

SETTING UP MAP ROOM IN WHITE HOUSE
AND OTHER INCIDENTS IN CONNECTION WITH SERVICE THERE

EDITED COPY OF INTERVIEW (ORAL HISTORY)

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B.T.R.

I reported to the White House as Naval Aide to the President early in January 1942 - 16 January, to be exact about it. In so doing I relieved Captain John R. Beardall who was under orders to report as Superintendent of the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis Md.

As can be well imagined the raid on Pearl Harbor brought about changes in the administration of the White House. Dispatches with reference to the employment of the armed services poured into Washington. Selected dispatches found their way to the White House. The geography of the Atlantic and the Pacific at once became most important. As I recall it there was a globe in the President's Oval Office in the West Wing of the White House and a smaller one in the President's Sitting Room-Office on the second floor of the White House proper. A cabinet of National Geographic charts was mounted on the wall immediately behind the President's desk in this sitting-room office. This cabinet of maps was most complete. It was used to a great extent in his famed stamp collection. Aside from these aids there was not available to the President any other geographical aids so far as I am aware. [Note: It is not out of order to remark here that the President's knowledge of world geography was amazing. I once expressed surprise that he knew so much about an insignificant lake in a small foreign country. "If a stamp collector really studies his stamps he can pick up a great deal of information" said he. And continuing "The National Geographic maps are most helpful to me because they are in such detail."]

On reporting to the White House, as I have remarked elsewhere, I found that the President's Military Aide, Major General (Pa) Edwin M. Watson, U.S. Army was also the President's appointment secretary. In showing me about the White House Office appointment "one of the rooms which will be of interest to you" said he, "is the Goldfish Room". It is the old cabinet room and here we park people who are awaiting appointments with the President. Since Pearl Harbor we have gotten a few charts in here, and the President sees them from time to time. The old cabinet table is large enough to handle these charts. I keep them turned face down when we have people in here". I glanced at the table and saw maybe as many as a half dozen charts which covered generally the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans, a pair of parallel rulers, a set of dividers and a reading glass. It was with reference to this that I thought Gen. Watson surmised that the room would be of interest to me.

I cannot be sure at this point in time who first suggested that a room be set aside where records of military matters, particularly current operations could be kept for the convenience of the President. As a matter of fact it doesn't make much difference who first came up with the idea of the White House Map Room. The need was an urgent and present one directly hostilities commenced. Some one, probably the President himself, remarked that Mr. Churchill's naval aide, Comdr. Thompson R.N. had with him for the P.M.'s convenience what he called "a traveling map room which was a condensed and visual version of Admiralty records." At any rate I repeat that the need for some such arrangement was apparent and that something had to be done in that direction at once.

As might be supposed head scratching was in order. I did not know where to begin. By chance, I learned that a Naval Research Officer of the rank of Lieutenant, junior grade who had spent some weeks prior to our involvement in the war as an observer in the Map Room of the Admiralty was currently on duty in the Office of Naval Intelligence. His name was Henry Montgomery - "Bob" Montgomery, the movie actor, to a large and appreciative public. I immediately got in touch with him. I was impressed with his personality, his intelligence, his modesty and his eagerness to do something helpful. Prior to his assignment in the Admiralty Map Room as an observer he had, minus his Naval rank to be sure, driven a Red Cross ambulance in the French Theatre. From the start I liked "Bob" Montgomery. As time went on I became genuinely fond of him -- He had initiative and enterprise -- was not hesitant in speaking out but once a decision was made he could "roll with the punches" with the best of them. As best I could I told him of my problem -- Read Admiral Kirk chief of O.N.I. agreed to release Montgomery to me -- But I am getting ahead of myself. Prior to getting in touch with "Bob" Montgomery I had been in contact with the Chief Usher of the White House, Mr. Howell Crim for the purpose of acquainting him with my need for space. He informed me that there was a room on the basement level of the White House located between the "Doctor's Office" and the "Diplomatic Reception Room" which might be suitable for my purposes -- a combination office for the Naval Aide -- and a storage facility for the information which I thought essential that the President have. Mr. Crim and I looked the place over. The room was of modest size -- the square footage I have forgotten but I would say that it was about the size of a couple of modest living rooms

thrown into one. I noted it had "facilities" generous in size -- a refinement which turned out to be really important once the Map Room got into operation, it serving as a coat closet and dressing room as well. The thing that caught my eye particularly about this room was its location. It was just steps away -- across the corridor, in fact -- from the elevator which the President used in proceeding to and from his living rooms on the second floor of the White House and as I have remarked earlier it was next door to the "Doctor's Office" where almost nightly, at days end, the President received treatment for the sinus condition which plagued him greatly and massage therapy for his lower legs and feet. Note: The President once remarked to me about his sinus condition, "John, you know I never knew what sinus trouble was until I became shipmates with what we chose to call air conditioning -. Now I can't shake it -- and accordingly I blame air conditioning. I think I'm right". And while I am on the subject of the "Doctor's Office" I might as well remark that I often thought the sinus treatment was a fine escape from the strenuousness of his busy days. Here about 5:30 - 6:00 p.m. the President could relax in the dental chair, get his sinuses packed, read the afternoon papers, get his massage at the capable hands of Lieut. Comdre. Geo. Fox (n.c), remark lightly about the days happenings and more likely than not feed "Fala" his Scotty. Prettyman, the President's valet, would bring Fala's ration to the President and the President in turn would place it before the anxiously awaiting Fala thus impressing Fala as to who, in fact, was his master.

I felt that we should make the Map Room information as available as possible for the President. It seemed to me that the room in question was ideally located for my purposes and I so told Mr. Crim. Within hours the room had been cleared out; its contents of odds and ends of furniture sent elsewhere -- a desk, a file cabinet and a couple of chairs moved in, towels in the facility and we were in business. At last I had a locked cabinet in which I could store the despatches which were flying back and between the P.M. and the President.

"Bob" Montgomery thought the size of the room would meet our needs. The next item was "to get going". I instructed "Bob" about as follows: Based on your experience in the Admiralty Map Room I want you to draw up a plan for an installation of the same sort here. Recall, if you can, just what information they thought important. In that way we can reduce trial and error here to a minimum."

Most importantly large scale charts of the Pacific and Atlantic were required. These were obtained and mounted, covering at least two of the walls. Other charts of more modest size were mounted covering other combat zones -- i.e. South East Asia and Indonesia, the Mediterranean, North Africa -- the East Coast of Africa, including the Red Sea and Suez Area, the Persian Gulf. Much progress was made in a hurry.

The operations establishment of the Map Room started out to be strictly a Naval affair -- A few days after it was gotten underway I invited General Watson in to see what we were doing. He was impressed but "where is the Army part of this", said he. I told him that I thought since he was military aide to the President that he would continue to keep the President informed on those matters. "But how can I?" said he. "I'm also the appointment secretary to the President and that is a full time job".

My reply ran something like this -- "I'll tell you what I'll do. I started out to make this room a center of Naval Information for the President -- that was as far as my authority would seem to carry me. If you want pertinent Army Information carried here as well I will be glad to do it so long as the whole operation is under my direction and control and so long as the Army helps out by supplying personnel who while here are subject to my directions".

"That is easy", said General Watson. "I'll have my Army Captain assistant report to you. Of course, I would like to have him help me from time to time as well". "That is satisfactory", said I, "but I note your man is a Captain in the Army -- and the rate at which promotions are going forward in the Army -- he won't be a Captain very long. Now I have my eye on a chap -- a Naval Reserve Lieutenant, a Naval Academy Graduate -- who I expect to bring over here as my assistant and executive of this operation. Promotion in the Navy being much slower than in the Army it is quite conceivable that your man may outrank my man eventually, if he doesn't do so right now. I would like your man to know that this operation is a Naval Operation and will be kept that way -- and that in my absences my lieutenant will be acting on my behalf". "Agreed", said the General. "It's a deal."

The Naval Lieutenant I had in mind was Wm C. Mott - Class of 1933 U. S. Naval Academy. Mott had not gotten a commission in the Navy because of defective eyesight. He took law and graduated from the Geo. Washington University. He had retained his status in the Naval Reserve and came back to active

duty in 1941 in the Office of Naval Information. Currently I was working for Admiral H. R. Stark USN the Chief of Naval Operations. I liked the cut of Mott's jib. He was intelligent, quick witted and a "doer". Since it was inevitable that most of my time as Naval Aide would be spent in my Navy Department office it was important that my deputy in the Map Room be a "take charge guy". Mott was just that. The nature of his physical handicap was such that I supposed it would disqualify him for sea duty. This fact was also a consideration in selecting him for duty in the Map Room. [Later, Mott went to sea as a member of the staff of Pacific Amphibious Forces. Admiral Richard Kelly Turner, USN]

The Map Room started to grow - It really just grew - sometimes quite by accident. "Bob" Montgomery's advice was most helpful in getting started. The Army was generous in sending us some good people. Among them was Albert M. Cornelius, an Army Warrant Officer who took care of our files. He did a fine job. The Navy sent us good people as well. The Map Room was a twenty four hour a day undertaking. More and more as the operation got underway the President started coming in to the room on his way to his office in the morning and on his way up to his quarters in the late afternoon. I often discouraged him from coming in trying as much as possible to conserve his time.

