

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Fred W. Shipman - Interview III

July 24, 1973

SHIPMAN: To continue my last discussion, the reason I went by boat to Norfolk, I had had a very unhappy experience when I attempted to go by plane. I had gone up to New York by military plane, and the pilot flew at a very low altitude in very rough weather, and I had not flown before. I became airsick. In fact, I was desperately ill. When I landed, they took me to a first aid station, and when I straightened out some, they sent me to a hotel in New York; actually, the Taft Hotel, where I was put up overnight. I got up the next morning and felt pretty rocky from my experience, but then I went back to the base for the purpose of getting on a plane to take me to North Africa. When I got there, I found out that they had changed my orders, and I protested and said I wanted to go. They said they felt that I was not physically up to taking the trip. When I insisted, they stalled me for a while then came back and said, "the President has ordered you back home."

BROOKS: Did you come back to Washington then?

SHIPMAN: I flew back to Washington in a plane, and the plane I flew in I sat up in the cockpit, and it was a smooth ride, and I felt chagrined at returning. When I came back to the White House, I saw the President, and I told him of my experience, and I felt that I certainly wanted to go, and I would go by ship. He said, "that's a far better way for anyone to travel anyway; that's what I would do." That is why I went down by ship. I was sent down to Norfolk, and there was an Army transport, the General Butner. It was an unescorted fast boat, and on it--I didn't know at the time--were parts of the first B-29's, plus 500 officers who were aviators who were going to be the first ones to fly B-29's. The trip over was extremely interesting, and I don't want to go into any detail about that; I have detailed journals on all that. We landed at Casablanca. We zigzagged on the way over, and we had rumors of being chased and followed and spied upon. And target practice at sea and all of the other things that make a trip across. It took us ten days to zigzag across the South Atlantic alone, and we landed at Casablanca. And there, one of the first things I saw was the Jean Bart, the French warship that we had sunk--half sunk--in the harbor, which was quite a sight. That was one of the first things we wanted to see. Well, my disembarkation was extremely interesting, but I'll just pass over that in a minute, let me first say

this--that because of my position and mission, I was assigned as the first person to disembark. And I was quite anxious to go. There was a great plaza, and warehouses, and a line of Army trucks waiting to take everybody. At the foot of the gangplank, there was an Army band, and when I started to go, the captain said, "Oh wait a minute." The captain insisted I wait until the signal, and they held my bags, and there was a large command wagon way over by itself with a chauffeur. The captain told me that when I started on, and he gives me a signal, to walk directly, not looking right nor left, but just walk across that open plaza to the command car; that was my car. And when the signal was given, he turned to me, shook hands with me, wished me bon voyage, and I thanked him for everything, and just as I put one foot down, the band struck up "From the Halls of Montezuma." And I, alone, walked down the gangplank; nobody could follow across that plaza to the command car, and that's where I went before they let one man off the boat--person or thing off of that boat. I felt like Charlie Chaplin in "The Dictator," but it was really quite impressive. And they said this is what they wanted, which was to impress foreigners with an American. I was in uniform; I had a simulated rank of Brigadier General, and I was in uniform, and they wanted me to carry all the formality and the appearance of representing the United States of America from the President's office. So that was quite impressive, but I never quite felt I lived up to it. I thought that was interesting, and I thought to not miss doing this might be a new role because I was the first archivist in the United States to go into a military zone to do any of this kind of work.

In Casablanca I stayed at the Anfa Hotel. That's where Churchill and Roosevelt had their Casablanca Conference, and we discussed some of our plans then. I found that if I went to Algiers--that's where headquarters were then--the Mediterranean theater of war headquarters--I had to get from Casablanca to Algiers and the question was, how would I go? I was reluctant to fly. You see, I hadn't flown yet, and I looked into all the possibilities of land travel, and I found out it was practically impossible crossing the Atlas Mountains with the natives. It would take about eight days, and you'd take your own food. There were no conveniences; you slept on the side of the railroad, and it was a pretty hazardous trip. So I took a Navy plane, and we went up to Gibraltar and down the Mediterranean, down to Algiers, and that was my first real flight. While I must say, I'm still squeamish--of course, remember in those days, all these were propeller planes; they were not jets; jets hadn't come into the war at all. We got tossed about. I'm always sensitive to motion sickness.

We got to Algiers, and at Algiers we learned that Hilary Jenkinson, the Director of the Public Record Office of Great Britain, was there. And he'd been there three weeks ahead of me, and he'd had quite a time because at headquarters, they told me he was unwilling to divulge any of his program. He considered himself an authority unto himself, and had a thumbs-down attitude. So I had conferences with the Chiefs of Intelligence for Army and Navy, and all, and was given a carte blanche and sent on to Naples. Naples was then where the operations were going on, and at Naples, I met Hilary Jenkinson.



BROOKS. That was the winter of '43?

SHIPMAN: '44. Incidentally, you asked a question about D-Day. I don't want to interject too much, but this is an aside. At the time I was planning to go, the country and the world were waiting to see what would happen with the invasion of Europe by Allied forces. When, where, and what--it was an awesome thing to anticipate for everybody. We knew people who would be--of all people that some one in it or involved in it--of course, the world was waiting. And the question of opening a second front had been pushed by Stalin, and there was a great deal of preparation and a great deal of secrecy. So no one, of course, with all speculating, really knew.

Before I left Hyde Park, I had some papers that had been used at the Teheran Conference. And generally speaking, those papers that relate to military matters were retained in the White House. But by chance, some of the papers relating to the ceremonial side of the trip got into the--mixed up with some notes of FDR's--Bill Nichols, of the Library staff going over some of that ceremonial material, found a note that FDR typed and a little inscription on it. I think it's been reproduced now in a little pamphlet. And it said, "Tell Stalin that we will be in Normandy the end of May or the first week in June." Now that was the most definite statement about opening the second front that had ever been known. It was the most secret war item that had ever perhaps been, next to the atomic bomb, that anybody wanted to know about. And this casual note--I wasn't at the Library when it happened--but when I went up with the President on a trip before I went to Italy, Ed Nixon, my assistant and Acting Director, brought to my attention that he was concerned and what we should do. And the question was that now we were involved, we know about it, what do we do? And he wanted me to tell the President or tell somebody, and I said, "Now I think the best thing we can do," because I had absolute faith in Bill Nichols and Ed Nixon, two more honest men never existed, or two more loyal Americans ever existed. I said, "There are three of us here that know, and the only thing to do with that is put it in an envelope, seal it, and put it in our safe," which has a regular combination lock on it, "you never saw it; I never saw it; no one of us ever saw it. And we'll never mention it again until after all this has happened--all the invasion is over. Then we can tell the story, but if we try to tell the story now--or anybody--as it stands, it will get everybody into more confusion than we'll perhaps be wishing for." So we never told anybody. But when I was in the Mediterranean, I met people who were telling me Roosevelt was phony, there would never be an invasion, that it was just a matter of Roosevelt double crossing the Allies, and they could never come across into Germany because the

