

White House Interview Program

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INTERVIEWEE: RAY JENKINS

INTERVIEWER: Martha Kumar

[Disc 1 of 1]

MK: The deal is: it's on-the-record, except when you want to be on background, or off-the-record.

RJ: Sure. Everything that I say will be on-the-record. I'm not at all sure that I can tell you anything I haven't told you from the time before.

I think their meeting probably pointed out the difference in temperament, personality of the two men more than anything else, and that difference being that Jimmy Carter was much more of a hands-on man, much more involved in the decision-making process and [Ronald] Reagan was much more of a delegator and not particularly immersing himself in the details of policy, and that sort of thing. But if you could get the President to talk about it, I think it would be worthwhile.

MK: Do you know if either one of them wrote up notes afterwards?

RJ: I'm certain that Jimmy Carter did. The extent to which they would be available, I have no idea. He kept a daily journal, and much of it was contained in his memoir. The extent to which the remainder of it is on public record, I don't have any idea. But if it is, that might give you what you're needing. It certainly would give you everything that's he's going to say, anyway.

MK: Some of them are very interesting. [Harry S.] Truman wrote in his diary about his meeting with [Dwight D.] Eisenhower. He had told him how things work and how legislation is passed, basically how the process worked. And he didn't think that Eisenhower appreciated it.

RJ: Well, you're getting very, very close to what you might find in Carter's notes. You're getting very close to it. It depends on whether Truman meant it in a patronizing way. I don't think Carter would have been patronizing toward Reagan. Eisenhower was a very bright man. It's now pretty well established that his tendency to obfuscate things was probably calculated. He once told James Hagerty who was worried about him going to a press conference, he leaned over and said, "Don't worry, Jim. I'll just confuse them."

MK: Well, at least it came in handy and—

RJ: It did indeed. I think it was a very good strategy.

MK: —he knew how to use it. He also in the press conference knew how to use Hagerty. He used to lean over and ask, "What about that, Jim?" A president can't do that today.

RJ: No, not today.

MK: I've looked at materials that James Baker had for his preparations. One of the things that impresses me is that, while there is a general feeling that the people coming in don't listen to the people who were there before, especially if there was a hostile takeover, I don't think that really is necessarily true.

RJ: [Inaudible].

MK: I think there are people who listen. The people who are leaving a White House seem to be very interested in providing the best information they can.

RJ: I think that's exactly right. Yes. It came to my mind, while I was reading through your memo, that it somewhat resembles a peace negotiation after a war. Once the war is over I think most people, particularly the losers, they want to get the best out of it as possible. I know that in my very narrow role in the transition in 1980, the way that it was structured—I'm really relying on memory; I'm not absolutely certain that I have this right. I suspect there are records you can go to that would be better than my memory. I think that Al [Alonzo] McDonald was sort of in charge of transition. That would certainly make sense. He was the Staff Director and he was a management specialist. The truth is that he wasn't really held in all that high regard by the others in the White House—he was looked upon as kind of an office manager—particularly whenever he began to try to tell you how to run your job rather than how to structure your office. But I think he probably put together the transition and I'm assuming that Jim Baker was his counterpart in the Reagan Administration.

MK: Yes. He provided materials to Baker.

RJ: Of course, each White House is going to be structured in its own way, and you might not have symmetry between the incoming and outgoing. But we tried to identify our counterparts who were coming in, and I remember that Jody Powell expressly assigned Larry Speakes to me. I know that Larry and I had at least one meeting, and maybe more, and talked on the phone a time or two. Our relationship was very friendly. He's a Southern boy. I think he came from Mississippi.

MK: Right.

RJ: So, we had a certain amount in common. I jotted down a list of things that I was going to suggest to him. It had nothing whatever to do with politics, but just the relations between the Press Office and the White House and the press corps. At that time there were around 1,700 credentialed people covering it.

MK: It's still the same.

RJ: Is it still?

MK: They kept it the same.

RJ: We did our best to keep it down.

MK: That's what they've done, too.

RJ: Of that 1,700, some of them wouldn't come there. They only came to the White House Christmas party. That's the only reason they were on there.

It did present some problems, but that is neither here nor there. I suggested to him that at press conferences—well, first I said that coming in is the time to make new ground rules. I'd rather try to negotiate an Arab-Israeli peace treaty than to try in midstream to change the rules of the way the press operates. They just go berserk if you make even slight changes. I said, "If you will think your relations through and lay down whatever new rules you want to, do it at the outset and do it firmly. Stick by it. Make sure they are reasonable rules." And so on. I said one, in particular, that I would change is a very simple one. I would stop the reporters at press conferences from jumping up and shouting "Mr. President" at the press conference. That was common in our time and I think it had been that way ever since the presidential press conference had come into being—basically in [John F.] Kennedy's time. It does date to Eisenhower, but mostly Kennedy. It made the press look worse than it did the President for that matter, because it made them look like a flock of birds attacking the President. He always maintained control of it, because no matter how many—all of them would jump up and shout, "Mr. President, Mr. President," waving their hands and so on. He still retained control because he had a little chart in front of him identifying where the various people were sitting and, I think, in some cases even photographs of the people.

So Larry Speakes liked that idea and they did, indeed, institute that. The idea was that you simply raise your hand and you will be recognized; do not call out. It was a much more orderly procedure. Then he threw out an idea about asking questions. He had this idea that they might do it on a lottery basis. I said, "I think that's probably a bad idea because the President will lose control of the press conference if you do that. The President has got to know that if he calls on the *New York Times* reporter who specializes in foreign affairs that that's the question he's going to get. He may not want to answer those questions." When I say lose control of it, I don't mean that he's manipulating the press, although certainly to some extent he is, but it becomes anarchy, almost. Speakes said, "I like that idea of doing that. I think we may give it a try, anyway." I said, "Sooner or later what you're going to do is draw the name of one of these real crazies out there—"

MK: Like Lester Kinsolving.

RJ: "—like Lester Kinsolving." I used his name specifically. So they decided they would do it anyway and, lo and behold, they did. I don't think they actually drew names out of a fishbowl, or anything like that, but they did have some type of lottery operation. They did get his name and this man asked one of these off-the-wall questions. I think before it was over—don't hold me to this—he was asking Reagan something like: what type of birth control he preferred, or one of these wacko questions like that. After that, I think they went back to the other, where the President at least has—he holds press conferences not merely to answer questions, but also to get out his own ideas. That's why he usually has an opening statement and hopes that that will set the tone of the press conference. If it doesn't, if he begins to get over into an area that he doesn't want to get into, he can always go back by calling on someone whose question he can anticipate.

MK: Did you find that you could anticipate most of the questions?

RJ: Well, yes, I think so. The way that we did that was, we had a perpetual briefing book for the President, which was a loose-leaf thing that was being updated on almost a daily basis.

MK: Did they come out of the briefings, the materials that you would put together for briefings, say, materials on foreign policy from State, Defense; it was that kind of stuff?