From time to time the Map Room, despite the "No Admittance" sign on the door, had visitors. Admiral Harold R. Stark - USN prior to his departure for London paid us a visit on 10 April, 1942 quite by chance. He had come over to the White House to see the President. I met him in the corridor outside the President's Office and he remarked that the President suggested he look in on the Map Room. Admiral Stark was impressed and wrote a letter that day to the Chief of Personnel on our behalf. ^{Admiral} King visited us on occasions as did General Marshall.

In the late summer of 1942 Admiral Wm D. Leahy our ambassador to Vichy France was recalled following the death of his wife in France and was assigned by the President to duty as his Chief of Staff. This assignment had been rumored for a few days about the White House. The President made it official by making the announcement at one of his afternoon press conferences. Directly the conference was over I asked the President if Admiral Leahy's assignment as Chief of Staff made any change in my relations with him, the President. "Not in the slightest", said the President, "and I've taken care

to tell Bill Leahy so". I thanked the President; overtook Admiral Leahy in the corridor; wished him well in his new job and invited him to come with me to the Map Room - his first visit. His visits increased - day by day. A few weeks later he remarked to me one Sunday afternoon - I cannot forget it-- "McCrea, I think there is more information about the War concentrated in your Map Room than there is in any other one place in Washington" "Thank you Admiral", said I - there would hardly a better place to have this information available as it is to the President, Mr. Hopkins and you".

The delivery of messages to the Map Room from the Service Department went "round the clock" - day and night depending on their urgency. Every morning about 7:30 I went over the nights incoming despatches in Admiral King's office pulling out for showing to the President the ones I thought would be of interest to him. I then attended the Secretary of the Navy's daily conference at 8:30 - and then to the White House to the President's bed room to bring him up to date on overnight events.

As time went on the President used the Map Room more and more. Often he was accompanied by Mr. Hopkins who, by the way, was in and out of the Map Room almost daily. There comes to mind a visit to the Map Room by the President which was a bit out of the ordinary.

The day was a Sunday. The President had concluded work on the overnight despatches and I was about to leave for my home when he remarked "By the way John, what are you doing tonight about seven thirty? That "What are - you - doing "day or night indicated that he had something in mind he wished to have done. My answer was always "Nothing at all Mr. President". And so it was in this case. The President continued,"I have invited our Secretary of War to come over at that time. He needs a lesson in geography and the Map Room is just the place for it. Now when we go to the Map Room I want only the three of us there- Mr. Secretary of War and you and me. Just tell the Watch Officers to withdraw while we are there. Make arrangements to meet the Secretary when he arrives at the White House - have the usher notify me of his arrival and he, the usher, can handle my chair

until we reach the Map Room where I hope you will take it over. and that was the way it went. I arrived at the White House some fifteen minutes before the expected arrival of Secretary Stimson - reported my presence to the President and waited in the lobby of the Main Floor of the White House to greet the Secretary. He arrived on the dot - and, after "resting" his wraps, the two of us proceeded down the stairs to the Basement floor at the foot of the Elevator Shaft abreast the Map Room door. Meanwhile the usher on duty proceeded to the Second Floor got the President into his wheelchair and brought him down by the elevator to the Basement level. The President greeted the Secretary warmly. Once inside the Map Room the President proceeds to give Secretary Stimson a tour of the place with emphasis on the extent of the visual aids, etc that were used to indicate graphically our armed force committment through out the world.

Just what information did we store and here readily available in the Map Room? Just off, and more importantly by far, was the complete file of messages passed between the United States (The President), the United Kingdom (Mr. Churchill), China (Chiang Kai-Shek) and Russia (Joseph Stalin) having to do with the conduct of the War. The establishment of this file was the progressive outgrowth of the very small file of despatches passed between the Prime Minister and the President which were handed to me by the President a couple of days after I had reported to him for duty as his Naval Aids. We were at his desk in his office. He took from a drawer in his desk a small clip file of papers - told me what they were and remarked that, in turning them over to me, he was sure I would safeguard them and that "their contents would not find their way into any of the news columns originating in Washington or elsewhere". As our involvement in the War progressed it was only natural that the Chiang Kai-Shek and Stalin despatches would find their way into this super secret lock-and-key file. Aside from Map Room personnel administration access to this file was limited to the President and Mr. Harry Hopkins and later to Admiral Wm D. Leahy. The President Chief of Staff visual aides were used to locate the whereabouts and numbers of U.S. Forces - Army, Air Force,

Navy, Marine Corps throughout the War Zones. In addition the progressive day to day location of military and merchant convoys was posted, as was the locations of Naval Task Forces, the whereabouts of capital ships, etc.

All this was explained by the President to Secretary Stimson. The Map Room Watch Officer had of course withdrawn according to plan and I handled the President's chair. After the Secretary had explained to him the general functions of the Map Room the President indicated that he wished to be moved to the Pacific chart and remarked about as follows:

"Now Harry (that is what the President called him) getting back to matter covered in your memorandum I think I should point out what I ^{have} ~~have~~ often forgotten that the Pacific Ocean covers a vast area of our globe. Many fail to realize what a really vast area is covered by the Pacific Ocean. Many of us who live on the East Coast think of the Atlantic as a large ocean - Of course, the Atlantic is a large ocean but the Pacific is much, much larger- You can see for yourself Harry. The Atlantic over there (the President pointing to the chart on the Atlantic Wall) is really small when compared to the Pacific- Yes Harry, the Pacific is an ocean of vast distances".

Secretary Stimson's rejoinder, if any, has been lost in the passage of time. The President repeated a number of times about the vastness of the Pacific. as compared to the Atlantic. Finally, the President asked Mr. Stimson to join him in his study. As we went out of the door I waved the watch officer in and proceeded to handle the Presidents chair on to the elevator and to the second floor study. The President not having included me in his invitation to the study I withdrew and went to the first floor to where I awaited the Secretary. In due course, twenty minutes or so he appeared and after ~~retrieving~~ his wraps I escorted him to the front door of the White House where his car awaited him. The evening was at an end.

I have thought often about this incident. As noted earlier the President had remarked that Sunday forenoon that the Secretary of War "needed a lesson in geography" and that the Map Room was "just the place for it". The President did not remark to me as to why Secretary Stimson needed a lesson in geography nor during

"the lesson" was I able to "guess" what the lesson was all about. Obviously it had something to do the relative sizes of the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans - I think it reasonable to suppose that the President had strong feelings on the matter otherwise he would not have asked the Secretary of War to come to the White House on a Sunday evening. I was in a poor position to ask the President why!

Mr. McGeorge Bundy - edited Mr. Stimson's diaries. The published work came to my attention and I sought to find out if there was any reference in the diary to the White House visit. There was none. Some ten years after the incident I write about, when Commandant of the First Naval District with Headquarters in Boston, I had the pleasure of setting beside Mr. Bundy one night at dinner in the Union Club of Boston. I recounted the incident about the White House visit and the "lesson in geography". Mr. Bundy could recall no reference in the diary to such a visit. The question remains with me why there was no such reference. Surely a Sunday evening call on the President of the United States would, I think, deserve a sentence in any diary let alone that of Mr. Stimson whose diary was kept in great detail.

Getting back to the origin of the Map room - It started from scratch and gradually grew into something of importance to the President. It really just grew - some of the ideas suggested we discarded but in the end real progress was made. I had the pleasure of visiting it in the early days of the Truman Administration. Later in the early days of the Kennedy Administration I visited the White House and was shown the Situation Room - the grown up version of the Map Room, with many refinements capable of keeping the President well advised about things to which he should have ready access. We are all familiar with the copy book axiom "big Oaks from little acorns grow". The little acorn the Map Room of 1942 has grown into the Big Oak the Situation Room of 1973.

It would be unfair not to mention the Map Room personnel. As I recall it now all, aside from two (2) regular Army Officers, were reserve personnel about equally divided between the Army and the Navy. They were intelligent, alert, anxious to be helpful, and above all knew how to keep their mouths shut. It would be

impractical at this point in time to list all of them here extolling, of course, their fine qualities - a "shut mouth" being most important.

As to the above I make an exception. It is in the case of Lieutenant (j.g.) Henry Montgomery. He was most helpful to me in setting up the Map Room. His experience in the Admiralty Map Room, short as it was, was of much value to us in quickly pointing the way in which we should go. It no doubt speeded up the establishment of our own operation.

There came a time when I thought it best for "Bob" to work on. Through no fault of his own, it being inevitable, Bob was a marked man. He was handsome; he was in uniform, he lived at the Mayflower Hotel: he was seen on the streets of Washington going to and from his hotel to the White House. From time to time small items mildly critical appeared in the Press about him. His association with White House was commented on not too favorably by a female columnist with a large following.

One day one of my well placed friends in the White House heirarchy asked if I knew I had rabid Republican working in the Map Room. I replied in the negative and added that that fact didn't worry me one bit - that while I had never voted I had been raised in a Republican community in Michigan and had been appointed to the Naval Academy by a Republican Congressman. "But this chap is known in California to have strong Republican leanings" said my friend.

"Again I say what of it?" was my reply "and by the way who is the villian?"

"Well its Bob Montgomery" was the answer I let fly with a blast that it seemed to me to be nit picking to complain about the politics of a junior Naval Officer in War time. "But this is the White House" continued my friend - and we left it there.