Germans were too strong, and we would just keep getting beaten back, and all he was doing was to try to stay in office. And I had one or two run-ins with generals, who, when they found out who I was, called me later to try to tell me they really didn't mean what they said, and I said they ought to keep quiet. I said for the sake of everybody's security, I'm keeping quiet too, so you do the same. So I never reported it, but they apologized and were worried, kept calling me up on the phone. I told them don't talk about it, shut-up, but if I hear you talking about it, I will report you. When they did this, when they found they talked before they knew--they thought I was an archivist, but they didn't know I was with President Roosevelt directly--and that scared the hell out of them. I didn't impose any more than I'd just tell them, "all right, now you know. Since you know, either you keep quiet"--anything I would do to stir things up, I was concerned about success--all I needed to do was get a press story on something like that, and the fat's in the fire. So this is perhaps indicative of some of my own way of looking at problems, which earlier I mentioned Dr. Buck would never have seen that, I'm sure. You can see the dilemma, and I think it was right. But to me, it was something because while I was in on the trip over to Europe--to Africa, and Europe and my meeting with troops and meeting with officers and all--I heard all of these rumors. Anywhere that FDR is crazy, and we were going to sell out to the Russians, and we were not to have a second front and everything else. I heard all of these things, but when they found out who I was, they stopped. I guess I left this over in Algiers. When I went to Algiers, I told the people--General Strong, and I told the British Intelligence what I was doing--and they were interested. They sent me on to Naples, and at Naples, there I met the same situation. I found out that Hilary Jenkinson was high-hatting everybody and telling them what he was doing was his business, and he wasn't telling them anything. But he did want to freely travel through the war zone, the parts that we occupied. And as a result of his attitude, they wouldn't give him anything. They wouldn't let him go anywhere or give him anything. So I talked to these men--some of the men who knew me from back home, from Washington--I have in the journals names of General Alexander, people like this kind that I talked to. They knew, they told me very frankly that once they knew what I was doing, that was all right--but for someone to come over as Jenkinson did, to feel that he didn't have to tell the Intelligence, or the soldiers, or the people in authority what he was doing, they wouldn't do anything.

Well anyway, I met Jenkinson, and when I met him, the first thing he said was, "What are you over here for?" And I told him, and he said, "Well, I've got everything under control." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "I don't need an American over here." And what he was doing was elaborating on a book--a listing--similar to what Posner had done about the Archives of Italy. He didn't even know that Posner had published that. Now I had taken with me all the archival material Posner had prepared with guides to European archives, and he was refining it. Then he wanted to get out all kinds of little atlases and so forth, and he wanted me to sit down and make another list. I said, "I didn't



come here to make lists." "No," he says, "I suppose you didn't. So then he found that I was having an easy time, in fact lunches with the colonels and generals and getting the top brass to do what I want. And after about a week of it, he came to me. Because I decided if he was going to behave this way, he would stay by himself. He came to me; he said, "Well, you know, Shipman, I think it may be best if you and I joined forces." So I said, "Well, quite all right with me." And the Americans told me that they felt maybe I'd be just as well off if I didn't. I said, "Well, we're both concerned about the same thing, and I do think it would be helpful to cooperate." So Jenkinson and I did join forces, and we worked together on programs, and he did a great deal of spade work and writing and so forth. I did more of the reviewing and suggesting and also more of the contact work. And as a result, I had authorizations to go everywhere. So I had--one authorization I had--I had an aide and a command car, and I toured all of occupied Italy up south of Rome. All around both coasts and down the center into all the little towns, and I visited practically all of the archival records places in Italy and made a record of what they had. And that's a detailed matter of extremely interesting things, and I made reports, and I've got reports on it, so I don't want to go into detail here. Some of my reports are written, and I've got other additional material at home.

BROOKS: You made reports to the Archives then?

SHIPMAN: Oh yes. When I came back to Naples, which was where we were headquartered, my friend Jenkinson was still having his squabbles with the authorities, and he was giving lectures on what's a record and what isn't a record, and so forth. And he was not getting too much assistance. But he was getting some people from his side to come to work and carry on the work that would be necessary and work with the forces. So I made a request, and we got someone who turned out to be Dr. McCain, who is now at Mississippi.

BROOKS: Oh, McCain. He is now retired from being Archivist of Mississippi.

SHIPMAN: Well, he's President. President of the Mississippi Southern University. He was the one that they sent, but he was after--as a result of my recommendation for someone to be sent--he was selected and sent after I left Italy. I stayed around because I thought we were getting to Rome, but it was delayed--the history of the delay of getting Rome you well know. So I returned by way of Africa and by clipper ship back to the United States and reported. During the summer, I was reporting there was a concern about what was happening in the European theater because there was no archival set-up then, and meanwhile back in Washington, there had been discussions with the Monuments and Fine Arts and Archives Commission on the part of the representative of the Archivist, I suppose Oliver Wendell Holmes.

BROOKS: He had been made Program Adviser.

SHIPMAN: And they developed the idea then that it would be good for someone to go to the European theater and do what I done in the Mediterranean theater, to set this thing in motion. So when I got back, the Archivist made the suggestion that he thought that if the President agreed, he thought it would be a good thing if I'd go to Europe and to England. Well, I don't want to go into the pros and cons of it, but it ended up that I did. I went to England in September.

BROOKS: After the invasion.