RJ: Exactly. Yes. The briefing book tended to grow, of course. I think it was two inches thick, a loose-leaf folder. And Brzezinski's office would just send over a few extra pages and say, "This substitutes for page-so-and-so in the briefing book," and we'd put it in there. The President would go over this very carefully. I say carefully. Jimmy Carter did. He had a phenomenal capacity for reading official documents. I once made a calculation or got it from somewhere that he read 350 pages a day of official documents. Now, of course, nobody reads that many. He scanned through them. But he was always very well prepared for the press conferences. So he could anticipate virtually every question and, in addition to that, you can also anticipate the type of question a given reporter would ask. You always know if you're going to call on somebody from a Puerto Rican newspaper that they're going to ask some question about their island. It gives the President a little bit of a break so that he can....

I had been told—I have no idea if this is true—that [Richard] Nixon identified newspaper people who could be expected to ask crazy questions; that it would make the press look bad and let him bat them out of the ballpark.

MK: Did reporters ever tell you what they were going to ask?

RJ: No. That was a fairly touchy thing. They never told me. I did have one or two occasions where a reporter—and these were not your top-rank reporters but somebody from a radio station in the Midwest or something—that if the President would call on them they would allow us to give them a question to ask. They were making a trade-off and we weren't about to get into that. We felt that the function of the press was to frame its own questions and it was not the function of the White House Press Office to frame them for them.

MK: Lyndon Johnson would have hopped on that in a nanosecond.

RJ: Absolutely.

MK: Did you ever have people say, "If the President after he deals with the major issues of today, if he's interested in touching on the subject of Bosnia, say something like that, I might have a question along those lines?" Did anybody ever do that?

RJ: No. I don't think so. There was never any rigging of the press conference, not during my tenure there, that I'm aware. Now it's conceivable that Jody may have had his own private arrangements. You could ask him about that. Do you have an interview with him scheduled?

MK: I don't have it scheduled. I just haven't called him yet.

RJ: He would be quite happy to....

MK: What did you all see as the roles of the press conference, and then also of the daily Briefing?

RJ: Well, the role of the press conference is almost a sacred ritual or has become so for the President. The importance of it is not so much to develop information as it is to allow the public to see their President responding to open, free-for-all questions from independent sources. The analogy has been made many times, it's more or less analogous to the question-and-answer period in the British Parliament.

The briefing is another matter again. That is indeed to impart information. It's important that it be held on a regular basis. My recommendation is: twice a day if possible. It can't always be done that way, but certainly daily, unless there's some good reason not to. It can take many forms, but the briefing, as we think of it, consists of the White House Press Secretary or one of his deputies going down to the Press Room, holding a press conference of his own in which he makes announcements, distributes press releases although, generally speaking, the press release can be distributed without the Press Secretary reading it. There are always decisions to be made as to whether the briefing is to be available for recording by television and radio, whether it's even to be a background briefing. There are times when you can sort of [hold] impromptu briefings. You've been in the Press Secretary's office; it's about this size. And he simply might call in—on the spur-of-the-moment—a dozen or two reporters, and just sit around on the floor and ask questions. These will be on background.

MK: Now, daily the Press Secretary has that at 9:30 in the morning. There's a meeting called the "gaggle" which takes place in his office.

RJ: I'm not aware of how this—

MK: But it's not off-the-record or even on-background. It is an on-the-record thing but it can't be used for sound or camera. What kinds of instances do people come in? In the morning, my recollection was, Jody did have something in his office, didn't he?

RJ: Almost always, he had a few reporters in there.

MK: Was it the wires? Did he have the wires come in in the morning?

RJ: No. We had no particular arrangement for briefing the wires separately from any of the other newspapers or any of the other news organizations. I think Jody tended to make the formal briefing his main conduit of information. Now, of course, there are just so many different levels of communication. Of course, there's the full-blown, on-the-record, for recording, for-attribution news briefing or news conference; on background in which a White House source can be quoted on deep background in which the reporter can say it has been learned or something. You don't attribute it to anyone. Off-the-record, you mentioned that. That's a fairly misunderstood, widely misunderstood thing. It has almost no relevance in communication. It is used almost exclusively to impart things like the President's parade route, for instance. We don't want this reported in precise detail. "Off-the-record" is something that is a purely logistical function.

Then, of course, the one that is overlooked is the leak. The leak is a vital form of communication in Washington. It's got a bad name, of course. It's the hardest of all to control, because that's where a lot of freelancing can be done. You don't like to have too much of that. When Jody Powell leaked a story, for instance, it was done in the President's behalf; it was not done for the southeast corner of the West Wing getting back at the northwest corner or something. Oftentimes it could be misused, but it's really a rather vital form of communication.

MK: What is it important for? In what kinds of circumstances are leaks important to use, and when would you use them, as well as when would Jody use them?

RJ: You use it when you think that there is information that is vital to the public interest in elaborating on a story. Obviously it's information that someone doesn't want brought out but, assuming that you have a debate going on and the other side has some hidden agenda,

hidden interest in it, you feel—and you may have your own hidden agenda. And, of course, they use the leak in the opposite way. The most typical example, I guess, would be if you have this debate going on, let's say on tobacco—just to use one, and it's between a congressman and the White House. Let's say that you have information that the congressman has ties to the tobacco industry, has received contributions maybe that are not part of the record, or what have you. It's legitimate information to bring out but, at the same time, you don't want to be directly connected to it. As I say, it works both ways and it is subject to misuse. It's going to be with us to the end of time, whether good or bad. The leak is an indispensable form of communication. And that is off-the-record in a sense. In the strictest sense, off-the-record means you can't report it at all. The leak simply goes a level even beyond deep background: "You can report this but you can't begin to tell the source."

MK: What about off-the-record as being a way of having the reporters understand who the President is, by having him have dinners with groups of reporters? Carter had groups for dinners. Those dinners are generally on an off-the-record basis.

RJ: I have been to a good number of those. They are off-the-record in the sense that you can't quote the President directly. You're right. I guess that that might qualify as off-the-record but, to me, off-the-record means that in no way can you use this information. And, as a journalist, what I would say when somebody says, "This is off-the-record..." I would say, "Tell it to somebody else, because I'm not in the business of keeping information secret."

MK: It's very difficult, as [Bill] Clinton has found. He's had some off-the-record sessions with reporters that a lot of information has come out of.

RJ: I think these that you are talking about are really more like deep background.

MK: Well, they were meant to be off-the-record; it's just that the reality is, that's what happens. For example, in one that Clinton had in Mexico he talked about the earnings potential—I think Terry McAuliffe had made some estimates that in five years Hillary Clinton would be able to bring in about twenty million dollars. So he cited that figure. It did not take long for that figure to get out and then the *New York Daily News* used it because they were not in the meeting. They were not in the dinner so they were not bound by the rules.

RJ: Exactly.

MK: It's a town where "off-the-record" is pretty hard to enforce.

RJ: It is. It is, except, as I say, that's why it should be kept to the most narrow possible way, meaning, and exclusively things that are purely logistical like, again to cite the best example, the President's precise route on a parade in Dallas. You don't want to do that again.

MK: Did you all give out stories on a selective basis?

RJ: Very much. Now that tended to be done by the Department heads themselves, the special assistants and the assistants to the President themselves. They had their own people that they—you have to have a certain level of trust between the policymaker and the press. And a man like [Alfred] Fred Kahn, for instance—he was one of our chief economic men [he led airline deregulation]—he would be much, much more comfortable talking to the economics columnist for the *New York Times* than he would a police reporter from San Antonio [Texas]. So they did have their own arrangements. In addition to that, there's no getting around it.

