



INTERVIEW WITH

Edward T. Tait

by

Maclyn P. Burg  
Oral Historian

on

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for

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION  
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Edward T. Tait

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Edward T. Tait

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This interview is being taped with Mr. Edward Tait in Mr. Tait's offices at 1155 15th NW, Washington, D.C. on November 15, 1974. The interviewer is Dr. Maclyn Burg of the Eisenhower Library staff and present for the interview are Mr. Tait and Dr. Burg.

DR. BURG: Now may I start by asking you, sir, where and when you were born?



MR. TAIT: I was born in Indiana, Pennsylvania, April 9, 1920.

DR. BURG: Now were you educated there in Pennsylvania, high school and university?

MR. TAIT: I went through high school in Indiana, Pennsylvania; received my undergraduate degree, B.S., from the University of Pittsburgh.

DR. BURG: In what field may I ask?

MR. TAIT: In business administration. Then I was in World War II for four and a half years following which I went back to Pitt to law school from which I graduated in January, 1949.

DR. BURG: All right, now let me ask you first about your experiences at the undergraduate level. Do you happen to recollect any teacher who had a great influence on you? Who stands out in your mind now as you look back on it?



TAIT: Oh, I can remember starting high school, my political science prof, Carroll Rupp, had a very great influence as did an English teacher, Lambert Joseph. In college I had so many different professors that it's a little difficult to pick out any one. I would say Dr. Graper, political science professor, had a great influence on my education as well as a man who was then assistant dean of men, Theodore Biddle.

BURG: An old Pennsylvania name. Do you remember why these people stand out? Was it the quality of their minds or the influence they had on your mind?

TAIT: The quality of their minds, their enthusiasm for their subjects, the degree of preparation, their ability to stimulate me into considering education exciting. I had a desire to learn, and they helped instill that.

BURG: Now as you came out of the BA, how close were we to the war at that point?

TAIT: My graduation class was accelerated to April 1942. I was a member of ROTC at Pitt. And naturally the government



was anxious to get all of us into service as quickly as possible, not only the ROTC graduates but others who were drafted. So there was, what, a period of approximately four or five months subsequent to Pearl Harbor when I graduated.

BURG: Was your ROTC work, had that been in infantry?

TAIT: No, it was anti-aircraft artillery, and that is the branch of service which I served later.

BURG: Now when you left Pitt in '42, was it then your experience that you were sent to an officer candidate school?

TAIT: I was an officer upon graduation.

BURG: You were one of those who was commissioned upon graduation.

TAIT: Yes, I had had four years of ROTC and approximately two and a half years of infantry, national guard, prior to college. I was an officer immediately and was given my commission at graduation.

BURG: I see. Some were handled that way, others, depending on their circumstances, a little different from that. All right,

now your anti-aircraft artillery service, may I ask where you were sent then once you were commissioned and assigned to duty?



TAIT: I served Fort Sheridan, Illinois; Fort Totten, Long Island; Camp Edwards, Massachusetts; Camp Pickett, Virginia; Camp Stewart, Georgia. Served thirteen months in Puerto Rico, and then completed my service at Fort Bliss, Texas, working on a research project. There were several other posts of an interim nature which I did not mention which are not of importance.

BURG: Let me ask what kind of guns?

TAIT: Ninety millimeter anti-aircraft guns. Most of this period I commanded a ninety millimeter gun battery, and I was a major when I left the service. The service at Fort Bliss was fascinating service where I first had contact with the German V-2 rockets being fired at the White Sands proving grounds which is near Fort Bliss. But my work at Fort Bliss was primarily a research project to determine the accuracy of the proximity fuse.

BURG: And these were tests then being carried out at Fort Bliss?

TAIT: Yes, yes.

BURG: And V-2 rockets, captured rockets from Germany had been shipped over--

TAIT: And were being tested at the White Sands proving grounds.

BURG: As early as that?

TAIT: Yes.

BURG: I didn't realize that.

TAIT: That would have been '46. 1946, immediately after the war.

BURG: Immediately after the war.

TAIT: But I was not personally working on the V-2 rocket project. I did have the opportunity to observe it.

[Interruption]

BURG: You were released from the service in 1946 as a major.





Now what was next, law school?

TAIT: Then I returned to law school at the University of Pittsburgh.

BURG: You had the GI bill?



TAIT: I did.

BURG: And was that a two-year program, Mr. Tait?

TAIT: Three years.

BURG: There was probably not too much opportunity to specialize in a kind of law while you were doing your training.

TAIT: That's correct.

BURG: Just a general law degree.

TAIT: Yes.

BURG: Then you would have to pass the bar exams in Pennsylvania.

TAIT: Correct.

BURG: Now, did you embark upon a law practice in that state?

TAIT: Let me mention in way of passing--

[Interruption]



BURG: Now let us put into the record at this point, I had forgotten that as one goes through law school the law review is something which the training young lawyers take part in. Now you had a position with the University of Pittsburgh.