Shortly thereafter one fine Saturday morning Bob rang me up in my office in the Navy Department - and this is the way it went

"Captain there are a couple of chaps in press room who have written an article about Mr. Harry Hopkins which it is hoped will appear in a Sunday Supplement of the so and so paper.

As you know Mr. Hopkins daughter Diana lives here at the White House. The authors of the article have a photographer standing by and they want me to appear with Diana in a picture showing her feeding pigeons on the White House lawn. I have told them that I didn't feel at liberty to conform with their request unless I had your permission to do so. That is the reason for this call.

"Bob", said I, "tell those chaps that as far as I am concerned they can take all the pictures they wish of Diana Hopkins feeding pigeons on the White House Lawn, But that you are working for a stinker who will not permit you to appear in such a picture."

"I figured as much," said Bob. "Under the circumstances I don't like the idea either." It seemed appropriate to touch base with Harry Hopkins which I did. He agreed completely with the action I had taken.

About this time a gentelman of Bob's profession and similiarly an officer of the Naval Reserve wrote to me and volunteered his services for duty in the White House, suggesting that he might be helpful in the area in which his "friend Bob Montgomery" was employed. In replying I pointed out that no vacancy existed in the detail under my control.

From time to time Bob had told me that he hoped he might go to see duty at some future time. In view of the attention his presence at the White House was attracting it seemed to me to be a good time to let him realize his ambition of going to sea. I talked to him at some length -- pointing out that his service in the Map Room had not alone been greatly helpful but was superb in all respects. I pointed out that he was a marked man; that his success in his career had in fact inevitably made him a national figure. And I think you will agree Bob that only one national figure can be associated with 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington D.C. Bob agreed completely and even eagerly accepted the suggestion that it was now a good time to go to sea.

Bob indicated that his preference was service in the P.T. boats. Since he was 39 years of age I suggested that the P.T. line of boats might be pretty strenuous for one of his age. He said, that despite his age, he would like to give it a try. He did. He did well on the P.T. and ultimately served on the staff

of a Destroyer Squadron Commander in the Atlantic. My appraisal of Bob was that he was a thoroughly good officer. I enjoyed my service with him.

This, Mister Moss, has to do with the early day of the Map Room at the White House. If any further questions occur to you don't hesitate to ask them. Earlier Mr. Moss you asked as to the kind of things in which the President was mainly interested -- Navy things, that is.

My answer to that is that he was interested in everything. As I told you earlier he charged me with being "his eyes and ears in the Navy Department. I want you to keep me informed -- fully so I'm sure you won't bother me with trivia. Nevertheless you must remember that I spent eight years in the Navy and my interest in it remains unabated. So many of your leaders now, I knew as young officers. I have watched their careers with interest." In the light of my instructions from the President I thought it best to tell Secretary Knox, and Admirals King and Stark about them. This I did, at an early conference. Said I, "If there are things going on over here you don't want him to know about just don't tell me." Understanding smiles greeted my remark.

You asked further if I ever got "whipsawed" as a result, my answer is "yes" -- but not seriously so. It came about as follows:

Among my friends in the Navy Department was Rear Admiral Walter B. Woodson, U.S.N., the Judge Advocate General of the Navy. Admiral Woodson had, at one time, been the Naval Aide to the President Roosevelt. While in that assignment as a captain, he had unfortunately failed of selection to the rank of Rear Admiral. A short time later the office of the Judge Advocate General became vacant and Woodson a law post graduate, a member of a number of bars and having served in that office for some three tours of duty including a tour as Assistant Judge Advocate General, was appointed to the vacancy, the appointment carrying with it the rank of Rear Admiral. He was well qualified for the job by law. Woodson and I had always been on the best of terms and when my designation as the Naval Aide to the President was announced he was one of the first to pay "a - well - wishing - visit" to my office.

"You will like the President" said he. "He is genuinely fond of the Navy and is greatly interested in all that it does. Remember too, he has a memory like an elephant. He is given to making casual remarks about one thing and another and then refer to them weeks later. So my suggestion to you is that you inform yourself completely about the little things which seem to interest him. He is bound to bring them up at a later date". And I thanked Admiral Woodson for the advice - which turned out to be good.

The despatches having to do with the hostilities and other urgent matters. I got to the President as soon as may be. Other items, particularly the internal administration of the Navy Department which were covered by circular letters, Alnavs etc which I thought would interest him I accumulated in a despatch box on my desk. Once a week, Sunday morning to be exact, I took these items to the White House along with the important dispatches that had come in over night. Sunday morning was an excellent time for me to see the President. His physical condition was such that he was actually immobile. He was invariably in bed when I arrived in his room. He had usually finished with the Sunday papers, was invariably in good spirits and wanted to talk and discuss the weekly "extras" which I had brought over.

One such directive which I had brought over on the day about which I write was an order that Naval contracts no longer were to be processed by the contract section of the office of the Judge Advocate General of the Navy but would be processed by a group of competent lawyers which the Under-Secretary of the Navy, Mr. James V. Forrestal had brought down from New York to do the job. The order to do this was signed by the Under Secretary and was, of course, given wide circulation in the Navy Dept. This order was just one of many papers which I took to the White House on the morning in question.

When the President reached this item he read it carefully and remarked "What is this all about - why is this change being made?"

"I'm afraid I can't tell you what, Mr. President, brought this about. All I know about it is what you see there. I would suppose that it has the highest approval."

Isn't the Judge Advocate General of the Navy the law office of the Navy? Where was that office established anyway?" said he.

"I think I can answer that Mr. President. It was established by act of Congress in 1888 as I recall it to be an office within the Office of the Secretary of the Navy - and the J.A.G. is the law office of the Navy Dept.

"Well", he persisted, "doesn't this order in effect take away an important function of the Office of the J.A.G.?"

"That is the impression I get, sir" said I.

"Does Frank Knox know about this?" said he. "I can't answer that Mr. President, said I."

The President was sitting up in bed. He took the copy of the order he had just read, folded it neatly and without further remark put it in the side pocket of the smoking jacket he was wearing. About four or five days later I attended a conference in the Secretary's Office at which was present the Under Secretary Forrestal. On the way out the Under Secretary greeted me and asked that I come to his office. This I did.

As he reached his desk he picked up the copy of the order handed it to me and said sternly - "How did this get to the President?"

"I took it to him last Sunday morning, just one of many items having to do with the Administration of the Navy, which I thought would interest him," said I.

"Of course, I know who told you to take it to him," said with a glint in his eye registering great annoyance.

"Mr. Secretary," said I "no one told me to take this to him. This item came to my attention because I am on the distribution list for almost everything that goes on in this department. When I read it I knew it would be of interest to him so I included it along with a number of items of interest which I took to him Sunday morning last."

"I suspect, he persisted, "Woodson had something to do with this getting to the President."

"Well, Mr. Secretary Admiral Woodson had absolutely nothing to do with this getting in the President's hands. I alone am responsible. I knew nothing about this matter until I saw it on my desk - as a matter of fact I haven't seen Admiral Woodson in weeks."

"John I don't get along with Woodson, he is uncooperative. Now if you had been the Judge Advocate General I'm sure we would have gotten along alright."

"Thank you Mr. Secretary" said I. As I turned to leave his office Mr. Forrestal said quietly. "The Secretary (Mr. Knox) has told me to withdraw this order and I hate like hell doing it."

And the order was withdrawn over the Under Secretary's signal and that was that.

Secy. Forrestal and I became close friends. He had a fine mind. He once told me that when he first came to the Navy Department he was greatly suspicious of the flag list of the Navy - "I said to myself these fellows cant amount to much if they are willing to work for the chicken feed they get."

He out grew that feeling and long before his career ended so tragically with his leap from the tower of the Bethesda Naval Hospital he had become a great admirer of the Flag list of the Navy.

Moss: Earlier you mentioned about the Presidents visits to Ross Mc Intire's office to have his sinuses packed - Would you talk a little about that

McCrea: I have covered this somewhat elsewhere in these notes - He didn't get his sinuses packed daily - just on occassions; but occasion after numbered successive days. I am sure he looked forward to the visits he made to Ross's office. The visits were a relief to the daily cares of his office. I don't suppose that anyone can visualize the effects of the President's physical handicap. When he went to the office in the morning and took his place at his desk there he was for the day. He could not get out of his chair and stretch his legs by walking about the room. He was a prisoner confined to the chair. The patience with which he bore his affection was remarkable - with never a reference to it. He wore his leg braces as little as possible - they were heavily uncomfortable and he could not walk without them. When he walked he had to do it on someone's arm and use a cane as well.

In Ross McIntire's office he usually looked and was fatigued. The therapy of the visit took place in what for a better word must refer to as a dental type chair. Once the

sinuses were packed he would scan the evening papers and remark lightly about the happenings of the day. His asides about certain of his callers were always pointed and amusing.

Aside from the relief he got from having his sinuses packed he always enjoyed and was grateful for the treatment and attention his legs and feet got at the hands of Lieut (H.C) George A. Fox U.S.N. whose specialty was physio therapy. The experience was refreshing.