SHIPMAN: Yes, after the landing. And from England, I went over to France. Before I left, I had recommended again that there should be somebody there who would pick up the pieces, someone in the service. Because I was not in service, I was an archivist and a civilian with a simulated military rank just for that assignment. But it was necessary to have somebody who had this information to spot an advance, when we knew our troops were going in the areas that were to be carefully watched, against using them for billeting and for other things at least, and even from the standpoint of if we could avoid any firing into some of these areas. So I thought if we had again someone similar to what we had with Dr. McCain in the Mediterranean, in Europe, would be good. I made this recommendation. But we had a man who was once working for us; his name is Asa Thornton, who was a Lieutenant, I believe, in the Army, over working at the Pentagon. And Holmes got interested in the possibility that he would be someone, and I thought, fine, if he wanted to. Thornton was quite an unusual person in some ways, and in some ways, he was kind of strange. But Holmes was just anxious about doing some of these things as--because Thornton, who was in the military and in uniform, told Holmes that he would go, providing he would get a Captaincy out of it. Otherwise, he would not go. So Holmes drafted a letter to the military and said that Lieutenant Thornton is willing to go on this mission for the military, if they make him Captain. Well, you can't do that with the military. They sent him in 24 hours; they sent him out as a Lieutenant. And nobody--it was the most--all of them who were involved ought to have had some notion. He wasn't negotiating for a private job; he was in the military. And when they said well, if they will make him a Captain, he will go, they just said--he's going.

So anyway, Thornton got over to England ahead of me, and then we went to France, SHAEF headquarters.

BROOKS: You went with him.



SHIPMAN: Well, I wasn't with him, but I saw him over there. No, he went on a different plane. You see, I went with the officers. Everything I did was on a higher military level; he was a lower-level type. And then in France, we went over these problems, and I met Jenkinson again. (At SHAEF, the senior officer for MFA was an English scholar, who was a wise and highly intelligent scholar. His name was Sir Leonard Woolley. He was an archeologist and was known world wide for his discovery of the Ur of the Chaldees. We became good friends.) Thornton started, so we could take him up to Aachen, which was on the front line. Thornton figured if he was going up to the front lines like that, that he needed somebody to introduce him. So I said all right. So we drove up to Aachen, and I took Thornton up to the very front and left him there. Thornton's own reports are something again--he had a great deal of experience, and some of it quite unusual. I think he did a lot of good work, and I think eventually, though he broke down and had to come home, but he had done a great deal of good work in Luxembourg, and his report's extremely interesting. And he was able to become quite intimate with the Duke of Luxembourg.

BROOKS: I've forgotten his name.

SHIPMAN: He came from the royal family--he was right in with them.

BROOKS: Did he come back to the Archives? I don't think he did.

SHIPMAN: No. But I got out of there, and on the way back, I came through Bastogne, and three weeks later, the Germans were there. I came back to Washington by the middle of December. Obviously, I had been in the war zone, and I am not going into all the experiences we had--anywhere in that zone was an experience--bombing, being bombed, shot at. You're never sure when you're flying whether you're flying safe. Even on the roadside near the Ardenne Forest, we nearly got caught. So a lot of the military side of it was interesting. My problem, of course, I was of simulated rank, and I did not carry firearms, but I was in uniform to be identified, that was the point. Yet, the archivists were right in--we were not staying back with the fleshpots of Europe--we were right in the front. I must say that was true of all of us who went. The only way you got this done, and as a result, coming back with first-hand information from going to these places--and I dug in archival rubble in Italy and all sorts of places--they had first-hand information and that we were also generally known, and that gave a good start. I've forgotten Sargent Child, the fellow that went over to London after I left, said in his first report back here that the fact that I had laid the groundwork with good people understanding--and this sounds personal, and I didn't intend it to be--but they liked me because I know what they mean; I was not mysterious. I was telling them something which made good sense--the value of records and

the value of our cause and to our culture, and what we could do without being extremists to preserve as much as we could quickly, and where they were and what we were trying to do. And by taking people of influence into your confidence and not doing Jenkinson's game--"I know better everything about something you know nothing about." This opened up for the Archives people, opened the gates for people. Plus the fact that I was with the President and the Archivist of the United States. They were my sponsors, you know. I have reams of material on this, and I'm sure the military has and so does the Archives. But that is that, and when I came back, of course, I made the usual reports.

FDR staying in the Office of the President longer than it was anticipated when the Library was started, it certainly took longer than it had been anticipated by those who were responsible for doing the work with and on the Library. Most of the records, and certainly the important records that were necessary to the administration of the Office of the Presidency, were retained in the White House; they were not sent up to the Roosevelt Library. The material that was sent to the Roosevelt Library from the White House was the type of material that would not be essential to the daily work. For instance, when the President made trips, he always had a considerable amount of material on schedules, and speeches, and ceremonies, and mementos, all that kind of material. He began to have it arranged so all that would come directly to the Library rather than get into the White House and handled down there, he sent it to the Library. Another thing, because he wanted to have the Library open to the public as quickly as possible, at least the museum part, he sent many of his speeches and their drafts. We had those from the White House. Then there were a great many papers that related to particular problems of, let's say, the correspondence that came into the President during the first days of the New Deal from the public. This sort of thing, but not policy papers, were still kept by the White House. Then, of course, there were personal papers and other matters that the President had, that I perhaps spoke of earlier, and these were the papers he had collected, then his papers for the campaign for Governor. We then went after the campaign papers--Roosevelt campaign papers of his '32 campaign, and his '36 campaign, and his '40 campaign. So that while these weren't the heart of the Presidential papers, they were still a considerable quantity, plus collected items, his own collections of historical material--navy logs and so forth he collected. It was still a quantity. Then we got copies of his papers from the Governorship of New York. Now New York State has an arrangement in which the Governor's papers are retained by the State of New York, but the Governor always has some personal papers, and those are the ones we had. Then in addition to that, later on, arrangements were made for reproducing the papers of the Governor of New York. I believe they are now on microfilm up in the Library also. That was started before, but it wasn't finished. Meanwhile, we made an effort to get papers from other sources, and there were quite a few small collections, and I contacted labor leaders, members of the Cabinet, and the usual people--people in the Supreme Court and all that. And we got some which were all reported on.



BROOKS: By that time, the people were out of office . . .

SHIPMAN: Some protested, and some sent a little; some didn't get around to it. Then, of course, the big thing later because that's after FDR died. The mainstream of the papers were still in the White House. There were a lot of papers, though in bulk, in the material I've already mentioned. Some of the earlier New Deal papers were in there.