Jody, in particular, would identify people that he thought would be friendlier toward the President than others. For God's sake, no Press Secretary in his right mind would set up an interview with Maureen Dowd with the President. I argued against an interview with Barbara Walters because I think she tended to set traps and, in fact, she did, in an interview. The reason I chose her, for purposes of illustration, is because she got an interview with Jimmy Carter and she asked this question in kind of mock disbelief, "Mr. President, you sound as if you're apologizing." Well, that's the sort of journalism, if you call it that, that she engages in. I don't have a really high regard for television journalists anyway. Yes. You pick people that you think are going to be favorable to your side, at least give the President a good, decent break.

MK: What kind of coordination would there be, say, with [Herb] Klein, if Klein was going to talk to an economics reporter from the *Times*? Was there any kind of communications meeting with unit heads within the White House?

RJ: There was an attempt. The rule was supposed to be that they were to coordinate. Fred Kahn's—I use him because I worked with him a fair amount—economic policy was in my portfolio of the Press Office. They were to inform us if they had an interview with someone so that at least we wouldn't be blind-sided by a story the next day. They may come out with—generally speaking, the policymaker would not hold a press conference unless he had an agenda of his own. He didn't just hold it to allow the guy to ask wide-ranging, free-ranging questions. And, in fact, if a reporter called one of these people, we'd like to have them call us and tell us what they had told the press, again, so we wouldn't be blind-sided. See, the Press Secretary tends to—this area that you're talking about is more difficult even in the Cabinet than it is in the White House staff. You've got much better camaraderie, cooperation and control within the White House staff than you do out at the Executive Branch.

But the White House Press Secretary serves basically two functions. He serves as the President's spokesman. That's his formal function. And the informal function that is not—he doesn't have the title but he functions as a Minister of Information. So you develop this kind of peculiar staff structural problem where the departmental assistant secretaries for information—and every department has one; they may call them different things but Hodding Carter was the Assistant Secretary for Public Information or Public Affairs in the State Department. In some ways he serves two bosses. He serves the Secretary of State and he serves as an Assistant Secretary to the Press Secretary. We really need to know what's going on in these departmental announcements. We don't want them to announce something that's going to come up at the Briefing, and we know nothing at all about it. So we try to maintain a relationship with them as well. That one is a little more delicate than others, because you see the Agriculture Department and the Commerce Department might be at cross-purposes on certain policy, and the President is the one who is going to have to reconcile these.

MK: How do you get information out of them that's not just accurate, but is a reflection of what's going on in that department, what problems there may be that the Secretary is working on, but may not want to be forthcoming about with the White House?

RJ: That's an endemic problem that will be there forever, I suppose. I just couldn't begin to answer that question.

MK: Say, before a press conference, a President has to know what's going on around the departments. How do you really search for information and make sure you know what's going on in the departments?

RJ: Well, the White House staff generally is structured in such a way that there's a counterpart for every department. They try to work out their arrangements as best they can between themselves. Now this is an area that goes way, way out of my expertise. All I can tell is just what I observed around there. One of the big problems of course is that somebody who is in charge of trade policy in the White House, he calls the Secretary of Commerce, let's say.

MK: Or the Trade Rep[resentative].

RJ: The question then becomes—. The Secretary, what goes on in his mind is: “Is this man speaking for the President, or is he speaking for himself? Who the hell is he telling me how to run my job? I'm the one who was given the task of making this”—so you have this tension that's built in between the White House staff and the Cabinet. And I think it will always be there.

It's a very small and almost irrelevant anecdote, but when Shirley Hufstedler came in as Secretary of Education, she was the “new-kid-on-the-block.” It was the last department created and she was the newest secretary. I think she came in in the middle of the Carter Administration. One day—we had a standard daily meeting if the President was in town, just a very brief meeting, about ten o'clock in the morning to get the lay of the land, so that everyone would know what was going on for the day with the President. Occasionally he would digress from the agenda. There really wasn't any agenda. But one morning he read something in the paper that he thought was quite interesting and he would like to share this with all of the other important people in government. He gave me a copy of it and he didn't say, “Send this to all of the Cabinet secretaries,” but my definite impression was that he wanted to; so I did. I did exactly that. I sent it actually to their information people—I didn't send it to the Secretaries—and put just a little sort of informal note on it that the President was taken by this piece and would like to share it with others in Government.

A day or so later I got a call from Shirley Hufstedler's Information Secretary and wanted to question me about this. “What does this mean? Is the President trying to convey some sort of hidden message or something?” In addition to that, I got an impression that they thought I was stepping on their toes; if the President wanted to consult with the Secretary, he could always pick up the phone and call her. It was resented a bit. As I say, this is a very tiny, almost irrelevant anecdote, but it illustrates the tension that exists between the Departments and the White House staff.

MK: In a way it also shows how difficult it is when you come in. There are all sorts of norms that are already there, and ways in which things work, and understandings of what things mean. Now, you came in during the Administration.

RJ: I came in [at] midpoint.

MK: So how did you learn? What did you do to prepare yourself when you came in?

RJ: Not very well, frankly. What did I do to prepare myself? Well, of course, I had a perfunctory meeting with the President, nothing more than a get-acquainted meeting, although I had known him in previous life going back to the time when he was a Georgia

state senator. I spent a couple of hours with Jody Powell, just getting a general idea of what they wanted me to do.

MK: What did the President say to you about your job, and what did Jody say to you about your job?

RJ: The President said almost nothing, other than in general terms—this was a three- to five-minute meeting. It was something to the effect, “I know that you will be a big asset to the White House staff” and so on. [It was] a very general conversation lasting, as I say, no more than three to five minutes. We didn’t really talk about what he expected me to do. The President needs to remain above the fray as much as possible and we didn’t get into any specific details.

But, in the couple hours or so that I met with Jody, it was pretty clear that what I was to be—my title was not an assistant or deputy Press Secretary; it’s usually reported that way. My precise title was Special Assistant to the President, no more than that. Then the subtitle to it would have been “for Press Relations”. Essentially what I was to be—I had a constituency in the same way that Sarah Wedington had a constituency to the women. Who were some of the other special assistants? [Inaudible]

MK: I was thinking Anne Wexler had the whole thing.

RJ: Well, my constituency was the American Society of Newspaper Editors [ASNE] because at that time I was about at the midpoint of my career as an editor and I had established some credentials that gave me a measure of respect among my colleagues. I was to be the liaison between the White House and the editors of the nation. Now, we had a Deputy Press Secretary, Patricia Bario, who in fact was in charge of an outreach program, but that was different from what I was expected to do. She would set up these conferences with regional editors where the President would come into the Cabinet Room and sit here and answer questions from Western editors, or something like that. Mine really was to simply maintain a contact with my colleagues in journalism and say, “Look. We’ve got a policy initiative that we’re announcing tomorrow and, if you’re going to editorialize on this, I’ll be happy to set up an interview for you with the Secretary of the Treasury,” or whatever, “a conference call with him, so you’re editorial board can discuss it.” I did a little of that but the big problem of course was that there were 1,700 daily newspapers and there was one of me. So it was always strictly just a hit-and-miss proposition.