Invariably after visiting Ross's office he would come next door to the Map Room. We were always pleased when he visited us. Early I developed a concern about sparing his time. I talked to Ross about it saying that often matter of interest could be communicated to him without the necessity of the President coming into the Map Room - would Ross object to my briefing the President in his, Ross's office when, in my judgement it could be done, thus saving the time of the President which would permit him to go directly to his quarters from Ross's office. He tried out this procedure and it worked. I read the pertinent despatches to him which he would have seen if he came into the Map Room. Of great interest of course were the highly secret despatches of the enemy which we were able to intercept and decode. What a help these despatches were in planning! What a help they were by way of letting us know what the enemy and enemy friends were up to. I did not read these intercepts to him - this in order that no one but the President would know their contents. We called the book in which these despatches were clipped "The Magic Book" - and indeed it was well named. The book was handled with care I can assure you.

[Note: This is not the time not the place for me to record my violent disagreement with many of the press and the politicians who would broadcast to the world closely guarded secrets the release of which could damage our country no end in many, many ways. The business to which newsmen have dedicated themselves in "this business of telling." And they are going to tell no matter what the consequences are even the best of them will tell when they shouldn't.

I recall with great vividness the distress in the Presidents voice when one day following one of his Press Conferences when he said to me "John, catch Elmer Davis (later head of O.W.I.) before he gets away; take him in the old cabinet room and see if you can get across to him the idea that he can't publish everything he wants to about our losses. Steve (Easley) tells me he can make no headway with him and I haven't the time to take him on"

I caught Mr. Davis and tried to tell him the dilemma the Administration and the Armed Services were in when it came to announcing losses. We had losses which while enemy inflicted were not known to be losses by the enemy. "But the people have a right to know." was his answer, "Besides" he continued, "if we made a daily summary of our losses and they were reported in our press the enemy would know nothing about it. I have a suspicion that you fellows in the Military have something to cover up if you don't want your losses known in this country."

It became my turn to talk and this is the tack I took:

"Mr. Davis," said I, "I don't know you well having only met you a few months ago here at the White House Press Conferences. You have a fine reputation in your business fraternity and I suppose there is hardly any one in your profession who has a greater following what with your writing and broadcasting. Now I have in mind telling you something but I shan't do so unless you are willing to tell me that under no circumstances will you ever repeat it or make reference to it in any way either in your writing, broadcasting or in private conversation or correspondence. Now if you are willing to give me this assurance I will tell you what I have in mind. If you are unwilling to give me a gentlemen's reassurance as I have asked we might just as well call off any further conversation.

Mr. Davis after a moments hesitation said he agreed to my terms.

"Mr. Davis," I continued, "you have made a point that in your judgement a daily report of our losses release to the press in this country would not be of benefit to the enemy

In this you are absolutely wrong. Nightly, an embassy here in Washington on instructions from its government sends a coded despatch to its foreign office which is a complete digest of all the military news released that day to our press. The country to which I refer has proclaimed its neutrality. But we know and have positive proof that all such information is forwarded to our principal enemies. Now I am not going to name that neutral country nor am I going to tell you how we know the information reaches the enemy. As to this you must take my word. You as a patriotic American I am sure would not want to give information of comfort to our enemies, and that is exactly what would happen if we gave honest daily loss reports to the press. I trust Mr. Davis that you appreciate the point I have tried to make with you."

Our conversation ended on that note. Mr. Davis didn't happily approve of all I said. He still maintained that "the people had a right to know." With this I agreed adding that "Whose" was his important factor. "When" conceivably could be "right now" or it might be at a later date - but in any event the judgement of the Military and the good of the country should be given careful consideration; as to deciding as to "When." Whether or not Mr. Davis was impressed with what I had said to him. I do not know. But I will say that I do not now recall that he ever again raised the question of announcement of losses at a Presidential News Conference, an item which heretofore had been one of his favorites.

Moss: You were telling me the other day that you used to spend considerable time with the President on Sunday mornings. Will you be good enough to exchange as the feature of your relationship with him.

McCrea: Elsewhere I have recorded in these notes odds and ends about my Sunday morning visits with him. Sunday morning was an excellent time to see him. He had no office to go to and because of his immobility he could hardly go elsewhere. He once told me he liked to go to church. "I like to say my prayers but I am conscious while I do so in church that I am being looked at. And I don't like to be looked at while I am saying my prayers."

church - usually a Saturday afternoon. Would I "like to go?" "certainly, Mr. President" was my reply often I make up my mind to go to church and when Sunday morning rolls around I will develop a sinus attack" this said with a twinkle in his eye while tapping his sinus area. with his forefinger.

I can only recall definitely of going to church with him on two occasions - though some how I think we went oftener than that. The events follows: When F.D.R. was just inaugurated as President on 4 March 1933 prior to the ceremony he went to church at St. Johns directly across Lafayette Square from the White House. The service was conducted by the Reverend Endicott Peabody the Headmaster of Groton. The service became an annual affair. Groton's Head Master would conduct the service and while the service was more or less a private affair, a good attendance was assured. One of the early pictures in which I appeared with the President was taken after the service on March 4, 1942 on the step of the side entrance to St. Johns. (My children like that picture.)

Another church service I recall we attended was at the Church the Christmas service the service was conducted by the Reverend Barney Phillips, who if memory serves, was at the time the Chaplain of the Holy Sand. Mrs. Roosevelt and Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt, junior (Nee Ethel Duport) went with us on that occasion. I sat on the Presidents left in the pew assigned to us he, of course, sitting on the aisle. There came a time in the service for the Offertory I retrieved a dollar bill from my wallet as my offering. "Say John, by any chance do you have a couple of extra dollars I may borrow for the collection. I don't have a cent with me,"-this said F.D.R. I quickly dug out two one dollar bills- the President folded them neatly and dropped them on the collection plate when it was passed our way. He whispered his thanks.

One day about a week later I was in F.D.R.'s office standing in front of his desk discussing a Navy matter with him when all of sudden the following exchange took place:

"John what do you think of people who don't pay their just debts?"

"Well, Mr. President I really havent had much experience in that regard" said I.

"Dont I owe you some money was his answer

"Well Mr. President if you are talking about that little transaction we had in church last Sunday I would say you do," said I

"And it was two dollars, wasnt it?

"This morning when I was dressing I said to myself "I owe John two dollars." And I took two dollars off my dressing table and here they are. We're all square now, aren't we?"

"Well thank you Mr. President but I really wasn't worrying too much about the two dollars" said I."After all Mr. President I would suppose only few can say to themselves the President of the United States owes me two dollars."

"Now John, you are a gentleman I'll keep you in mind when in the future I want to make a small touch. You know if I had borrowed two dollars from Hopkins he would have hounded me daily until I repaid him-and you never said a word about it" all this in high good humor-It was a joy to see him relax. Our contact with church you can see was stretchy! And it had its light moments. Usually on Sunday mornings by the time I got to his bedroom, about 9:05 or thereaabout, he had breakfasted and was surrounded by the morning papers. The morning dispatches out of the way we talked he liked to talk about the Navy-and every so often would prefere his remarks by saying "When I was in the Navy"alluding of course to the fact that he had been Assistant Secretary of the Navy from 1913-1921.

Mr. President liked to discuss individuals. When he was "in the Navy" King, Nimitz, Halsey and many others were on the way up. He knew them personally and expressed much interest in their careers - "What have they done in the recent past," he would say-and invariably add yet to the subject by telling a story or so about those days when he was "in the Navy."

When he was in the Navy the President was exceedingly popular with the younger officers. He was light hearted and gay-had none of the stiffness about him which the young were inclined to associate with the "secretary level." His judgement was good for one of his youth - mind you he was

the ripe age of thirty-one when he was made the Assistant Secretary of the Navy. If one can believe the tales of his time he was not too popular with the older officers. Many thought him somewhat (many, many of the older officers did not care for Daniels) disloyal to his chief. Daniels the Secretary of the Navy. Many did not like Louis Howe, F.D.R.'s administrative aide. As a matter of fact, it was rumored, around the Navy Department that some of the Bureaus would hold in abeyance, mail, on which they thought they would have trouble in getting the Secretary's signature and wait until the Secretary was out of town and then present such mail to the Assistant Secretary for his signature which they invariably got. But with all this the relation between Mr. Daniels and the young assistant secretary was pretty good. A warm friendship, between them existed throughout the years. President Roosevelt appointed Mr. Daniels our Ambassador to Mexico where incidentally he did a good job. Years later Mr. Daniels made a moving address at the Springs, Georgia of the cottage where F.D.R. died to be a national shrine. I spent that evening in company with Daniels on the train and dined with him in Atlanta. The burden of most of his conversation was his admiration of F.D.R.

One yarn the President told me on one of our Sunday mornings was of his narrow escape from death when, as Assistant Secretary of the Navy, he was a passenger on board one of our destroyers in the war zone in W.W.I. I never did anything about running it down so I am recounting the details as I recall. He told them to me. It seems that one of the four inch midship deck house guns was trained fore and aft and that one of the gunners mates was working on it. The ship in the war zone and the gun was loaded. Was a _____ F.D.R. was on the wing of the bridge, on the port side, in the vicinity of the compass repeater. He left this position moved in-board directly behind the helmsman. Just as he cleared the wing of the bridge the gun was accidentally discharged the shell taking off through the area just vacated by F.D.R.