Well, the question of making them available had been discussed, and Dr. Connor and others tried to get some commitment from the President, but he was running the war, as he would say, and those things he would get at when he could. What he would do, I think I mentioned earlier, the way he would send his material up to the Library, and it would contain--they would send materials--records, books, all sorts of things. And he would mark them "A" and "B," and some of the A's were to be given directly to the Library; the B's were to be held, I believe, maybe the reverse until he had a chance to see them. And somebody would decide to hold back to a later date or only personal matters he would keep. So the A's I immediately put a hold on, immediately. And I had a statement from the President indicating this program, so I had at least some basis of what to say because that's something. But there was nothing said about the papers that hadn't come, and it concerned me.

Before FDR went to Yalta, I received a copy of a memorandum signed by him in which he set up a committee made up of Grace Tully, Sam Rosenman, and Harry Hopkins, who would be responsible in the event anything happened to him, for reviewing his papers and determining what should be made available and when for public access. Now the committee didn't get a chance to function because when the President came back from Yalta, this story is well known, he was a sick man, and it wasn't too many weeks after that before he passed on. And when he passed on, his papers were in the White House, and the question then was what should be done with the papers. So immediately, I set out to claim them. I found that there was very little help in my problems because I had a conflict in the Archives. The Archivist tried to do his best to have the Presidential papers kept in the National Archives in Washington, which was in violation of the agreement in which the Library was accepted by the Government, that it was for the purpose of papers to be accepted, because it was FDR's personal wish that the papers be placed in the Library at Hyde Park. That was the condition of his and--I don't mean to belabor the point. There's certainly enough published about it and documentation on that point, but Dr. Buck thought he would change it around. Of course I thought he would change it around. Of course I thought that was a betrayal of trust, and I wouldn't do it.

BROOKS: At various times you've spoken about records from the White House, and now we're talking about papers. Was the distinction made by anybody then? Was there much talk about the distinction between official Government records

and Presidential papers? It's pretty much parallel, I think, to the distinction made in New York State, and it's been a paramount issue in all the Presidential Libraries since that time.

SHIPMAN: Well, if you go into that, you'll need another tape. In the first place, I was using the terms interchangeably for this, and since you've called me on it, I'll be more careful. I'm speaking strictly now of everything relating to the immediate White House as papers or-- I'll call them papers-- they're records no matter what you . . .

You know the history of Presidential papers and the ownership of Presidential papers. If you'd like a discussion on that, I can do that, and I'd like to . . . But this question came up--whether or not you can separate personal papers from the public record, and so forth, and why the papers shouldn't be made a matter of public record. This is something that I think has been thrashed many ways, and as I say, I'd love to go into the subject; I think it's extremely interesting. But let me put it this way--you know (this is carrying coals to Newcastle) that a President is many things, and when he acts, he is the head of his party; he is also the official who is carrying out the laws of the United States, and he is also a private person. And when he writes sometimes--or when he receives something--and this is the thing which often people don't remember, they think everything is Presidentially produced--much of what a President wants to protect is material that is sent to him--more often what he is sending out. It's the public writing to him and suggesting, requesting, cajoling, and telling him or his own aides and all, giving him information. This is the confidentiality, and if that's to be violated, it's not the person of the President; he could indulge and take letters from his officials or from private citizens or governors and all, who sent into him believing that they were sending it in trust. We know that there are so many ways to solve a problem that when a President's confronted with a problem, he has to consider so many factors. He has to consider also politically many things. If he does something in one instance, he may be compromising to get something in return with another, which is more important to him or to the country. And these things cannot be made just strictly a matter of record in a sense that everybody's going to be told. You can't function if you impair their freedom of negotiating.

FDR had been solicited by me several times to make a very careful record of everybody's conversations with him, particularly when he was in the Oval Office. We were generally alone without the secretary present, but he would not have a secretary in the office because he wanted freedom of discussion and that would be impeded by the presence of a secretary. And he indicated to me the advantages of free discussion and confidentiality. He did not believe in making a record of everyone's ideas. These talks can start and roll away from the central theme and onto all sorts of imaginative ideas that would be discarded before they get down to the real drift of what the subject matter contained. So he was against this. As a matter of fact, there is in the Roosevelt Library



now a recording that was made without his knowledge, and that was made by a dictaphone placed in his office, and a man had come into the office to talk to him a little about politics, and just as they're talking, FDR said, "What's that noise,?" and someone from part of the basement of the White House said, "It's the dictaphone, Mr. President." And he said, "Well, where is it, I want it shut off; shut it off." And he couldn't find the button, and he said, "Well, Mr. President, it's under your desk." And he found it, and he shut it off. Then I understand he gave strong disapproval--I could use stronger language than that--to such a procedure. He said, "Don't you ever do a thing like that again." But they saved that piece of recording and sent it after he died up to the Roosevelt Library, and it's up there. But FDR told me that the right of confidentiality to speak to the President and for the President to get that kind of information himself was necessary. That you restrict people to the record, or especially if you do it without their knowing it, that there was no trust, and there would be no honest exchange of ideas, and information would not flow. And it couldn't be done, and morally, and conscientiously, and politically, he thought this absurd; he would not have any part of it. That certainly is quite different than what is going on now with the revelation of the Nixon tapes and with the general statement that's going on that everybody does it, which everybody doesn't. So much for that.

BROOKS: Fred, what you've been talking about is in a period leading up to close to the death of President Roosevelt. Is there anything in connection with your own experience that you think would be worth putting down on the record here?

SHIPMAN: Well, the period between my return from abroad in December of '44 was marked by--shortly of course--by the fourth inauguration of FDR. I saw him shortly then, and I knew he wasn't feeling well. But none of us ever felt that when FDR had a setback that he wouldn't respond because he was a buoyant personality, and he didn't give in very easily. So the idea of it prevailed that he was with us, none of us really believed. I'm sure we didn't know how he felt as well as his doctors must have.