Getting back to how did I prepare for it, I read a few books. I’ve read Richard Neustadt’s book. I guess everybody should read that whether they’re going to the White House or not. A number of books like that. One of the most interesting books that I read was John Dean’s *Blind Ambition*. The more I read in that, the more I asked myself what have I gotten myself into? One very, very useful thing that I did—Griffin Bell had left government by that time and had gone back to Atlanta. I went over and had about a two-hour conversation with Griffin. I respected his—he was not on the White House staff, but Griffin was a very, very bright man and I knew I could rely on him to be candid with me and tell me what I could expect and what should be expected of me.

MK: What did he tell you?

RJ: I don’t have a record of it. I guess maybe I did take notes of it. He seemed to be defining the problems of the first two years of the Carter Administration, and they now have become almost clichés: that the President was too immersed in the detail of management, that he

needed to delegate that to other people; that he didn't have particularly good relations with Capitol Hill. You remember the famous remark of Tip O'Neill about "Hannibal Jerkin," referring to Hamilton Jordan. That was a good example of where we just hadn't—I say "we"—"they" hadn't gotten off to the right start. I would later on make my own mistakes.

Probably the first mistake that I made—and this does to some extent have to do with transition. I guess Jody said, "Do you want an office here in the West Wing, or over in the Executive Office Building?" Well, my heavens, he shouldn't have asked that; he should have assigned me an office in the Executive Office Building because that was much more akin to my role that I was supposed to be playing, sitting around calling editors all day long and setting up special interviews of one kind or another. I chose to be in the West Wing, for heaven's sake. It's almost human nature that you would do that. It was a mistake.

I don't remember whether I told Larry Speakes this or not, but we had three top-rank press people in the Press Secretary's complex, myself, Rex Granum and, of course, Jody. And then in addition to that there were two or three assistant secretaries down just off the Press Room itself. There were too many people around there. There certainly should be no more than two in the Press Secretary's immediate office. That should have been reduced from three to two, because people tend to get in one another's way whenever you have too many people around. I'd keep the White House staff as small as possible. I think that's very good advice. And in particular, keep those in proximity to the President to the smallest number possible. In the final analysis, the Press Secretary is going to be making the major decisions anyway, and there's really not much you can do to take the load off his shoulders. You can field a lot of telephone calls. If he's getting telephone calls, important calls that deserve to be answered, from editors throughout the country, then the Deputy Press Secretary or special assistant can take those and has to take them in a lot of ways. Now that doesn't always satisfy the person who's calling, but it has the next best thing to it. You try to insulate and protect the Press Secretary as much as possible.

I remember the *New York Times* did some kind of profile on me after I had been there a few weeks. It was generally a very favorable profile, mainly because I had had a long-standing connection with the *Times*. But they did have one little fishhook in there in which they said that there are some who think he came to be the Press Secretary's Press Secretary. Well, that wasn't really entirely true but to some extent I guess it was. I was certainly to advise Jody on practical matters on how to deal with the press and so on. I was the only one that had had extensive experience in the press. Others had—Rex Granum had been a very good reporter. He was the Deputy who was there in the Office. Pat Barrio was the Deputy over in—but in retrospect it would have been much better if I had taken an office over in the Executive Office Building [EOB] rather than take up that space and get in the way of everybody around the—somebody who didn't really know the game. It took me at least six months to learn how Washington worked.

MK: What did you not know coming in, that you learned in that six months?

RJ: It's so obvious that I'm almost ashamed to say it. I went there thinking that my role was to serve the press. My role was to serve the President. It's that simple. If their interests were in conflict, then that meant that my loyalties lay with the President, not with the press. I thought that I was going there to help out the press. I helped out the press best by representing the President's interests. Any time that I had some impulse to act like a reporter—I think in general it's probably not a good idea to get somebody who has as much experience and is steeped in journalism as I was, in the role of a Press Secretary, because it's all but impossible to put your previous life behind you, particularly when you feel this real

obligation to report news when that's what's been ingrained in you ever since you took journalism 101. Then, all of a sudden, you may be in the position of suppressing news.

MK: Isn't what they [i.e., White House] want is to use the contacts that you have, to leverage off of your relationships?

RJ: To some extent, yes. That's not even a cynical interpretation but a just realistic interpretation of it. It's not something that applied to the Carter Administration any more than it did to the Nixon or the....

MK: That was Herb Klein's job.

RJ: Exactly. And he did it extremely well. Herb Klein was quite good. I've come to respect his role a great deal. But he certainly understood his role was to serve the President, and not to serve the press. Or, rather, to serve the press by serving the President's interest.

MK: In his case, he was in the Old Executive Office Building and that helped him greatly because it kept him out of a lot of warfare.

RJ: Absolutely.

MK: The Carter White House, I don't expect had quite the same warfare.

RJ: No. We didn't have anything quite like that. This is a digression. I mentioned that I read John Dean's book, which was written by Taylor Branch, of course, which I thought was the best of the Watergate books. But I thought to myself, "My God, what am I getting myself into?," and I really began to have cold feet—after I was reading that there was such a pervasive, low moral tone to the whole Nixon Administration. But that simply didn't exist in the Carter Administration. We were capable of being realistic or cynical, whichever way you choose to put it, but there were not the suspicions that people were out to get us and all sort of conspiracies both within and without the White House.

MK: On a regular basis what kind of editors would you deal with? What sort of relationships did you have? In a way, your job is to have relationships with the outside world.

RJ: Yes. Exactly. I'll give you just a very typical example of what I did. Again it's so trivial that it's nothing more than illustrative. But we had some major economic policy that was being announced in—I think I'm right about the date—August of 1980. The President had made a significant speech on it, and it was laying out the broadest kind of economic policy. I called a number of fairly prominent editors that I knew in the country. The editors of the *Chicago Tribune*—I remember in particular speaking with them. I'd say, "Look, we would really like you to take a deeper look at this when you write on it than simply reading the wire service reports or even your own White House reporter's report." The White House reporter was a generalist; he was not an economics man. "All I want to do is tell you that we can make available to you virtually anyone in the Government to the Secretary of the Treasury to have a conference call with you," and so on. And I spent a morning and an afternoon, maybe a whole day, following the announcement of this initiative, contacting these various editors. I could tell a measurable difference in the editorials which appeared in the papers that I had contacted and the ones that I hadn't.

MK: So one of the things that you would do after such an event was look through and see what it produced.

RJ: Absolutely. We subscribed to every major paper in the country; not every paper but a huge number of papers, and we would excerpt their editorials each day. In the White House there was a little daily newspaper—I've forgotten what it's called.

MK: The White House News Summary.

RJ: The News Summary. We did watch that feedback closely. As I say, I could always tell that if you cooperated with—we weren't trying to manipulate the news; we were just trying to give them more depth than they would have gotten by reading the news stories or the wire services in particular. As I say, that's just one example.

MK: What kind of information would they get? Would they take an interview with the Treasury Secretary? Was it paper? Did they get more paper than they otherwise would have? Would it be an economics person within the White House that they talked to?

RJ: I would have access to a whole list of people. It could be Charlie Schultze or someone on his staff. It didn't necessarily have to be the Treasury Secretary. I think I raised it to a higher level than it deserves there but, in fact, if I were calling—this is not a good example. If the *New York Times* economics columnist, if we wanted him to have access to the Treasury Secretary, they would make their own arrangements. They wouldn't need me to do it. But someone who is a little below that level, say the editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, I could set him up with an interview with Charlie Schultze, the President's Council of Economics adviser. They'd talk fifteen or twenty minutes and, without exception, whenever this was done, the editorials served the President's interest much better, and I think served the public's interest much better, than having an editor write something without really knowing all of the facts on it.