That was a narrow escape. The last that on the occasion of the 1920 National Democratic Convention in San Francisco. He was a passenger in a loaded hotel elevator when the car plunged to the bottom of its

shaft has all the markings of a second narrow escape. There may have been others of which I am not aware.

You can see that Sunday Mornings with F.D.R. was always interesting.

On one such occasion he remarked to me about as follows: "John do you keep a diary?" "No Mister President, I don't I'm too lazy for one thing and besides even if I were so inclined the Navy Dept. directly following Pearl Harbor, issued orders that personal diaries were not to be kept."

"Well," said he, "I just wondered" continuing "I've been very frank with you on occasions-and I trust you."

"Thank you, Mr. President, I respect your confidence as for keeping my mouth shut I can do that, too. An officer whom I admire, Admiral J.O. Richardson with whom I was shipmates when he was C-in-C U.S.Fleet on congratulating me on my assignment as your Naval Aide remarked that he knew I could keep my mouth shut and in this job such a s-- of a b---- was' important. (Pardon the personal plug!)

"Well," the President continued, "one of my helpers here, a chap whom I liked greatly and in whom I reposed much confidence was Stanley High. I trusted him more than I should have. Imagine my surprise when one day there appeared in the Saturday Evening Post an article written by him disclosing many of my personal habits. What I ate for breakfast, what I read, etc. etc. It annoyed me greatly. One has to be careful in selecting those he can trust."

Looking out the window of his bed room on one such Sunday morning he held forth at length about the part he played in seeing that the then Jefferson Memorial was located where it is.

"Moss: Did you have telephones in the Map Room?

McCrea: Oh yes we had telephones connected to the White House switch board. We had no direct service to the Navy and War Department. Nor did we need any. The telephone service supplied by the White House switch board was superb. Directly I was made Naval Aide a White House direct telephone line was installed in my Navy Dept Office and another was installed

and they
in my bedroom in my home/were a great convenience for me-it
meant instant, or almost instant, communication with the Map
Room and my office in the Navy Department. I need hardly add
that that telephone in my home was "off limits" for my family
no matter what.

Moss: I note a number of volumes on Roosevelt on your shelves.
Do you find him an interesting subject?

McCrea: Of course I do, I have read almost everything I can
get my hands on about him. As a school boy he wrote at
length to his mother. She kept these letters and they
now make fascinating reading. One can really sense the
growing up of the boy.

It so happened that I was invited to make a talk at
Noble and Greenough School ^{was} a local boys school of
considerable consequence in this area. It seemed appropriate
to have the talk center around great men with whom I had come
in contact in my Naval career, pointing out as best I could
their traits which impressed me most. I turned to the four
volume set of F.D.R.'s letters which you see over there
and I concentrated on the letters which were written when
he was a student at Groton-since his age when there would
closely parallel the ages of the boys to whom I would be
talking. On one of the letters reference was made by F.D.R.
to Warren Motley as classmate. With the passage of time
Warren Motley had grown in stature and was one of the leaders
of the Boston Bar and a member of one of Bostons outstanding
law firms. It was my good fortune to meet and know Mr. Motley.
We became good friends. The next time I saw him at the club
following my discovery of his name in F.D.R.'s letter to his
mother the conversation was something like this.

McCrea: "A few nights since I was perusing a flock to letters
written by F.D.R. to his mother when he was a schoolboy at Groton
and in one of them I note he makes reference to you. Tell me
Warren how did he strike you as a schoolboy? How did he get on
with others of his time? What traits of character did he seem
to possess at that time in his developement?"

Motley: He was a pleasant enough chap-made friends easily-active

in school affairs. He was an all round nice fellow but John, I assure you, no one would at time have even thought that one he might be the President of these United States.

Another of my close friends here in Boston Mr. Thos P. Beal was a friend and classmate at Harvard of F.D.R. Tom was an usher at F.D.R.'s marriage to Eleanor Roosevelt. F.D.R. got each of his ushers a stick pin - the crest of the Roosevelt family - which were much in vogue in those days. Tom remained a good friend of F.D.R.. - but understably, Tom being a family third generation president of Boston's Second National Bank, was not too sympathetic with many of F.D.R.'s liberal views.

[Note: As a gesture of friendship for me and knowing of my association with F.D.R., Tom one day gave me, the stick-pin referred to above. He made a special trip to my house to accomplish this. It reposes in my safe deposit box - I protested mildly, of course, about taking the pin but gave in to Tom's remarks about lifes uncertainties, and his wish that I have it. I have made arrangements for the pin's ultimate disposition]

Moss: How about operations in the War and Navy Department similar to your Map Room and if there were such offices how did your operation differ from theirs if it did?

McCrea: I do not know what the War Department arrangements were. The Navy Department had a ship movement section which took care of Admiral King's needs. O.S.S. (Office of Strategic Services) under the direction of Col Wm. J Donovan put together an ambitious information center which was located in the vicinity of the old Naval Hospital in Bethesda in N.W. Washington.

In this operation Col Donovan, - incidently a close personal friend of Navy Secretary Frank Knox - was ably assisted by Colonel Merian C. Cooper U.S.A.F reserve. Both of these chaps were "operators". They had enterprise, initiative and imagination beyond belief.

"Coop" was in my class at the Naval Academy for 3 1/2 years, "bilging" at mid year our first class (senior) year. He had a fantastic career - from being a member of the of the Lafayette Escadrille - to our own Air Force - to the Kosciusko Escadrille (Polish) after W.W.I. He was shot down in Russia and escaped after ten months in prison. He became interested in the movies. He and a friend wrote and shot

"Grass" the story of a nomadic tribe of S.W. Asia and the tribes in search for food for their cattle. He wrote, produced and directed "King Kong" and "Chang". Produced "Flying Down to Rio" "Last Days of Pompeii", "Little Women" etc.. He and Lowell Thomas produced "This is Cinerama" for less than a million dollars; The play grossed in excess of thirty two (32) million.

It was inevitable that the team of Donovan and Cooper would produce something of a high order of dealing with Combat Intelligence. Cooper came over to see our Map Room and was impressed with its "amateurishness." He did however see a few things that he liked. His idea was a small _____ and an illustrated lecture. There would be one show a day at 3:00 p.m. The rank would be invited to attend. Special arrangements would be made for the President who would have to make a daily trip to this super intelligence center to the briefed by the experts from Army, Army Air Navy and Marine Corps. It sounded great but this I know: the President did not once visit the Donovan-Cooper Intelligence center while I was his Naval Aide. After the War I was told by someone that he "thought" the President went over once - but of that he wasn't sure. Of Cooper a classmate of mine once wrote "I know of no one like him - writer, movie director and Air Force Officer and outstanding in all of these fields." I agree.

Moss: You have already decided pretty much who had access to the Map Room - you, your staff and people who had special permission. It was I take it essentially a military operation. What kind of a pass system did you have to get in?

McCrea: Pass? Everybody on duty at the White House had a White House pass issued by the Secret Service, numbered as to access and extent of access. As for myself my White House pass bore my photograph and was surcharged with a large figure 1. The Number 1 permitted me to go any where in the White House from basement to attic. Other numbers indicated that the bearer was limited to the basement or the first floor, second floor etc. Everytime one came through the White House gate he was required to show his pass special passes had to be issued for automobile wheels were permitted on the grounds. Every time one went in or out of the White House grounds he was supposed to show his car pass as well. I didn't always show mine; it was unnecessary

since my little old second hand Ford was well known to the gate guards. That Ford was always due for a laugh. It looked out of place in the circle in front of the White House. In fact it drew comments far and wide. Transportation was a major problem in connection with Washington duty each time I went to Washington I would buy a second hand Ford-usually for about \$75 or thereabouts. One can well imagine the caper out by such a car on the main White Home drive. At any rate it was satisfactory transportation for me-and besides it was paid for. On detachment^{one} was required to turn in his White House pass. When I was detached in February 1943 I took my pass to the Chief of the White House Secret Service detail, "Mike" Reilly. "Mike" looked at me and remarked "Captain if I dont pick up your pass I'm sure you will never let it fall into the wrong hands. Why dont you keep it as a souvenir of your duty here." I was, of course delighted and kept the pass. I stowed it away in a trinket case where I kept decorations and ribbons. A few weeks ago after an interval of a number of years I had occasion to visit the trinket case. Much to my discovery I observed that my White House pass together with its plastic holder had completely disintegrated- a victim, I suppose of the passing years, and the uncertainty of the durability of plastic of early manufacture.

Moss:- Did the President ever use the Map Room for conferences?

McCrea: Sometimes, but not often, F.D.R. Hopkins and Adm Leahy would visit the Map Room as a group I would suppose that visit could qualify as a conference. Then too there was the visit of Secretary Stimson-for "the geography lesson" described above.

Moss: How much did the people at the State Department know about the Map Room?

McCrea: Very little. Mr. (Jimmy) Dunn, Asst Secretary, knew of the Map Rooms existence. Besides I went over with you elsewhere Allies assault on Madagascar.

I think I might add right here a thought or two about F.D.R.'s attitude towards the Dept. of State. F.D.R. was fond of Cordell Hull but he did not cut him in on too much. Mr. Hull was not well and was hospitalized from time to time. F.D.R. thought State was "leaky" (his own term!) and it was to this annoyed F.D.R. He was often distressed to read in a column originating in Washington terms that could only be gotten from State.