TAIT: The ranking students in law school are invited to participate on the law review. There I was a member of the Order of Coif. You must be in the top ten percent of your class to be a member of Coif, and my class standing on graduation was number three.

BURG: In the U Pittsburgh law school?

TAIT: Correct. Then I graduated in January. The bar examination was being offered in January, I did not have time for review, and took it immediately and passed it the first time. Going back to undergraduate school at Pitt, I was president of Omicron Delta Kappa, the national honorary society, which is, at that school, the top honorary society for not only

school activities but also scholarship.

BURG: Was this a business administration honorary--



TAIT: This was for the entire university.

BURG: For the whole university.

TAIT: For the whole university, all schools. And I was president of Pitt Rifles, an ROTC type organization, president of the student body in my senior year.

BURG: Oh, you were.

TAIT: And also upon graduation I received an award as the outstanding senior graduate of the entire university.

BURG: Excellent. Then the distinguished career as a law student right after the war. Now when you did embark on the practice of law, was it with a firm--

TAIT: I was invited by Judge W. Heber Dithrich to be his law clerk.

BURG: Is that commonly about a one year appointment?

TAIT: Correct. Judge Dithrich of the Pennsylvania Superior

Court each year picked one of the top graduating seniors to be his law clerk. I served with Judge Dithrich for my period, and then I was assistant trust officer at what is now Pittsburgh National Bank for approximately one and one-half years, following which I entered private practice with the law firm of Kountz, Fry and Meyer in Pittsburgh.



BURG: Now the Kountz, was that a K-u--

TAIT: K-o-u-n-t-z. Incidentally for spelling or further information this is in Who's Who, supplemental source.

BURG: Sometimes our transcribers have problems phonetically rendering a name and we like to check into it. Now let me ask you the impertinent question what drew you into that position as a trust officer? Had that kind of work appealed to you?

TAIT: It had no strong appeal to me. I was married during the war period. I had three children, two children when I started to law school, three when I graduated. In those days lawyers were not paid. As law clerk to Judge Dithrich I received payment of \$4200 a year. Most of the members of my

class received nothing when they started to practice because Pennsylvania had the system under which a person has to serve a six-month clerkship before you were eligible for admission. Then, frankly, one of the main reasons I went with the trust department was that it paid me the kind of money I needed to support my family. It was not my first choice. I would have preferred private practice, but I could not afford to be in private practice at that time.



BURG: During the law school with wife and two children and you were part of that generation, sort of trail breaking generation, the students coming back on campuses married, older men from the war, children.

TAIT: Very true. It was a much older class. There were students in my law school class who had graduated from undergraduate school between the years '41 to '46, graduates of all of those years hit law school at the same time, had tremendous competition even to get in, a large number of applicants.

BURG: I started university as an undergraduate in 1947 and was married in 1950; so I too fell in that general period.

TAIT: Yes, you do know.



BURG: The standards as I recollect were very high because of the competitiveness. Those of us who had had service and were older I think made it very difficult on the young, incoming freshmen.

TAIT: We had no choice.

BURG: Precisely.

TAIT: But we were older and more mature and quite serious.

BURG: Now, may I ask what your specialization was in the law firm that you joined? What kind of practice of law did you take up?

TAIT: The firm engaged in a general practice. I handled every little problem which, as a junior lawyer, came along, including some pro bono publico work defending indigent defendants at the request of the local judges.

BURG: That I assume was rotated in that city among the beginning lawyers.

TAIT: Yes, in the lower court, it was rotated. I was immediately

assigned to a case before the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, and there just weren't enough of those indigents where the rotation system could work. But, as a law clerk, the court was familiar with my work, and they assigned that case to me.



BURG: I see. Which would be an unusual opportunity for you to practice before such a--

TAIT: Yes, very much so, to practice before the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.

BURG: By and large did you find that general practice of the law satisfying to you? It must have included almost every--

TAIT: Some of it was satisfying. Other parts of it was so easy it was almost boring. I found after handling my first or second divorce that I had no taste for it and no desire to handle any more of them. Some of the criminal cases which all of us handled by court assignment also, purely, were not challenging. The first few are because they're new to you. After that they do not provide real stimulation, and it's not the kind of practice which I would have wanted to do forever.

BURG: What did draw you? What did challenge your interests?

TAIT: The more difficult the problem was, the more I enjoyed it.



BURG: I see. But the difficulty could come in almost any area of the law.

TAIT: Yes. And also I was at the age then, younger lawyers are not assigned large cases.

BURG: No, I suppose not.

TAIT: You start off with the little cases and you act as an assistant to a senior attorney on the more difficult cases.

BURG: Could I ask you, did you become at all interested in politics once you did have your position in a law firm and some kind of income coming in?