MK: What kind of special relationships did you have with the *Times* and the *Post* and the *Wall Street Journal*, as far as giving them information? Did they get special feeds?

RJ: I think they did. I know, for instance, that I had almost regular meetings with Eleanor Clift and Tom deFrank [who] were then *Newsweek*'s White House people. I had an informal arrangement where I would meet with them, I think it was on Wednesday afternoons, just to answer whatever questions they had. I know that there were these other arrangements as well. I think, for the most part, it was on the telephone. In addition to that, these special arrangements were worked out between the policymakers and contacts at [a] newspaper that they knew they could trust. They didn't necessarily have to be the White House staff, the White House press who tended to be generalists. That's a terrible position. You know someone who might be happy to talk to you is John Herbers, who covered the White House. The only problem was he covered it during the Watergate years and that was so distortive that nothing worked like it was supposed to be working. It was an aberration rather than—it would be interesting history but not much more than that.

The problem with the White House Press Office is that they're like the old cliché of the airline pilot: "Hours of boredom and moments of panic." They simply sat around with nothing to do. I'm talking now about the twenty-five or thirty regulars who simply sat there and waited for something to happen. I think this tended to feed the tendency toward sensationalism. If you can find a conflict between Brzezinski and Stuart Eizenstat, you make a story out of it. But there was always going to be a conflict between Brzezinski and Stuart Eizenstat and whatever name they may have in whatever Administration.

MK: Did you all ever set about providing more and more information on the theory of giving these people work to do, extra work to keep them busy?

RJ: I think, yes. I think there's no question. Again, in the cliché: it's [time to] go down and feed the animals red meat. "The daily feeding." The briefing is called "the daily feeding." You inundate them with memoranda. You never hold a briefing without passing out forty or fifty pages of material that at least will give them something to do for the rest of the afternoon. Yes. There's no doubt that there's an attempt at manipulation. But ultimately, I think, there has to be a kind of minimum level of trust between the Press Secretary and the press. We're really getting far afield from transition but that's all right with me. I don't know that much about transitioning.

MK: We're looking at governing as well. What is an effective operation? In the operation that you all had, how many people worked there and how are the jobs split up?

RJ: How many worked in the Press Office?

MK: Yes.

RJ: My recollection was somewhere in the range of twenty-five. Of course, the Press Secretary was like the Sun and all the others were like the planets to him. He was the vital person. It was structured as any sensible management chart would be structured. Jody was not—he'd be the last on Earth to claim that he was a good manager, or a good detail man. I think he was among the very best Press Secretaries we've ever had. That's not just my judgment. If you read the writing of people who covered it during the time, they would say the same thing. He came in at a time when the level of trust between the press and the Press Office was just about as low as it could get. You had [Ron] Ziegler, whom nobody trusted. Toward the end of the Nixon Administration I think Ziegler was not even giving briefings. They were sending out—

MK: Jerry Warren.

RJ: —Jerry Warren, right, because he was the only one who had any credibility with the press any longer. They were sending in the second team, in effect, is what it was doing. Then [Gerald] Ford came in, and had a series of accidents. He had the terHorst resignation almost immediately, and that was a terrible blow. Then he got Ron Nessen, who was temperamental and really not well suited to be—he was much more suited to be a reporter than he was a Press Secretary. A perfect example of what I'm saying, when you really should look for somebody outside the press rather than the press itself for a Press Secretary. I don't think he worked out very well. I wasn't there. I could only observe it from a distance. So when Jody came in he was taking over at a very, very low point and I think he did restore that minimum level of confidence between the Press Secretary and the press that you have to have if the country is going to be served.

MK: In effect the Press Secretary has three constituents. The President is his boss.

RJ: Exactly.

MK: And then he [the President] in a sense is a constituent as well because he has to have a sense of what information needs he has; what information he should have, as well as what information is to be given out. There's also the press corps and then there's the White House staff.

RJ: Yes, and the Cabinet by extension, as well.

MK: That's true. What kinds of relationships were regularly established with all three? Say between Jody and the President, they met every day?

RJ: Absolutely. Jody was one of the two or three people, maybe one of two in the White House, who could simply pick up the phone and call the President without going through anyone and who had conversations with him several times a day. Jody's personal relationships were his strongest points. He's a man of enormous integrity. Everybody knew they could trust Jody and they knew that he had no personal agendas, that he was serving the President. He was trying to make the Administration work.

He could chew people out, there's no doubt about that, although he didn't do it in a ruthless or cruel manner or anything. He had kind of a humane—one of the most touching things I remember was when some very low-level intern, I believe, at the White House had gotten in deep trouble. I can't even remember the details of it. But this person stood to be stained—obviously this is a grotesque comparison like Monica Lewinsky—for the rest of her life. It was some young girl. It would have been awfully easy just to throw this person to the wolves and say we fired her. She leaked something, as I recall. That was what the problem was. Her whole life stood to be affected by this. Jody came to bat for her and stood up for her. At the end of it, when it was all over and all settled, he said that he had a special place of sympathy in his heart for a young person who got into that kind of trouble. Well, what he was talking about was the time when he was expelled from the Air Force Academy. I think people saw him that way, as a very compassionate, highly intelligent but humane person in the end. He's really one of my favorite people. The only thing we couldn't get him to do was to stop smoking.

MK: Has he stopped?

RJ: Well, he had a heart attack, you know.

MK: No, I didn't know that.

RJ: He had a heart attack about three or four years ago. I honestly don't know if he's quit or not. I think he did.

MK: Something made me think he—[Mike] McCurry quit when he was in the White House.

RJ: I would never have encouraged anybody to quit while we were there. I remember the President once—one of the very few private remarks I've had. He asked me—again, it shows Jimmy Carter's tendency to manage too much. He said, "Isn't there something you can do to get him to stop smoking?" I said, "Mr. President, you can ask a lot, but that's one thing you can't do." I don't think it would have been good to try to get him to stop, either.

MK: What kind of relations did you all have on a regular basis, as far as giving information to White House staff people, and getting it from them that dealt with the communications of issues?

RJ: It was mostly on an informal basis. Jody would come in and he'd have a memo in his hand and he'd say, "How about calling Anne Wexler and find out what she wants done on this and what needs to be done; tell her what to do." Whatever. It was done on an ad-hoc and

informal basis. We did have a few structured meetings. The Press Office itself had its own morning meeting to talk about and anticipate things that were coming up during the day. Then, in addition, we had the so-called senior staff meeting which was a pretty unproductive affair. It really was not the senior staff, but generally the deputies of the senior staff. It was held in the Roosevelt Room each morning. Again, it was just to keep everybody informed on what was going on in their departments so that everybody would be singing from the same hymn book.

I thought maybe I might throw out a few ideas that came to me when I went through your [memorandum]. Your memorandum is really good. You talked about rhythms of the day and I just jotted a note on the side, "It's not rhythm; it's jazz."

MK: Can you talk some about a day? When did you come in and how did you prepare for the day?