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I am reminded of an incident which had amusing over tones to me at any rate. It was a fine spring day somewhat on the Warm side, a bit windy, the kind of a day which was conducive to open windows. I chose this fine afternoon to walk up from the Navy Department to the White House. About the time I arrived in the vicinity of the Corcoran Art Gallery I noticed a white sheet of paper, typewriter size flying down the street- I crossed the street retrieved the sheet of paper which aside from being slightly soiled, in otherwise in good condition. To my amazement it was stamped as originating in the Department of State and across its face there was stamped in large type red letters and all, the word "Secret." And it should have been "Secret", too. I took the sheet of paper into my Map Room office-wrote a short memorandum in long hand telling how I had come into possession of it addressed the envelope to the Under Secretary Mr. Sumner Welles whom I knew, gave it to one of our trusted White House messengers who promptly took it across the street to the Dept of State and delivered it to Mr. Welles office. In short order I received a note of "thanks" from the Under Secretary.

There is no particular moral to the foregoing. It only suggests that an warm spring like days when a gentle breeze is blowing in Washington one should be alert for flying papers.

Moss: What was the relationship between F.D.R. and Sumner Welles? It was a lot closer, wasn't it; than with Mr. Hull?

McCrea: You are right in that respect, as I pointed out above Mr. Hull was not well and would be absent from his offices' for days at a time. But the President was always solicitous about him. "John, find out how Cordell is these day." F.D.R. was always pleased when the news about Mr. Hull was favorable.

Sometime in 1942-spring or fall-but at any rate overcoat time, Fulgencio Batista, the Cuban President-Dictator paid a visit to the U.S. The President and I were to leave the White House at a given time on a late afternoon, to go to the Airport to meet Batista. "John, do you suppose Cordell Hull would like to go down with us to the Airport to meet our guest? Find out, will you and in any event tell him I would be pleased to have him go with us."

It worked out as planned. Mr. Hull was delighted with the President's invitations and he appeared at the Diplomatic Entrance looking a bit frail at the scheduled time of departure. I sat on the jump seat in front of Mr. Hull we had a fine opportunity to listen to the conversation. We had plenty of time and drove leisurely to the air port. Mr. Hull remarked about the development along Pennsylvania Avenue and the changes which time had brought to that fine thorough-fare. He was pleased too with the appearance of the _____. When we arrived in the vicinity of the Congressional Cemetery in South East Washington Mr. Hull gave the President a guided tour. He told of the establishment of the cemetery, the necessity for it the names of many of our early statesmen who with their families are buried there, the hardships that many members of the early Congresses had to endure in the service of their country, the long journeys that had to be made to Washington etc. etc. the duty of all of us today to properly care for the cemetery which is so strongly linked to the early days of the Republic etc. The President was impressed as was I. I tell this to indicate the deepest friendship that exists between F.D.R. and Cordell Hull. On the other hand most of F.D.R.'s business with the State Department was conducted through Sumner Welles. Welles was a Groton product as was F.D.R.; whether that had anything to do with their relationship I am not sure. Welles knew his business. He was a professional. He knew Latin America inside out and that part of the world was of great interest to F.D.R. I would further suppose that since for reasons of health, Mr. Hull was so often unavailable the President was pretty much his own Secretary of State, assisted on occasions by Sumner Welles. For my own part I cannot fault F.D.R. for this arrangement.

Moss: Why don't you recount some of the ways in which you brought news to F.D.R., how he reacted about say MacArthur leaving the Philippines or may be the assassination of Admiral Jean Francois Darlan. You remarked that he was interested in events.

McCrea: MacArthurs departure from the Philippines was of course, no secret to F.D.R. It was hoped of course, after the outbreak of hostilities that the Philippines would be able to hold out against the Japanese. This was merely a "hope" The U.S. Forces - Army, Air Force, Navy and Marines plus the Philippine Army-were not of sufficient strength to hold off the Japanese invader. The defenses were Corregidor and the Manila Bay area and the fortification at its entrance. Early in the war the Army was making plans for the withdrawal to Australia of the Philippines government and general MacArthur. Of course, the President knew of these plans, McArthur's withdrawal was a certainty-"When" depended on conditions.

I had an interest in the assassination of Darlan because it came about shortly before F.D.R. left for the Casablanca Conference. If you are interested I invite your attention to Robert Sherwood's work Roosevelt and Hopkins - 2nd edition at Pages 967 and following Bob produced in toto a letter I had written to him to plug up what I thought to be holes in his story which had been produced serially in, I think, Colliers magazine with particular reference to the Casablanca Conference and how it was brought about. Briefly both F.D.R. and Mr. Churchill thought they should meet "somewhere" early in 1943. I first heard of the idea in the first week of December 1942. The date 2 December sticks with me. This may or may not be correct but it is close enough. It came about thus: One evening after we had finished the affairs of the moment the President said brightly "John I'm thinking of recommending to Winston that we meet in North Africa just after the first of the year - what do you think about it? "Well, Mr. President" said I, "that is a pretty big order - Right off hand I don't think too much of the idea. I'd like to think it over."

The next day, after some thought, I undertook to explain to the President why I thought he should not go to North Africa. I put forward a number of reasons - the hazards of travel - particularly by air the time involved, etc. In short I thought the chance he would be taking was just too much - his quick answer to that was "Our troops are taking chances so why should'nt I." I pressed the point by saying "I'll bet North Africa is full of guys who would do you in for ten dollars. He laughed at that you will recall Darlan was assassinated sometime the latter part of December.

When I brought the despatch to him I remarked about the event in more or less I suppose "I told you so" tone of voice.

Moss: Were you the first one to tell him about that?

McCrea: I have no idea whether or not I was the first to bring him the news about Darlan's assassination, but we certainly talked about it at length.

Moss: What was his reaction?

McCrea: It didn't seem to worry him unduly that is as far as his own trip to North Africa was concerned. He was sorry about, of course. Darlan had a son who was considerably crippled because of polio and the President had something to do with boy getting to Warm Springs, Georgia for treatment. He felt the personal touch, no doubt.

McCrea: Continuing -

about getting the news to him. Let me spin you a yarn about the fall of Tobrukin June of 1942. That, of course, was one of the important events of the war.

Mr. Churchill was due to arrive in Washington early in June. The President wanted the P.M. to come to Hyde Park. Such a change in the P.M.'s itinerary was not discussed with him by the President. I have recorded elsewhere what happened with reference to this change in plans. Briefly put the President directed that I welcome the P.M. to Washington on his behalf and tell the P.M. that he the President, desired the P.M. to join him at Hyde Park. The President arranged rail transportation ahead of time for the P.M. and his party from Washington to Hyde Park at the convenience of the P.M.

The day of the scheduled arrival came. The Boeing landed on the Potomac and talied to the Naval Air Station. A considerable crowd was on hand - a lot of important people - including the Secretary of State Cordell Hull, Lord Halifax the British Ambassador, and others of importance. A naval captain such as I was probably the most insignificant member of the welcoming committee. Despite the competition I managed to be reasonably close to the gangway which led up from the landing stage. Conditions on it were pretty cramped. As the Prime Minister was emerging from the plane- Mr. Hull turned around, and said in his high pitched old man's voice.

"Captain McCrea I have been informed that the President has directed that you welcome the Prime Minister to these shares on his behalf. If that is the case you better get out then." I mumbled something about not wishing to crowd others more important off the gangway- but I made my way quickly down the brow to the float introduced myself and gave the P.M. the President message. As to getting to Hyde Park I informed the P.M. that I had a special train standing by at the Union station which he and his party could use if that were to his convenience or if he preferred I would have transportation by air available the following morning. The P.M. listened attentively and then said gravely I shan't make this important decision until I have had my bath!" With that over Mr. Hull Lord Halifax and others proceeded to extend greetings. I whispered to the P.M. Naval Aide Comdr C.R. Thompson RN (Mr. Churchill had two Thompsons on his staff-Thompson the Naval Aide and Thompson, the Scotland Yard chap!) to please get the P.M. option to me as soon as practicable, since I did not want to keep the special news on "stand by" longer than necessary - I told Comdr Thompson I would be in my office (the Map Room) until I heard from him. About 5:00 p.m. I was advised that the P.M. would prefer to go up by air the following morning. "I shall be at the British Embassy tomorrow morning at 10:30 with the Presidents car and another to pick up the P.M. and his party and take them to the air field"and that is the way it turned out.

The day came when the President and the P.M. were due back from Hyde Park. They came down by train. I made it my business when I remained in Washington to see the President out of the White House and to be on hand to greet him on his return. The day came when the President and the P.M. were due back from Hyde Park. They came down by train. I made it my business when I remained in Washington to see the President out of the White House and to be on hand to greet him on his return. The morning about which I ^{talking} am / I arrived at the Map Room bright and early about 7:30 a.m. I was advised that the President's train was already in the Union Station. I looked over the night despatches and finding nothing particularly of interest I moved out to the south entrance of the Diplomatic Reception there await the arrival of the President, leaving instructions that if any late arriving despatches were of interest to get them to me at once.