I remember that after the President's return from Yalta, I went up to the House of Representatives when he addressed the Congress in joint session. As a matter of fact, I stood behind the dais, and I was appalled by the fact that he sat down and read, and he explained that after his long trip, his iron braces had been a little heavy, and he apologized for sitting down to give his address. Of course, he'd had a very difficult time coming back. He lost one of his closest friends, Pa Watson, who died on the trip coming back. So it had been a very difficult experience, and Harry Hopkins was very sick. We went up after his address to the Congress--we went up to Hyde Park--and I saw him up there. Anyway, it was in March, and I know March 29th was the last time I saw him. I went up on the train, but I didn't see him on that train. And I went to the Library, and I was talking with Ed Nixon in the reading room of the Library. Normally, when FDR was around, no matter where I was, he liked to cup his hands and holler, "hey Fred, I'm here" from no matter where he was, and I could hear him all over the Library, and Ed said, "Fred, here's the President," and I looked up, and here was the President being wheeled in. He was emaciated; I was appalled. I didn't

realize even when I'd seen him at the Congress; I didn't realize. I couldn't believe; I was in a state of shock. First thing he said to me was, "Well, Fred, how's your Italian," because he was recalling my trip to Italy. And I said, "Not nearly as fine as your English, Mr. President. I certainly thought your report to Congress was most fascinating and well done." So we exchanged pleasantries, and we talked about his trip back, and he told me how he was rocked so hard coming back in the destroyer. Well that was unlike FDR because he loved the sea, and I could tell he was pretty off. And Ed Nixon and I went back, and we had lots of problems to solve regarding the papers, the Archives, and one thing and another, and I remember Ed saying to me, "Well Fred, I'm afraid we won't have the problem long." Well he was determined to go to San Francisco to open the UN, and I had hoped he'd take me, but he talked to me, and he said, "I'm going out, and I'm coming right back, and there's no reason-- I'm not going to do anything but just make a quick trip." And I realized he was too sick to talk to him about it. And that visit was the last time I saw him. I came back to Washington, and he was spending the weekend here and then going down to Warm Springs before he would take this trip out to San Francisco. My family was in Washington, and I was on a bus at the terminal out at Friendship Heights; I just had met my wife, and someone said there's a rumor on the radio that President Roosevelt is dead. And Ruth turned to me and said, "Well, that's a rumor, isn't it?" And I said, "If it's been said, I think it's true." She couldn't believe it, and I said, "Well, I couldn't tell, you saw him last time. I'm shocked, but I'm not surprised." So I barely got into my own home, and the telephone rang, and the Archivist said, "What are you going to do, what are you going to do?" I said, "I'll get in touch with you." "You ought to get in touch right away." So he wanted me to run down and practically take the papers out of the place right away. Well you couldn't do that. I got in touch with the people at the White House, and they said in the morning if I came down, we'd have a chance to talk. Well I went down, and the packing of the papers was going ahead, and I was being told what was what.

BROOKS: By whom?

SHIPMAN: The packing of his papers was being done by the White House people; they were doing the packing into packing cases.

BROOKS: Miss Bonsteel's people or . . .

SHIPMAN: Yes. I believe we were--wait a minute now; you were right, by whom--they were getting them ready; they weren't in packing boxes yet. I'm a little foggy--I think Archives supplied the boxes and packed them--yes, I'm pretty sure. Isn't this awful; I'm not sure which of us did it. I know that I directed it. Well, the question was where would these go? Now the executor of his estate was Basil O'Connor, and he said, "Wait, you can't walk off with those papers. This hasn't been set, and there's nothing here to indicate that these papers have to go. We have to evaluate; we have to have a lot of things settled; so, we're not sending those papers up to the National Archives or anywhere else. We're going to put them in a warehouse until we have the legal aspects of all this settled." So I came back, and I told the Archivist the problem that what happened to these papers was in the hands of the executor now,



and that it was a legal problem of settling the estate, and that the plan was to put them in a warehouse while pending the settlement of the estate.

BROOKS: Was Rosenman closely involved at that time?

SHIPMAN: No, Rosenman had nothing to do with this. He was not executor.

BROOKS: That surprises me.

SHIPMAN: Basil O'Connor was executor.

BROOKS: You know they were both involved with Mr. Truman.

SHIPMAN: But Basil O'Connor was the executor, and he was the man putting the control on things. So I talked to him at length. I must be very honest--I can't remember which, but it came out of--between the Archivist's talk with me and my talk with O'Connor; I felt that it would be too bad to have the records get out of public control. This is very honest; I don't recall whether I originated the idea or whether Buck came up with the idea when I told him the problems; but between us, at least the suggestion was made that an unused stack area that had not been actually equipped with shelving and all was available, still in the building. And while this whole subject was pending, the records could be put in there and the area locked up, and the keys could be in the hands of the Roosevelt executors. I transmitted this information to Basil O'Connor; they looked into it; they talked to the Archivist; they felt they had the proper safeguards all around, and they agreed that this could be done. So all the papers were moved--they might have been moved by the military or the Archives, I don't know which--to the National Archives Building. I directed it all, and it was taken up to a stack area, one of the new stack areas in the annex, and placed there and kept under lock. And it was arranged for Grace Tully to have a desk up there and to give what kind of service was necessary to President Truman and to the estate in regard to those records while the matter was pending.

BROOKS: It was then she had an office up on the fourth floor.

SHIPMAN: I've even forgotten where it was, but it was up there. And they stayed there some two years.

Meanwhile, the whole question of the settlement of the estate and the settlement about the papers came up, and there were many kinds of proposals. But behind it all was all that FDR had said, what had been written by people who had supported the Library, built it, the Government's pledge to take care of it, and other conditions. And of course the push on the part of the Archivist to keep the books and material down in this building forever, and send copies up there. All that was going on. Probating the will had to go on up in Poughkeepsie, and Mr. Hooker was one of the attorneys who was assistant in this area on the spot.

BROOKS: Mr. Hooker?

SHIPMAN: Hooker, yes. He was the old attorney of the family, and he acted with helping--probating--with Basil O'Connor and his assistant. I've forgotten him; he was a nice man. I went over these problems again and again, and they took a very dim view of the Archivist's position, and I did too, and I made it very plain. I said one thing I want is to carry out what had been the understanding that Franklin D. Roosevelt had regarding his Library, and that, I think is most important. With all that, we worked it out, and I went right down to the courts with the lawyers, and we worked out the wording and the settlement that the papers were to be perpetually maintained in the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library in Hyde Park, New York. That was a condition, a gift, and this was what they had to accept.

BROOKS: This was the Surrogate Court in New York?

SHIPMAN: That's right. And Ed Nixon and I went down, and I told them what I wanted to be put in there so there would be nobody like the Archivist who would pull them away. This was basic in my beliefs and in my carrying out what Dr. Connor and Franklin D. Roosevelt and I agreed upon, and what Roosevelt had done in establishing that Library, and the people who supported it. So we got that down tight, much to the chagrin of the Archivist. Once that was done, it was almost three years since FDR's death before that was finished. Meanwhile, the Library was opened, and lots of other kinds of papers came--family papers and others. And the museum was getting as many as one-half million people a year. It was a great financial success, and people were making excursions there by boat and train and bus and everything else.