RJ: I prepared by watching the seven o'clock CBS Morning News and ended by watching the seven o'clock CBS Evening News. But you talked about the long hours, twelve- to fourteen-hour days. There are no hours at the White House; you're on duty for twenty-four hours a day. When you go home, you're still there because you're connected by the Signal Corps telephone and, in addition to that, the White House is wherever the President happens to be at the moment. It may be in New Delhi. It's not a physical location. There was many a time when I would be the ranking person in the White House; that was because the President was gone and he would have all the other top advisers with him. But that was a wonderful time. It was like being in a museum or something. There was nothing going on when he wasn't around.

MK: When you watched the CBS Morning News at seven, were you at the White House when you watched it?

RJ: I generally tried to get there then, although hours—I think this tendency to say long-hour days—[are] probably not too important. It is a high-stress job, but it is high stress not because of the long hours, but because there is absolutely no margin for error whatsoever. Now you're going to make errors and then you spend the rest of your time correcting but you just have to remember that once a problem reaches the White House basically it has no solution. If it had a solution it would have been solved at some level lower down. It's so often a roll of the dice. Sometimes you roll seven and sometimes you roll eleven. The stress is not so much from the long hours—because the hours literally are twenty-four hours a day. It doesn't matter if you're at the White House or whether you're at home or in San Francisco or where. The stress arises from the burden of the job rather than the length of the hours.

Now there were people who put in too many hours. David Rubenstein was a good example. It was legendary that he would be there at eleven o'clock at night. It didn't matter, because he wasn't married. Heavens. He was married to his job. He enjoyed it. I think he even enjoyed the celebrity status of being the one who spent the most hours in the White House. But that was almost irrelevant. Jody didn't spend a huge amount of time. He tended to come in around ten or eleven o'clock—well, no, not quite that late. He had very erratic hours. But it was meaningless because he was available. Any time that you wanted him you get him at home or wherever. There wasn't a day that passed that I didn't call him. If he didn't have a morning meeting, I would call him at ten or eleven o'clock. In a way, even though I don't think he planned it that way, it was pretty good for his family life. It allowed him to at least be around Nan and Emily—Emily was about twelve or thirteen years old then, their only child—during the morning. It at least gave them a semblance of a father in

the house rather than down at the White House and he was still doing exactly the same work that he would have been doing if he had been sitting at his desk. I think the stress level doesn't have anything at all to do with the number of hours spent there. Actually that applies anywhere.

MK: What about the nature of one's adversaries? Was that a source of pressure?

RJ: Yes. Well, it depends on what you call your adversaries. The press in general, this adversarial relationship is overblown, I think, in a lot of ways. The real adversaries in the press from the Clinton White House are the *Wall Street Journal*, for instance, or the *American Spectator*. They are specific newspapers; they're not the press generally. You deal with them in very different ways. You deal with your friends as friends and you deal with your adversaries as adversaries. I wouldn't have dreamed of setting up an interview, if I were Bill Clinton's Press Secretary, with the editor of the *Wall Street Journal*. Four years would go by without that even being considered.

MK: Well, one of the things that Clinton did was, on his fiftieth birthday, he did an interview with Trudy Feldman.

RJ: Well, Trudy is a special case.

MK: And Trudy's interview was published in the *Wall Street Journal* on the op-ed page.

RJ: I do recall that now. Maybe Trudy is changing. I don't know. I hate to get into personalities.

MK: I think people intensify as they get older.

RJ: I hate to get into personalities but it was well known: if you had something that you wanted to publish pretty much in the form of a press release, if you did an interview with Trudy you could get it done. I'm almost reluctant to say it, but I'm going to say it, because she came to me once with a story she had written and wanted me to read it. See, she had more one-on-one interviews with President Carter than any single reporter there. But she came to me with a story that she had written about one her interviews and wanted me to read it over before it was published and even said, "If you don't like anything in it, you can change it." That's why Trudy got so many interviews.

MK: She also had one with Clinton during the Fall, last Fall, at Yom Kippur and that one went into the Outlook section of the *Washington Post*.

RJ: I think people ought to know that whenever they are running Trudy's stories that, by and large, they are running material that's been pre-vetted. Now, what happened on that *Wall Street Journal* one, that surprised me very much. I think Trudy got caught in a crossfire serving two masters who were on opposite sides of the fence. As I recall, from that particular one, it was not a very damaging piece.

MK: No. It was very favorable. That's why he did it. In fact he pointed that out to McCurry.

RJ: Trudy was a very useful person to have around the White House. She could get in your hair, but she was very useful.

MK: In your day, what were the rhythms as far as the press needs were concerned? What were the kinds of deadlines that would come up in a day, that you were working with?

RJ: We did have to be mindful that they did have needs that had to be met. As disorganized as Jody was, we did do our very best to meet those deadline needs, just the practical needs of having a story every day. It was not a highly structured thing and it was always subject to change. Of course, if the President was gone, everything was off. The White House was shut down for all practical purposes when he was gone. I think more actual policy work got done during those periods than any other time. Someone like Stuart Eizenstat would just have much more time to consider matters. He wasn't quite under the state of siege as he would be if the President—see, the press followed the President; wherever he was, they went.

MK: So did he do interviews or that sort of thing with reporters?

RJ: Yes. Not White House staff reporters. They would be specialized reporters. See, his was domestic policy and it was across the board. It might be Robert Pear of the *New York Times*, who wasn't credentialed to cover the White House but, if we were talking about some new initiative on healthcare or something, he would have a special interview with him. Generally speaking, the policymaker would make his own arrangements on things like that with at least consultation with the Press Office, if not the help of the Press Office. Sometimes, the request would come through the Press Office, and sometimes it would go directly to the policymaker. Each of those policymakers pretty much had their own press secretaries. Certainly the top ones did. Brzezinski did, for instance. He had Jerrold Schechter.

MK: Right. During a day, what were the basic information needs and the time they needed it, for the wires, radio, television, print papers and magazines?

RJ: Well, I think we used the six o'clock news as our benchmark, the six o'clock evening news, because that coincided with newspaper deadlines as well. We were keenly aware that every reporter was expected to have some news. You have so many blank columns in a newspaper to fill and so many minutes on television. But what we tried to do was not stumble over our own feet, which happened more often than it should. One in particular that I remember, we had something that we had announced that we felt was quite important and we wanted to get as much attention to it [as we could]. I can't even remember when this was. But at the same time, the same day, someone scheduled a routine photo opportunity with the President and Muhammad Ali. So Muhammad Ali met with the President for five minutes in the Cabinet Room. Then on the evening news you can imagine which one appeared; it was Muhammad Ali and the President rather than what we wanted to get on there. So we had to be mindful of that sort of thing. It would have been much better if we had gotten—if we hadn't given the press something else they would have had to use what we wanted them to use and then give them Muhammad Ali the next day.

MK: Did you do much of that, that kind of thinking about—say if you're aiming for the evening news—.

RJ: Yes. You kept that constantly in mind. There's no doubt about that. Now you didn't try to sandbag the press. This was something we were very careful not to do, was to play tricks with them. You didn't announce something, a very important initiative, at 5:30 in the afternoon, and say, "Okay. Take it now and put it on the television or put it in the paper tomorrow." You did try to respect their need for familiarizing themselves, getting the background for it, or even helping them get that insofar as possible.