Just as the President was disembarking from his car the Map Room assistant watch officer handed me a priority despatch announcing the fall of Tobruk, I greeted the President to be sure and he asked if I would'nt like to join him and the P.M. for breakfast. I thanked him and explained that I had already

had my breakfast "Any news, of interest," said he. I replied that I had news of interest "Very well, come on up," said he. In due course the three of us, the President, the Prime Minister, and I arrived in the White House Second Floor Living Room-next door to the President's bedroom. When the President got squared away behind his desk I handed him the Tobruk despatch. He read it carefully and said quietly "Show this to Winston."

By this time the P.M. was seated on the divan some little distance from the Presidents desk. I took the despatch from the President and gave it to the Prime Minister. His pink cheeks faded perceptibly. We was flabbergasted. "I can't understand it; I just can't understand it! Tobruk with no preparation at all in 1941 withstood a siege for six weeks before it fell. Now, I was told Tobruk could stand a siege of three to four months or more and it falls in thirty six hours. How could it happen?"

The President expressed sympathy and continuing remarked that he supposed one had to expect the unexpected in time of war-but that this was an unexpected event of considerable magnitude. And then Mr. Churchill said "I'm just wondering what effect this catastrophe will have on my government."

"Oh, I would'nt worry too much about that Winston," said the President

"But you don't understand Mr. President this is a catastrophe. I must worry about its consequences. "Well" the President said "you know Winston admires your system of course, but I think ours is little better in some respects. I'm the President of these United States if I live until January the twentieth 1945. Where as if your government fell there would be a complete change-you would be out of office. Both systems have their strengths and their weaknesses." Now all this was said sympathetically and somewhat lightheartedly. The Prime Minister nevertheless was understandably greatly distressed.

Now with this background about the June '42 fall of Tobruk and the small and incidental part which I played in bringing that event first to the attention of the President and the Prime Minister. I must use how this event is recorded in "The Turn of the Tide," by Arthur Bryant published by Doubleday in the U.S. This book, I would suppose, is regarded authoritatively in many quarters since it declares it is "A History of the War Years Based on the Diaries of Field-Marshal Lord Alanbrooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff."

Now Mr. Moss if you are interested I invite your attention to page 329 of "The Turn of the Tide". But supposing you are not interested I shall quote directly from that book allegedly a quote from Allanbrookes Diary.

"After lunch we had another long conference lasting till 4:30 p.m. In the middle the tragic news of the loss of Tobruk came in. I can remember this incident as if it had occurred yesterday. Churchill and I were standing beside the President's desk talking to him, when Marshall walked in with a pink piece of paper containing a message of the fall of Tobruk. Neither Winston nor I had contemplated such an eventuality and it was a staggering blow. I cannot remember what the actual words were that the President used to convey his sympathy but I remember vividly being impressed by the tact and real heartfelt sympathy which lay behind these words. There was not one word too much, not one word too little."

There follows a paragraph on this same page 329 which deals with suggestion made by General Marshall as to how this emergency situation might be ^{met} ~~met~~. Then there follows a sentence which concludes the entry. It reads

"I always felt that the Tobruk episode in the Presidents study did a great deal towards laying the foundations of friendship and understanding built up during the War between the President and Marshall on the one hand and Churchill and myself on the other."

Now Mr. Moss you will, I am sure, note the differences between my version and that of Lord Alanbrooke with reference to getting the news of the fall of Tobruk to the President and the Prime Minister. Of course, the matter is of little consequence in the light of so many other events of importance but the President and the Prime Minister were aware of the fall of Tobruk at 0600 or thereabout as I have described above - some six hours earlier than the time indicated by Allanbrooke.

Mr. Moss: Now Lord Alanbrooke was not in the President's study with the President, the Prime Minister and you

McCrea: He was not, There were at that time just the three of us the President, the Prime Minister and myself.

Moss: Is it possible that Roosevelt and Churchill let Marshall and Brooke and others know about it at that afternoon meeting and that was the first Brooke knew about it.

McCrea: Indeed he might very well have done so. I don't have to be told that this is a minor incident but you earlier raised the point as to how news of events got to the President and asked for examples. It just so happens that my version is correct as I have here recorded it. I ask you was not the fall of Tobruk in 1942 one of the major events of the war? Of course it was! Would not the reactions of the two most important individuals the President and the Prime Minister to this event be of such a nature that whatever took place would be indelibly impressed on the minds of those present at the time? Again I think the answer is in the affirmative. Lord Alanbrooke cannot remember what the actual words were that the President used to bring his sympathy etc. etc. for the single reason that he, Lord Alanbrooke was not present when the President and the Prime Minister were just made aware of the fall of Tobruk.

And by the way Moss, while I am tearing Alanbrooks version into pieces I must say that hie is no doubt correct in saying Marshall walked in with a pink piece of paper! So that part of his version is correct.

You may wonder at my firmness about this whole incident. Again I say in the light of things of importance having to do with the war, this is a tiny tiny incident. You chaps are interested in history. Your inquiries are all addressed about what took place at a given time and place. In this matter I have recorded what did take place and at what time.

Enlarging on getting news to the President. When he was in Washington there was no problem. When he was at Hyde Park or Camp Shangrila I used the telephone for the most part because we had direct lines from the White House to switchboard in those places. In early August 1942 (I think this is the date) there occurred the Naval battle of Savo Island. We lost a number of ships, cruisers, destroyers, the Australians lost the Canberra. This was bad defeat. The President was at Shangrila for the week end. I got the news about 0700 of a Sunday morning. Even with our direct lines I thought it best to drive to Shangrila and give this distressing news to the President in person.

This I did [Note: In "working with Roosevelt" Sam Rosenman tells of my visit to Shangrila on this occasion.]

In summary getting the news to the President was easy. Less than urgent matter I was inclined to let accumulate. The urgent ones I got to him at once. On reflection I cannot recall waking him up at night to give him a news item. On a few occasions I was tempted to do so-but I felt he needed uninterrupted rest more than he needed news-good or bad.

Moss: Let's change the subject for a moment. You wrote in some detail about the Allied occupation of Madagascar. You remarked that you drafted a letter from Roosevelt to Petain in which the President disclosed to the Marshal the intention of the allies to occupy Madagascar.

McCrea: That is correct.

Moss: Now here is a letter to Petain which Bob Sherwood reproduces in his book.

McCrea: Lets look at it. This is the letter to Petain preceding Operation Torch. I know nothing of its origin.

Moss: Okay - good - because Bob Sherwood doesn't either.

McCrea: I would suppose that Hopkins drafted it. Certainly information about Torch was closely held. I recall distinctly how startled Steve Early was about the whole operation. He felt he should have been "out front" on it since he was sure to be pilloried by the Press once the attack was consummated.

There was "leakage" though about this operation. The Russians had a party at their Embassy in Washington to celebrate the Revolution. I attended. On leaving the embassy I bumped into the columnist Major George Fielding Elliot, whom I barely knew. He recognized me came close by and whispered in my ear something to the effect that "this data is the most important military to us thus far in the war."

"I don't quite understand Major what you are driving at?" said I. "Come, Captain, you must know to what I refer." Well, I did; at almost that very moment its troops engaged in Torch were being landed in North Africa but I was not going to admit it to the Major. At that moment a speeding automobile going up 16th street hit a Police Officer who was directing traffic in front of the Embassy knocking him into the crowd. The conversation between Elliot and me terminated.

I wanted to quiz the Major further but the confusion because of the accident precluded it.

I might here add that, on a number of occasions, during my service at the White House I was astonished at information getting in the hands of those who had no business to know. As has been my experience that the ones who are most willing to talk are those who have no business "knowing" in the first instance.

Moss: Going back a little further as I recall it you said something about wanting to leave the job as Naval Aide as early as November 1942.

McCrea: Oh I talked about leaving the White House after I had been over there just a few weeks. I've told you earlier that I was all set to go to sea in December 1941. Rear Admiral Arthur S. Carpenter was the assistant Chief of Personnel and he was going to sea in Command of a Cruiser Division "Would you like to go along as one of my cruiser captains?" "Of course I would" and said so loud and clear. Pearl Harbor then came along and I was on my way to the White House; the Cruiser Command went to another.

Rear Admiral Randall Jacobs succeeded to the job of Chief of Personnel when Rear Admiral Chester N. Nimitz almost immediately following Pearl Harbor was sent to the Pacific as relief of Admiral Husband E. Kimmel. It so happened that Admiral Jacobs Navy Department office was directly across the corridor from the office occupied by the Naval Aide to the President. Because of this I saw a great deal of Admiral Jacobs. He knew of my disappointment in not getting a cruiser command. But said he, "I'll keep you in mind for a big ship command if you can be available in the spring of 1943. With that prospect in view I easily started talking in a low key sort of way about leaving around April 1943. This, of course, had to be done in low key-that was about it.

Moss: I know you dismissed earlier any disclosure-tactics if you want to say as to how you got away. I think it is interesting and important.

McCrea: Oh very well-I'll give you the details-stop me if they become too boring first off, there were many reasons why I wanted to go to sea. I enjoyed being part of a ship; to my mind there was something most substantial about a ship. The ship board discipline appealed to me.

There, if ever in this world is law and order and comradeship at its best. I enjoyed the association with the Navy and Marine Corps Officers. I thoroughly enjoyed too association with the chiefs and the enlisted personnel. I trust that someone who knows the subject well and who writes with a facile pen can write the saga of the U.S. Navy Bluejacket. They are a fine race of people. I can say full heartedly that whatever I think is superior in the U.S. Navy bluejacket the same applies to the men of the Marine Corps.