BROOKS: The museum had been opened in 1943?

SHIPMAN: Yes. So it was really a big going concern, and the Library and some of the historical material--not the personal material, not the Presidential--but some of the material he had collected on Dutchess County and the Navy and that sort of thing, were all things that people could go up and see. But the papers were still being held. So during the summer of 1948, they finally finished the legal work, and the authority was issued to transfer the material to the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library. That was done, frankly, right over the head of the Archivist. And I remember sitting in my office and watching the Army truck--the Army trucks came in, and as they came down the driveway to the Library at Hyde Park, we gave a whoop; I said, "We've made it; we really have got it." And that's when the papers were brought--the basic papers, the big policy papers, everything else the military--everything went into the Library.

BROOKS: The summer of '48? You had left by that time.

SHIPMAN: No, no, I wouldn't leave until it was done.

BROOKS: But you were down here.



SHIPMAN: No, no, I went back up there after FDR died. I left in the fall and stayed up there all the time and commuted with my family. I didn't work down here after that.

BROOKS: Yeah, but when you left the Library and transferred to NSRB was in the spring of '48. I think, I really do, Fred, that it was in '47.

SHIPMAN: Well, I won't dispute you because I'm speaking purely from dates. I always carry '48 in my mind. I always remember this was a big--of course this was my objective. Now, I had a problem then--here it is now finally, everything's in here now, we've got it; I know I've also got it at the expense of a deadly enmity with the Archivist, whom I could not work with.

My family was in Washington. Now my family is either going to come back up to Hyde Park, and I'm going to stay here the rest of my life, or the issue was done; I have carried on--not exactly what FDR wanted--because he expected me then to know and become a specialist in his area--but at least it could be carried on. And I had a talk with my family, and they were so reluctant--in fact, they cried rather than go back up to New York, and I had the double problem of the Archivist, with whom I couldn't work with and my family here, I decided that at the first opportunity to find something in Washington, I would take it because there was no happiness in this. And it was a very difficult thing for me to do because I really loved the Library, and I felt that I was beginning--I'd gotten to the point of a long haul where I'd really begin to work on the Roosevelt material, and that was the idea of it. I'd gotten the basis laid. Well this often happens that this part of a job is done by one person and somebody else carries it out. This is not unusual in the way things are done. But it was a great disappointment to me because I really did intend--and that was FDR's intent, and I know the people who were close to FDR--felt that I was expected to become the specialist in FDR. I'm afraid my family didn't have any feeling of that at all. They were unsentimental about it; they were unsentimental about anything but getting out of New York. So I had to choose between my family and my career, and I decided that family after all is my first concern. So I came back here, not without a lot of heartache and not happy, but at least I was out of the situation, and I resigned from the National Archives.

BROOKS: Now this is important--the gathering of the papers to the Library and the clearing of the title by the Court. As I've said to you before, much of what was done at Hyde Park became precedent-making for the succeeding libraries. The published report of the FDR Library says that the system up there was opened on May 1, 1946.

SHIPMAN: Well it was, but those papers that were opened were papers of his political campaigns and miscellaneous items. They weren't Presidential papers. See, here's the thing about the Library. FDR had his--his whole career--he had papers as Governor of New York, as I told you about earlier; he had papers when he was in the Assembly of New York, and he had a lot of political files,

and he had a lot of historical material. Then there were papers--private collections--of different sizes that he had. There were some materials, if I'm not mistaken, there were some gift materials--early materials of the first Presidential campaign, and after that I think, were easily opened. There was a file known as gift file, you know, but it was from all over the country where people sent things in. They also sent in comments about problems. Then there were a lot of special files, but the general files were not opened.

I recall, too, that I was up there--the dates bother me--because I was up there long enough that I went through Roosevelt's personal office files and all the rest of it, while I was up there. He kept a special file in his office of correspondence with King George, Winston Churchill, and all. I've been through all that when it came up there, but it wasn't open to the public. So all of it was up there. Now the point I would like to make, and I think this is exceedingly important, and it is not understood by many, despite all this back and forth, that the Roosevelt papers were never out of the hands of control--except for that brief period when Grace Tully was working upstairs--of an official of the Government of the United States. And they came intact, packed and put together by a Government employee into a Government building. They were never in between for somebody else to sell out to somebody else, and they were taken up . . . and they were very bulky. Now somebody like Grace Tully who--and I don't think anybody knows the quantities--who might have gone in and picked a paper now and then, I doubt she would do it. But you can imagine out of the tons of paper what a person would have to do, because up there, those papers--most of those papers were in packing boxes, and they were never opened here in the Archives. They were sent that way up to the Roosevelt Library. But the papers that were in Roosevelt's own office, or his secretary's office in file cabinets--of course, they were always in file cabinets, they went up there in file cabinets--but they remained in the custody and control of Government employees and officials. And to the extent that one can be humanly alert to these things, we who were responsible for it watched over it. Nothing that I ever knew was ever alienated from those files. If it were done, it was done in a surreptitious manner that I would never know; it certainly wasn't done by anybody officially or cleaning files, nothing of that type, and this is something people don't realize. The first time in the history of Presidential papers was ever done. The first time, and it did set a precedent. Charlie Tansill, who I knew very well, was making speeches about Hyde Park, and of course, he was using Hyde Park as "Hide," and all that, but this wasn't true. And what made me provoked is when this is done to historians and then you get someone like that fellow who used to be in the State Department, and we knew was a kook, and people who like . . .

BROOKS: Who was that?



SHIPMAN: That fellow, Loewenheim, who charges on the Dodd papers that he didn't get them all. He was a kook back in the State Department; they fired him. And yet, the leading historians supported his claim that there was a coverup up there.

BROOKS: Eventually, the American Historical Association Newsletter published a statement that absolutely no ground was found for those charges.

SHIPMAN: These historians made--this is why there are a lot of these historians who are absolute kooks. And with all they're trying to do, they wouldn't have a paper. You know it would be enough for some people to say, "well, I'll burn them before I let them see them."