In addition to Jody's briefings, one of the things that I did quite a bit was—I held almost no briefings myself—I did occasionally when he was out of town but, my God, I'd rather be tied down over a bed of fire ants than hold a no-holds-barred briefing. But what I would do would be set up these specialized things where you would get a specialist in the White House and all I would do would be address him, pass out not a press release—there's a name for it—but the information package of some kind, it could be a forty-or-fifty-page memo on some initiative, and then you'd have the top person in government there to discuss it. A simple example of it would be if some economic figures were being released. Let's say a—

MK: A Consumer Price Index [CPI].

RJ: —CPI or an unemployment report or something of that kind, particularly if it was something that reflected well on the President. Hell, if it reflected well on the President, you might have him. But you'd have Charlie Schultze there to conduct the briefing, to answer questions. I would simply introduce him and pass out the thing and so on.

MK: What kind of coordination took place with the Department, in terms of people who were hired as information officers? Were they passed by the White House?

RJ: I think the people who hired them—there weren't that many on the White House staff. Always, of course, they had them—

MK: I mean in the Departments.

RJ: —in the Departments. There was some coordination.

MK: Say Hodding Carter. Basically, Jody made that decision?

RJ: Yes. There was some coordination, and in other cases there was not. I know, for instance, Griffin Bell's first information man was a guy by the name of Marvin Wall. I know that the White House didn't have any input on that. Griffin chose Marvin on his own. It didn't work out very well, for one reason or another. Then Marvin was moved to another—I think he was assigned to write a history of the Justice Department or something like that. He was replaced by Terry—

MK: Eastland.

RJ: Not Terry Eastland. He was Meese's. A very good one, I might add. Terry Adamson. He was quite good. Terry was a lawyer. Marvin was a newspaperman and Terry was a lawyer. That tells a lot of difference.

MK: When Hodding Carter decided to televise briefings from the State Department, was the White House involved? Was Jody involved at all in that decision?

RJ: Very much. I think Jody had more contact with him [Hodding Carter] than any other single Assistant Secretary for Information. He dealt a great deal with Tom Ross at Defense. But, you see, one reason for that is because almost everything changed with the Iranian hostage seizure. In some ways that changed my job very dramatically. Because Jody then had to devote virtually all of his time to the Iranian hostage thing. And that meant that I had to take over, as best I could, some things that he otherwise would have dealt with. Which took

away from me the time that I was supposed to be spending on these things that I came there to do.

MK: Why did he have to spend the time on the hostage situation?

RJ: It's just because of the sheer demand of it. It wasn't just Jody. It was the President's time as well. The political emotions were just so high, not to speak of the fact that you had the possibility of starting a war or getting fifty-eight people killed. That was what was uppermost in the President's mind. I couldn't begin to quantify what percentage of the President's time was spent on it, but I dare say it was at least 50 per cent from early November of 1979 to the end of the Administration.

MK: What about the rest of the White House?

RJ: It didn't affect, say, a person like—it did occupy virtually all of Brzezinski's time. It depended on the Department. It didn't affect Charlie Schultze or Stuart Eizenstat or Anne Wexler. It did affect her to some extent. It certainly took at least as much of Jody's time as it did of the President's. It was a very distortive thing and the policy was constantly changing. In the first few days it was elevated to the highest level and then as we saw that the thing was not going to be resolved quickly, we tried to sublimate it after having already created the problem ourselves. But these are things—you can't really say that we made mistakes; they were just reactions that did or didn't work properly. In the end we brought the people home alive, and that's what Carter wanted to do, and without going to war, without killing a lot of people.

I guess I can quote this. Well, I would like for it to be off-the-record.

[Off-the-record]

MK: Were there things after you got in, you look back and think, "Gosh, I wish I had known X"?

RJ: Yes.

MK: What are things you wish you had known?

RJ: Probably more about how Washington works, the Washington culture. The White House culture and the Washington culture, which are separate; the Congressional culture; nothing more than I wish I had been able to learn faster than I was [learning]. I felt, by the time I left, maybe I had reached a point in the learning curve where I could actually help the President some. Of course, by that time, it's too late. And of course that's true of many, many other people.

MK: Including the President.

RJ: Including him, too. You quoted Neustadt's—

MK: Arrogance, ignorance and adrenaline.

RJ: Yes. I'd rephrase that. That's almost certainly—interestingly, Richard Neustadt, Jr., you know was a White House staff member under Carter, and I believe that he was killed in an accident.

MK: He was. He drowned in a rafting accident.

RJ: Something like that, yes. So I wonder if Richard Neustadt, Sr., had his own son in mind when he made that remark about—

MK: That's funny, because he was there at the beginning.

RJ: He was there at the beginning. He was on Stuart Eizenstat's staff, and I think he was our specialist in Communications policy, I believe.

MK: I know he was working on the role of the Office of Telecommunications Policy, about what it should be.

RJ: And I jotted down—just substituting different words for arrogance, ignorance and adrenaline—self-confidence, open-mindedness and energy. Those three are just as good words as his. They describe pretty much the same thing. But you've got to have those qualities. You don't want to have clerks in the White House staff, for goodness sake. I do believe very much in Roosevelt's famous phrase that his staff should have a passion for anonymity. The big thing is that these people, they almost inevitably are going to see themselves as 330—I believe that was the number on our White House staff, which was too large. Reagan, after promising to reduce it, enlarged it.

MK: I don't think he promised to reduce it.

RJ: Maybe not. I don't know.

MK: Republicans tend not to mention it. It's Democrats who reduce it. Why do you think there were too many people?

RJ: Because there's this natural tendency of the bureaucracy simply to expand. It's not exactly a bureaucracy, but it does tend to become one. The reason is, because at some point they begin to trip over one another's own feet. There are just too many people around. The major decisions have to be made at the top and I would tend to reduce the staff. I just finished very belatedly reading this new biography, relatively new—it's about four years old now—of John Marshall by Jean Edward Smith. Have you read it by chance?

MK: No, I have not.

RJ: He's a Canadian scholar and it is a superb book. I later found out—I talked to Dan Carter who was on the Pulitzer Prize committee. I said, "I think this book really deserves it." He said it was among the top books. In it he related how many people were on John Marshall's staff when he was Secretary of State. Would you guess what it was? That doesn't include the ministers. Would you guess what it was?

MK: Ten?

RJ: Seven. I suspect that Marshall ran a very good State Department. I think that this President could get by with a lot fewer people than he has. They even get in the President's way, for heaven's sake.

MK: How do they get in a President's way?

RJ: They all want to meet with him, you know. There's nothing like a meeting with the President. The more people you've got around—it's like going to a football game. If you have a crowded football game it takes a lot longer to get out of it. I'm just much in favor of it and particularly keeping some distance. I think an awful lot of these people could be in the Cabinets, rather than in the Executive Office Building. You certainly do have to have advisers. I think that probably goes over about everything that...

MK: In looking at the office and how it was divided up, what were the units within the Office and how many people were in each of them?

RJ: In the Press Office?

MK: Yes. Let's say under Jody, yes.

