husband, me, and on one side was Bill Rogers and Gene Tunney, and a waitress from the Carroll Arms, all five of us abreast going up the stairs to the reception, it was quite a combination'

Ritchie: Didn't McCarthy have a reputation as sort of a womanizer at that time?

Watt: Well, the first year or two when he was single. He was a gay blade about town.

Ritchie: Didn't Jean Kerr turn him down the first time he asked her out?

WATT: That was when she was on the subcommittee.

Ritchie: I suppose she didn't like his reputation.

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Watt: Well, she thought if a senator was inviting a staff member to go out with him, he had, you know, ulterior motives, I suppose, but I don't know. She asked a girl on the staff, what she thought, and she said, "Oh, you better not go out with him." So she thought and said, "No, I won't go out with him." Then of course he was several years older than she was, too. Senator McCarthy was my age and she is fifteen years or more younger than I am. It's funny that Joe McCarthy would be almost seventy if he had lived. You don't think about him as being an older man. But he's been gone twenty-two years. I think he was the only senator on the subcommittee from the time I came on the Hill until he died, that I worked with right straight through. Then Senator McClellan, all except for about two years, until he died. It was just one of those happenstances that people stay on and stay around all those years. And the staffs.

I should also mention the fact that in 1952 Walter Watt and I were married, in July of '52. I had been single all those years and he was widowed.

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Ritchie: How did you happen to meet?

Watt: Well, he was retired from the Fire Department as a captain after twenty-five years--he had a disability, bursitis in his hips--and he came up here as a Capitol policeman, through Senator Cain, I believe. I think he had a connection through Washington State. He was on the police force. Then in 1954, when the Republicans had lost out, Bob Kennedy asked me if Walter was going to have any problem keeping his job, and I said I didn't know. So he said, "Well, I'll take care of that." So he put Walter on as one of Senator Jack Kennedy's employees. They had so many on patronage. It was a night job, and Senator Ervin had a student on his patronage that wanted to go to school and work at night. So they switched positions and Walter went on the door, over there outside the Secretary of the Senate's office.

In a year 'or two, Joe Duke who was Sergeant at-Arms, asked him if he would be willing to take the desk at the entrance across from the Vice President's office, where the people are admitted to the floor of the Senate. He did that for a while. He was there during the

Rackets Committee, I remember, because I used to work late, and when the Senate was late I'd go over there and wait for him. Then the director or superintendent of the warehouse where all the books from the Government Printing Office come in, he retired or died, so Joe Duke said he didn't care what my husband's politics were, that he was asking him if he would take charge of that. So he's been over as superintendent of the warehouse ever since then; he's still there.

Ritchie: Was he assigned to your committee room when you first met him?

Watt: Senator McCarthy requested that he come and cover the hearings. There was a man named Goodall that covered them, and there was a little bit of bad feeling there I found out later because he'd been taken off, but Joe McCarthy had asked for Walt because we were married. So he was outside the door of the executive sessions and I was inside, which I thought was pretty good. One time when Joe McCarthy was chairman, we had a witness from Pennsylvania, and he had been known to threaten Senator McCarthy's life. I remember that Walt was outside and

Roy Cohn was inside, and Watt wanted to find out if the witness was armed, and Senator McCarthy said, "Oh, no, no way." We had a girl, Nina Sutton her name was, who worked on the committee taking stenotype, and we had her taking the minutes of that meeting. And here's Senator McCarthy, and Nina sitting here, and the witness here, and Nina is shaking like this all the time she's taking notes knowing that he's threatened Senator McCarthy's life'

Ritchie: She didn't want to be in the cross-fire.

Watt: She was very nervous. I met Walt through the Congressional bowling league, actually. He was on the force but I didn't know his name for a year or so,- That's why I still call him "Watt," because I didn't know his first name for a long time. Then along the line his wife died very suddenly of a heart attack. That year there were about seven couples on the bowling league that were married--in fact we had a party with the seven couples that were married--it was a regular matrimonial bureau. But anyway, that's where I met him. Then my whole life changed, and I didn't know what I'd been missing all those years.

That was in July, we were married between the Republican and Democratic conventions that year, just happenstance. The Saturday after we were married, we didn't tell anybody, but we went to Maine to meet my folks and have the once-over. We went to a party at Carmine Bellino's. The Republican convention had been over the weekend before and the Democratic was supposed to start soon. We went to the party and we told Carmine confidentially that we were married. Bill Rogers was there, and he was telling us that he was on the legal committee at the Republican convention and that he had gone all out to see that Senator Taft

did not make it, he had gone all out for Eisenhower, and he was one of the people responsible for Eisenhower being on the ticket. Then of course he became Deputy Attorney General when Eisenhower was elected, until Herbert Brownell resigned, then Bill Rogers took over as Attorney General. All these little sidelights, you never hear about what's going on behind the scenes.
[End of Interview #2]