Now one question I'd like to go back--I don't know if I've gotten the basics, that's all I'm trying to get out is the basics so that the principles involved . . . but you mentioned earlier about papers and records and so forth. One of the questions that was certainly never settled is to what extent are the papers of--the so-called papers of the White House, the papers of the President--are they the President's papers? What about the offices of the President? You see what grew up over the years, as you and I both know, the Budget Bureau was part of the President's office. Department offices became part--as they began to expand--of the President's office. And the question of what are Presidential papers then had to be more or less defined. Well, we never did go beyond what was within the rights, within the control of the President and the immediate secretary. We didn't go into the Budget and say the Budget Bureau papers are Presidential papers, or others. But this question does always come up, and I think this has to be refined, and I think as the organization of the President's office changes, it will always have to be refined. But the core is what I'm speaking of as Presidential papers rather--not because the others aren't Presidential--but what we're talking about as being within the immediate control as the personal possession of the President versus what's in the Budget Bureau or any special commission he had.

BROOKS: I think that the Presidential Libraries ever since then have followed that same principle, especially in relation to the Budget Bureau, which is treated as a separate agency by the National Archives. Presidential commissions that report to the President are a little different. If they are appointed and make their report within one administration, then the commission papers have been sent to the various Presidential Libraries.

Fred, did you work with Miss Tully very much?

SHIPMAN: Oh, I didn't work in a sense; I would help and do things yes, but I can't say I worked. You see, the work she was doing was for the executors--Grace Tully was, of course, shocked by the President's death. It wasn't really what Grace wanted to do, and this is strictly off the record . . . But Grace had been particularly thrown by this matter because there'd been great casualties in the White House. Now you might not think about it, but

at that time when McIntyre was Secretary to the President died, Steve Early had left; Pa Watson, who was a great figure around the White House died; Missy LeHand had died a few years before. Grace began to get to a point where she was there with the President when the President died. And of course there were people who were close to the President. Being Secretary to the President, they came to her, and they did--just as I can truthfully in connection with myself--And what happened was Grace thought she would get an appointment to the State Department, and Jimmy Byrnes would perhaps take her and give her something commensurate with what she had. She told me she was shocked; she went over to see him, and he didn't have much to offer; he said to her, "What did you think, you were going to stay in the White House the rest of your life?" And it cut her terribly. Then they developed an idea, and it started with Dr. Buck, that here was a good time to start a Franklin D. Roosevelt Foundation. And Buck talked to me about it. Basil O'Connor and I again were able to talk. Buck and O'Connor couldn't get along; O'Connor was a free-wheeling individual, and when he saw Buck, he just didn't find Buck the kind of person to talk to. They actually said they used me. But it was the idea of Buck. Well, O'Connor thought that was a good idea, and so I--I really was a conduit more than anything else on this subject--I tried to get them together, but O'Connor would say to me, "I don't want to talk to him; I'll talk to you; you can tell him." And Buck would say, "I'd be glad to talk to him." I'd say, "Well he told me he's busy, but he wanted me to tell you this." It was really so. So then Basil O'Connor started to make a Franklin D. Roosevelt Library Foundation. Well, Mrs. Roosevelt didn't want such a thing. For some reason, she didn't like Basil O'Connor. And so she got Sam Rosenman in the long run to scuttle it. But meanwhile Grace Tully was to work for the Foundation. We went on--you asked me if I worked with her--well, I worked on this Foundation idea, but then Mrs. Roosevelt put an end to it. Dubinsky of the Garment Workers' Union was a good friend of ours, a good friend of mine, and he came up to Hyde Park, and he said, "in the first six months after we're set up, we can make 10 million dollars." Mrs. Roosevelt scuttled the whole thing. And Sam Rosenman told me, he said, "I felt terrible, but that's what she wanted." So they had the meeting, and the whole thing went down the drain, and it was wrong, but whatever she was doing it for, I think she was wrong, but she killed it. And she killed it as much as anything; she didn't, well I don't know why; she just didn't want it.

BROOKS: That's one reason why the Truman Library Institute was established at the beginning, because the Roosevelt Library didn't have one.

SHIPMAN: It was Buck's idea; I give him credit for it, but he didn't know how to put it over. And Basil O'Connor--Mrs. Roosevelt wouldn't have any touch with it, and not only that, she killed it, and she had Sam Rosenman as her agent. Sam told me he felt terrible. And Dubinsky said, "My God, I'd have gotten 10 million dollars for it." And she wouldn't do it. Of



course then they were fighting among themselves, and between that and everything, it wasn't a happy time. And knowing that I was having my home problems, and Buck problems, and their problems, it wasn't a happy time.

Well, now one of the other things I think that I would like to get at for a minute has nothing to do with FDR, but it does have to do with a very important set of records, namely those of Henry Morgenthau had been--all through my acquaintance with him and with FDR--one of the things we'd always been told, "Henry's keeping a wonderful record." The President would tell me about it, and, "it's all coming up here," the Morgenthau so-called Diaries. And after FDR died, Henry was dropped by Truman as Secretary of Treasury shortly after, so he took his papers. Well, one of the things he did--I asked him about his papers, but he wanted to take them up to New York. I reminded him that I had all this promised that they were going to the Roosevelt Library. Well he wanted to take them to his office. I found out that in the first place what the Morgenthau diaries were. They were copies of memoranda, and letters, and everything he'd put in book form. Sometimes originals, but mostly copies.

BROOKS: Nine hundred volumes?

SHIPMAN: Yes, we call them diaries.

BROOKS: Some of them classified.

SHIPMAN: Yes. So not being too bright, he let a young student use his diaries, and this boy gave a talk at the American Historical Association meeting here in '46 or '47, in which he told how casually FDR had devalued the dollar, and it became a great public--almost a scandal. The result was, of course, the press was after the diaries, and the courts were after the diaries, and Morgenthau panicked. He had no idea what to do. So he had attorneys Pilpel and Greenberg.

Pilpel is very good. And they were his attorneys. Well, I contacted them, and I said, "Well, why don't they turn these over to us?" Then they wanted me to come down and look at them. In this period, I began to work with Wayne Grover, who was then Assistant Archivist, and I knew him very well, and I didn't do any dealings with the Archivist at all; I just found Wayne and I could work on things, and we did work on things. That's how I really functioned. And had I known that Wayne was going to become Archivist, I still might have stayed at the Roosevelt Library, but it wasn't to be that way. If I'd known that within--frankly I knew--I had told Truman to get rid of Buck, but I didn't know how soon it was going to work. I don't know, perhaps it wouldn't have worked out anyway because my family was unhappy. If my family had been happy, and I'd known Buck was leaving and Wayne was staying, I would have stayed the rest of my life perhaps; I loved it. I was just about to get into the other stage of the work.