RJ: I was sort of an adjunct, a special assistant. Although I was called the Deputy Press Secretary, I wasn't. There were two Deputies. One was Rex Granum, and he was very much the person immediately under him [Jody]. Then the other Deputy was Pat Barrio, who handled this outreach program and she was out in the Executive Office Building. She pretty much ran her own shop. I believe that Pat had jurisdiction over preparing the News Summary. She had a staff I'd say of about seven or eight people, some of whom carried titles of assistant secretary or associate secretary.

MK: Did she do the radio line?

RJ: She did, yes. She did do that. Then in the lower Press Office, I believe that's what it was called, I believe Claudia Townsend was the person who was in charge of it. She worked directly under Jody, too, and she strictly handled logistics and did it just amazingly well. [She was] a very competent young woman. I think she may have had one or two assistants under her. Dale—I forgot his name.

MK: Dale Leibach?

RJ: Yes. He was an assistant Press Secretary and maybe she had one or two others. They were all very small operations. Then in addition we had the standard support personnel of secretaries. The Photographer's Office was more or less under the Press Office. His name was Billy something, I've forgotten; he was awfully good.

MK: Webster?

RJ: I don't believe that was his name because—

MK: It wasn't Webster. He was—Shaddick.

RJ: That's it. He was capable of taking as many as 1,500 pictures of people shaking hands with the President, and getting them delivered. All of these people were just very, very competent. That is, the ones that were at the working level.

MK: Did you do any booking for television programs for people, say somebody is going to go on a Sunday program?

RJ: To some extent, we certainly coordinated that. It could cause real problems. I remember—again, I don't want to get too close to quoting the President but I know that there was some

concern when an Assistant Secretary of State, Marshall Shulman was his name, for one reason or another he went on to one of the Sunday talk shows without clearing it with the proper people. It caused a lot of problems around the White House. Not problems, but it—

MK: Anxiety?

RJ: —raised some questions and said: “We shouldn’t allow this kind of thing to happen.” And it came from the very top, those questions did. Obviously what happened was the President was watching television—

MK: Brzezinski.

RJ: Brzezinski also.

MK: Because Shulman came from Harvard.

RJ: Whatever.

MK: Brzezinski from Columbia. But they were both interested in Russia.

RJ: This is almost in-house gossip here, but he [Brzezinski] was regarded by the White House staff with great suspicion and kind of a Rasputin who exerted this inordinate control over the President because he had a meeting with him every morning at 7:15. It was his and his alone. I know that there was real hostility between—really it was more from Stu Eizenstat to Brzezinski than it was the other way around. I think Brzezinski was very secure in his position. What I really would like to know would be the relations between Brzezinski and Cyrus Vance. From my perspective Cyrus Vance, he was too honorable a man to be in a fight with a street fighter like Brzezinski. I was one of the ones who didn’t like Brzezinski. I don’t think anybody in the White House liked him. I don’t think his own staff liked him.

MK: Well, he had a sense of turf and how to get it, and how to protect it, and how to advance it. Speechwriters were also under Jody?

RJ: You know, I never was entirely clear about that. But if they weren’t under his direct control—actually I think they were under Al McDonald, when I was there, but that almost means nothing. I do know that every single speech came to the Press Office. That was one of the things that I did was read speeches a great deal. Mainly what I did was to read them with the view of a newspaperman who would be reading it and underlining it—this is what I’ll use for the lead—and to give Jody some idea of what he could expect the newspapers to focus on. In particular, if I saw some phrase that could be taken out of context and misrepresented, I would blow the whistle on that. That was one of the practical things that I did for Jody.

MK: On the State of the Union, let’s take a particular speech, how was that viewed? What sort of opportunities did people see that providing for publicity?

RJ: I think you’ve asked a question that I really couldn’t give a good answer to.

MK: It wasn’t something that crossed your desk a lot earlier.

RJ: Not really. I did see it, of course, the final product, but it was not the product of a speechwriter, but several—and the President himself. He made the final editing on all

speeches. But that one in particular. It was in a class by itself; it wasn't just another speech. I couldn't really tell you too much. I know that it was seen as a huge opportunity. He was going to be speaking to the whole nation. It had political as well as policy importance.

MK: Was there a procedure that you all had on a regular basis to look backward and assess things, to assess how you had handled particular things?

RJ: Yes. I think we reviewed everything that was done, particularly press conferences. We would go over those very carefully, and the President himself did. I remember one day, one of the early times I was there, he gave a press conference and I was sitting at Jody's desk and the phone rang. It was the direct line from the President. I picked it up and it was the President. He said, "Could you call the whatever office it was and tell them to rerun the press conference?"

MK: WHCA [White House Communications Agency].

RJ: He said something to the effect of "I want to see what mistakes I made." So he was assessing his own performance.

MK: In his last year he hung up press conferences and decided that they were a waste of time. On what basis did they decide it was a waste of time?

RJ: Well, the Iranian hostage thing just dominated everything to such an extent that probably there was nothing—you don't hold a press conference unless there really is something to say.

MK: Well, he had a schedule where he did it on a very regular basis, because they would have the editors and then the out-of-town editors coming in. They'd alternate. Then the regular press conferences, the White House press corps.

RJ: Generally speaking, that's not a very good idea, to have a regularly scheduled press conference.

MK: It was a venue where he was shown to his advantage. He rarely had a press conference where he did poorly. He was very good at it.

RJ: His very best form of communication was in small groups. We'd have Congressmen come in or even large groups of Congressmen. Sometimes they would come in the East Room and you'd have maybe forty or fifty, sixty Congressmen. The President would come in and make a little talk and answer questions. He was extremely good at that sort of thing. I guess where he was at his weakest was in his public speech, the public speech, where Clinton is so good. Carter really was not that good in giving a speech. But, as you say, he was very good in press conferences because he was always in command of the facts. He rarely ever misspoke. Once in a while he would, but he was very, very careful in his speech.

MK: In thinking back over your time in the White House and the people you knew there, was there a particular type of person or certain kinds of characteristics of people that seemed to work well in a White House, that certain kinds of people do well and others may not?

RJ: Yes. I think so. I think that there are, for want of a better word, policy nerds. Stuart Eizenstat comes to mind. He did his job extremely well. He thought through policy very carefully. Stuart is very close to a professional politician in the British sense, the

Parliamentary sense. I know that when the Administration ended that he was just in a prolonged funk until the Democrats came back. David Rubenstein told me once that he was willing to take anything. I think that David said if they offered him director of the Bureau of Weights and Standards he would snap it up, leaving a lucrative law practice to go back into government. Of course, he is back now and in a very big way.

MK: Yes.

RJ: I think he is Assistant or Deputy Secretary of State, some high-ranking position. He's very good. These are people who, in a way, are like Bill Clinton himself. They analyze policy very, very closely and carefully. Then there are others; there are some who are simply egotists and who just want to be close to the center of power. There are very dedicated people like Jody, who is really not a big policy man, but wants to make the whole thing work. Hamilton Jordan would fall into that category, too. They are some of the smartest people I ever met. There were weak links in it; there's no doubt about that. I think they are fairly well established. We had very poor Congressional relations; everybody knows that. They improved toward the end, but at the outset they weren't good. I think to some extent the President probably was responsible for that. He had dealt with the Georgia legislature and that was a very different animal than the U.S. Congress. It took him a while to really understand that fully.

I've got to go and meet some people but if you have anything else—.

[End of Disc 1 of 1 and Interview ]