Moss: We were talking earlier the last time we met I think- about the fast chat you thought F.D.R. made for off the cuff talks at official luncheons and state dinners-would you pursue that further.

McCrea: The first year of the War brought many political figures to Washington - King, a Queen, Presidents, Prime Ministers, of course they were entertained formally at dinner, followed by an exchange of toasts. I was impressed with character of the talks made by the President on such occasions- they were, in my judgement, little gems of friendliness graciousness and wisdom. Of course they were made without notes. No record was made of them. It occurred to me that some record should be made of them if only for the protection of the President.

I never had any difficulty in finding my seat at the table. It was as it should have been considering my rank-as far "below the salt" as possible usually placed me at the end of the table. One day-the occasion was a luncheon in honor of the Polish Prime Minister his name escapes me, who unfortunately some weeks later was killed in an air crash at Gibraltar-there sat on my left the Hon James Byrnes, former member of Congress and Justice of the Supreme Court. I had never met Mr. Byrnes before. Our conversation settled on the President and amongst other things I told him of the Presidents "table-talks," how perfectly splendid I thought them and how I thought them worthy of preservation of the President. Mr. Byrnes was inclined to agree.

The Post luncheon toast was proposed - when the President started to talk Mr. Byrnes drew an envelope from his pocket - dropped it below the level of his table and recorded what the President had said. Before Mr. Byrnes entered politics in South Carolina he had been a court reporter.

(An hour or so after the luncheon was over a messenger Hon. Mr. Byrnes appeared at my office with a copy of the Presidents remarks and a note from Mr. Byrne to effect that he agreed a records of such talks should be kept and that he thought at appropriate that his copy should start the file. In due course I talked with F.D.R. and Steve early about it. Steve was enthusiastic about it - thought it should be done. The President was less enthusiastic but went along. Steve arranged from then on to have his brilliant short hand stenographer John Romagna within in earshot and out of sight of the President and guests when he made future talks of this nature.

I have no idea what ultimately came of this operation- as where the file is today, if it exists.

Moss: Earlier you referred to your detachment from duty as the Naval Aide to the President and your assignment as Commanding Officer of U.S.S. Iowa. How did that come about? What sort of tactics did you use? I remember that when we talked about this earlier you dismissed it all as unimportant - But I think it is interesting and important. Would you be good enough to enlarge on it?

McCrea: I still think the details of my detachment and reassignment are unimportant but I'll be glad to give you a run down on it all.

I've told you earlier that the White House assignment caused me to lose a cruiser command. This was a disappointment. I was fearful that the Naval Aide job would be of long duration unless it turned out that I was wholly unacceptable to the President - a contingency which I hoped, of course, would not eventuate. Admiral Stark and King wanted me over these and it was important for that I not disappoint them. I decided to do the best I could and let the future take care of itself. After I had been on the job some three or four months and after the President had, by reason of our daily contact, gotten to know me and I to know him, I began, during our relaxed Sunday morning session, to drop little words about the my hopes of going to sea in a ship command. He having "been in the Navy," understood my position perfectly and sympathized with it but "this is war time and we all must serve where we can best help the war effort" - and that is the way it went.

Meanwhile I kept in touch with Rear Admiral Jacobs the Chief of Personnel and he assured me that he would keep in mind when a ship command would become available.

Meanwhile in early summer 1942 the President one day addressed me about as follows:

"John; my missus tells me that the "Iowa" building at the New York Navy Yard is due to be launched August 27, 1942. Mrs. Wallace the wife of the Vice President who you know is from Iowa is to be the ships sponsor. Miss Malvina Thompson my missus's secretary, of years standing, has never seen a ship christened and she wants to go and my missus wants to go, too. Do you suppose you could arrange to escort them to the ceremonies? And by the way, Ambassador Joseph Grew who is enroute to the U.S. being repatriated from Japan, is arriving in Washington in the late afternoon of August 26 the day preceeding Iowa's Christening. I am planning having a small stag dinner that evening and I think you should attend. Just see if you can work all these things in."

Well, I worked them in. I took the midnight train to New York. Had breakfast with Mrs. Roosevelt and Mrs. Thompson at their apartment. A Navy car was at the apartment at my disposal and at 9:30 we were in route to the Navy Yard. The Commandant Rear Admiral John _____ received Mrs. Roosevelt and Mrs. Thompson and he and his wife proceeded to look out for them.

I was impressed with "Iowa" she was a beautiful sight to behold - poised on the launching platform, so trim and sleek looking. As I stood there the thought crossed my mind that she should be ready for commissioning about 1 April, 1943 and why shouldn't I make a "try" for her as her first Captain. On my return to Washington I dared to bare my thoughts in this regard to Admiral Jacobs - would I have "rank" enough? "By next April," said he, "We ought he well below you in rank for Commanding Officer of Battleships."

There the matter rested. Rumor of one port and another reaching me that so and so was being _____
_____ was hopeful.

Then came the President's 9,000 mile train and automobile trip around the country 17 September - to - 1 October 1942.

We arrived in San Diego - on my arrival I was handed a secret despatch from Capt Wm M. _____ the Captain detail Officer in the Bureau of Personnel stating that "Iowa" would go into commission about 20 January, 1943. "Are you interested?" it read.

I replied that of course I was interested and that I would be in touch with him directly I returned to Washington. This I did. I told him that the President one day stated that I could probably leave after I have been on the job a year or thereabouts but that he would make a final decision in the matter when the time came. In other words I had no firm promise when I could go. _____ wanted me to be more specific and told me that I would have to make my own arrangements about getting away from the White House- my reply "Well, I'll do that but don't expect me to come back tomorrow morning and tell you that I've made it because I'll have to take my own time about this and make my move when the opportunity presents itself.

One Sunday morning, in late October I maneuvered the Presidents and my conversation into the matter of leaving. We had been talking about odds and ends and I sensed and I thought it was a good time to make my move. I told him that I was not insensible to the honor of being the Naval Aide to the President in time of War and while I realized that much of importance with references to the War was taking place in Washington never the less I felt that I should be out there some where in a ship. "Many of my friends are out there," said I. "Many have had trouble, grave trouble and some how I feel I must get there, too. I might add both my wife and my mother think that I am crazy to want to leave this assignment for sea duties. But after all Mr. President I must live with my conscience in this matter and I really think I ought to go." And then _____

_____ Mr. President your four boys are all out there." With that he said "All right John, all right, I'll let you go at the end of a year." I promptly reported to Captain _____ on Monday morning that I was released. At the same time I gave him the name of my relief Vice Admiral Wilson Brown. Known to the President from other days and suggested by him to relieve me.

On 7 November 1942 the Bureau of Personnel issued orders detaching me from duty as Naval Aide to the President, effective on or about 20 January 1943. I was all set - I thought.

Early in December, the 9th as I recall it the President called me in and told me that he had made up his mind to go to North Africa, early in January - but that he couldn't leave until he had addressed the Congress on 7 January 1943. He added "you are to go along and you probably won't be back by

by 20 January". I weakly remarked that I trusted that the trip would not contrive to make me lose the ship. His reply, gently, ever so gently and with a smile "Why John under the circumstances I don't think they would take the ship away from you. And that was it."

We returned to Washington from the Casablanca conference on I was detached from duty as Naval Aide February 1943. I proceeded to N.Y. and reported to the Commandant of the Third Naval District as the prospective Commanding Officer of "Iowa". "Iowa" was commissioned on 22 February 1943. The Secretary of the Navy the Honorable Frank Knox attended the ceremony and made a fine speech. The entire Iowa congressional delegation gave one member of the House of Representatives attended as well. Many prominent civilians from the New York area were also in attendance.

The commissioning of Combatant ships in War time was done with the barest of publicity - or better yet no publicity at all. This did not occur in the case of Iowa. Secretary Knox was carried away with the event. Following the commissioning ceremony of Iowa he returned to Washington by air and in the course of an afternoon news conference referred openly to the "Iowa"

commissioning. As a result Iowa received a substantial "spread". The New York papers did not carry the event. In a matter of days Iowa received a letter from the office of the Chief of Naval Operations, signed by the vice Chief of Naval Operations inviting Iowas attention to the fact that security had been breached in announcing in the press the commissioning and that the Navy Department expected the commanding officer of Iowa to exercise caution in the matter of future announcements to the press regarding Iowa.- Of course, this was an easy one to answer. My reply was to the effect that no publicity had been given the press with reference to Iowa's commissioning by Iowa that all the news items were datelined as originating in Washington and attributed to the Secretary of the Navy, this to the annoyance of the working press of the New York papers who attended, but did not report, the Iowa commissioning. Of course, I never heard from my letter.

Just one more thought before we stop for the day - I think I should record my personal feelings toward the President. I liked him - I liked being with him; in fact it was a delight to be with him. The lightness of his humor and the gentle way in which he did so many things. He may have used a lot of force on other people;- In fact I heard him blister one of his closest

associations one day - but he never used it on me. Both he and Mrs. Roosevelt were so kind and so thoughtful and so considerate of my family and me throughout my service in the White House. Most difficult for me to believe anything bad about either of them. They were gentle folks!

Let's call it quits for today. We can take it up later.