But anyway, to go back to Morgenthau, he panicked; he didn't know what to do. So I talked to the attorneys, and I told them . . . They said if we do that, they'll do this to the papers. I said, "Now look," and I sat down. I must say this in all honesty, Pilpel and Greenberg said to me, "Boy, I certainly wish you worked for us," because of what I'd done. When they knew I was leaving the Roosevelt Library, they said, "We really are losing . . ." I said, "Look, if you set a condition of gift and the Archivist accepts that condition of gift, which gives you a limit to the access, and so forth, it can be limited, according to the condition of gift, and he accepts it, that's on faith, and it has the effect of law, and if those are in the Roosevelt Library, nobody can touch them, and you won't be bothered by the press or by everybody else. There it is; we can say this is the condition of gift. But if you leave them in your office, everybody that comes by and everytime the cleaning men come by, there will be questions . . ." So I worked out with Greenberg and Pilpel a condition of gift, and I worked out with Wayne Grover a condition of gift, which the Archivist accepted. And I'm telling you, nobody was more grateful than Henry Morgenthau that we took those papers off his hands and put them in the Roosevelt Library with the conditions of gift with the access limited. He was so relieved I can't tell you because he was really frightened that he was being--I don't think he was frightened in terms of what terrible thing had come out, but how he'd be put through the mill with all the press getting in it and everything. But that was a real service, and I think it's something that should be used anytime when it's to the public good, and I was very glad of that.

I was sorry to leave the Roosevelt Library; I was sorry to leave the people I worked with; I was sorry that I couldn't see the future there that I wanted. It was confused, but I do know that I had legally fulfilled the basic requirements of the Library for what FDR wanted, then how and who administered it might not change because the law, everything had been settled and the problems of administration for the future . . . Yet, the Archives would always produce professional people; that was their goal, and the Library would be in good hands. I know some people around the Roosevelts felt that I had chickened out, but actually, when the going was rough, they weren't around that much to comfort me, and things worked slowly, and that's why I did what I did. I never got over the disappointment of leaving the Roosevelt Library; I never got over it. From the heights of being with Connor and FDR and doing these things, and the great thrill of it and the thrill of the future and what it would mean, I was just enjoying it. From the time that Connor left, and then, of course, the death of FDR and the family got so unhappy, I just--it somewhat turned to ashes. But I didn't forget my basic responsibilities. I think I acted with good faith with FDR and with the country, really. As far as I'm able to say, nothing has been compromised, and everything has been done to keep this honestly intact for the people of the United States. That was my desire and FDR's intention.

BROOKS: Would you say more about your relation with Mrs. Roosevelt?



SHIPMAN: Well, Mrs. Roosevelt, of course, was always very gracious all through my acquaintance and our friendship. I say this in passing that we had three children and my wife--is a very private person, and as a result, a lot of the occasions and events to which we were expected to go to or invited to go, she didn't go and couldn't go. We didn't get out into the social world. We were invited again and again by the President and by Mrs. Roosevelt to do things or to go down to Washington with them, and so forth, and we would find that the children were sick or something of this kind, and we were not active in this fashion as some people might be. Mrs. Roosevelt was always considerate; she would want us to come over, but Ruth would find that she couldn't make it. So we were occasionally taken over there for lunch over to the house. But generally speaking, we did not go back and forth freely. I, of course, being in the Library and right on the estate, was allowed a great deal more freedom and would see Mrs. Roosevelt more or less informally on different occasions, and she would come through and was always gracious. But she did not get involved too much in the affairs of the Library. She would show it off or have people come that she'd want me to meet. She didn't have any material at that time that she was giving to the Library that I recall. There might have been a few things of hers, not much. After FDR died, she came over, but she knew that things were more or less left in the hands of the attorneys. The private papers that she kept out were made available for Elliott Roosevelt to exploit, which he did. I can't really say more about Mrs. Roosevelt's relationship other than it was cordial, and she always had us to some affairs. We were at Val-Kill parties several times a year. After FDR died, she had us here, and even when Ruth was down in Washington sometimes, I'd have her come up, and we'd go to Val-Kill for a party that Mrs. Roosevelt had invited us to. They always sent us a Poinsettia at Christmas, and she was very considerate. I hadn't seen Mrs. Roosevelt for some time after I left the Roosevelt Library, and I don't know who ever told her, but my father died about a year after I left the Roosevelt Library, and to my complete surprise, I got a very nice letter from Mrs. Roosevelt. Someone up there at the Library must have told her. And I think that's about the latest communication I had from her because you just don't hang on. She told me about her interests in the UN about a year or so after FDR died, and she was sparring with President Truman about her role. He wanted her to take a special commission in connection with some of the plans regarding women in the U.N., and she wouldn't take it because she wanted to be a representative--not just as a special commission; she wanted to be a delegate. She wanted that role; she didn't want to be just on a temporary commission. And I remember she and Harry Truman had quite a time, and she would come to my office in those days and tell me that she had to impress on him that she was not going to be doing odd jobs; she wanted the job of a delegate. Strangely enough, I wasn't as much up on it as she thought I was, and she'd give me a complete story about this, and she was rather critical that President Truman didn't see about this, and she wasn't going to do what he wanted her to do. She was going to either do what she wanted to do, or she wouldn't do anything, and she got what she wanted. We had Christmas parties as you know, and there would be sometimes children brought up there to be taken through, and we would have parties at Val-Kill and this kind of thing. The social side was more Mrs. Roosevelt.

I knew FDR's mother very well. She told me personal matters about the family which I never felt should be going beyond me. But they were very easy people to deal with, and they took me in as much as one can. They really considered me one of the family, and one of my disappointments--I hope this sounds right--I was sorry Ruth couldn't mix in a little more. But of course, there are two things--with the three children, she was always very much watching over the children. She never really mixed as much as if she had been free or we'd have somebody to take care of the children while she'd been free; we would have been much more active in many, many things than we were. Ruth's first feeling was the children . . . But that doesn't mean she didn't go to things--but I mean to the extent in comparison to what was available, we only got to about one-quarter in terms of being actively social and doing things because of that. Of course I saw to it that the work problems were taken care of. The only day you had off were Thanksgiving and Christmas with FDR.