TAIT: I believe I have always been interested in politics, and I've always been interested in political science. I think some of my best grades, high school on through, were in political science courses. And even when I was in college as a member of a Pennsylvania organization known as the Intercollegiate



Conference on Government which met once a year in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, comprised of students from all of the universities throughout Pennsylvania where we conducted ourselves like a state legislature for several days. I did not have any interest in politics during the war years, but, even while I was in law school, I was interested in what was going on, current events, national events, candidates for office. And at the end of law school I became active in the Young Republicans of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania. And also in the Pennsylvania State Young Republican Organization of which I was a director and legal counsel during the period between '50 and '53.

BURG: So actually into the campaign year, the presidential election year, of 1952 and beyond.

TAIT: That's right. And when I left the service we bought a small home north of Pittsburgh, suburb, which had been farmland before and almost all of my neighbors were young persons who had been in the service, now coming out of the service, were interested in their home, their local government. And we had a very elderly man there as Republican committeeman who did not, for many reasons, represent the views of this new suburban

neighborhood. My neighbors prevailed upon me to run for the position of Republican committeeman. I did and won and served one term only, did not run for re-election.

BURG: What year was that, Mr. Tait?



TAIT: That would have been around 1951, '52.

BURG: Now, if I may, I'd like to ask you who at national level in the Republican party, who appealed to you as presidential timber, '51, coming up towards the conventions of '52.

TAIT: To me, and until General Eisenhower entered the picture, Senator Robert Taft was by far my favorite candidate. He had visited Pittsburgh, I believe, before General Eisenhower permitted his name to be considered, and I had a private meeting with Senator Taft in his suite. He was, of course, asking for my support in securing delegates to the national convention. But even before that, I had no money, had sent small contributions to Taft in his last campaign for the senate in Ohio. I was and am a great admirer of Senator Taft.

BURG: I see. Now your meeting with him, Mr. Tait, would that have come in the autumn of 1951 or perhaps in the spring or the

early part of '52.

TAIT: I cannot be precise. I do not remember when that occurred.

BURG: Now may I ask, you've expressed your admiration for the man, did that private meeting with him enhance your opinion?

TAIT: Oh, yes, very much so.

BURG: I was going to ask you, what strengths did he possess that drew your admiration?

TAIT: I was familiar with his record, his intellectual ability, from news sources, from his record. I admired his voting record and his integrity, his ability. I think the only difference which occurred as a result of my private meeting with him is that I saw him as a very warm kindly person: As related to my age then, he was elderly. Senator Taft looked very austere on television and his pictures always appeared to be the same, but I found, in person, that he had a very warm personality, which unfortunately he was unable to convey to the people in the United States.



BURG: It's been said, Mr. Taft, and I think perhaps you've noticed this among your college instructors perhaps, that Mr. Taft could project that warmth, that there was warmth there and kindness there, but once he passed beyond ten or fifteen people in a gathering, once it became a larger gathering, somehow that ability to convey his warmth fell away.



TAIT: You've described it accurately, better than I could have described it.

BURG: That was your observation too.

TAIT: This is very true.

BURG: Some people who were his admirers and supporters have expressed their regret that somehow, if we use that overworked term of "charisma", it simply couldn't be projected by him to larger audiences. And I've known college instructors, splendid men in a seminar and absolutely incapable of handling the larger size classes.

TAIT: Yes, I agree.

BURG: Now, in his conversation with you on that day, do you happen to recall the kinds of things that he stressed with you as he asked for your support?



TAIT: He was talking about national affairs, conditions of the country, the need for a new type of leadership. President Truman was in office at the time; the Korean War was going on. President Truman has rehabilitated himself enormously in the public image since then, but at that time President Truman's image was very low. He did not have the respect of the majority of the people. He was not a unifying force. I felt our country very strongly needed someone to unify it, both as to economic matters and as a result of our involvement in the Korean War.

BURG: Now Thomas E. Dewey had made two tries. Was it your feeling that you personally hoped that he would not be the candidate again?

TAIT: That is correct. Tom Dewey in my opinion had the same problem Senator Taft had. After Tom Dewey was a candidate, some years after, I got to know him, and I found that in small

private groups he was absolutely brilliant and warm, but he too never could project his personality to the nation. I think he would have made an outstanding President, but people didn't know it.



BURG: When Senator Taft left, you were then rather firm in your belief in him and your willingness to support him?

TAIT: Senator Taft remained my favorite candidate until General Eisenhower became a candidate. And had General Eisenhower not become a candidate, I would have supported Senator Taft wholeheartedly, with some reservations as to whether he could win.

BURG: Yes, a reservation you share with many.

TAIT: You've heard this many times I'm sure from other persons.

BURG: Yes, I heard it in the state of Washington and in the state of Texas, from the political leaders there.

TAIT: Yes. It's regrettable, but in election campaigns I do not think we have any choice other than to be pragmatic.

BURG: Yes, particularly if you're a party that's been out of power for twenty years and hope to reachieve power.

TAIT: Exactly. Furthermore Senator Taft, as a practical matter, had, through the Taft-Hartley law, earned the strong enmity of the labor movement. Undeserved I believe, but, nevertheless, labor leadership convinced many of their members that the Taft-Hartley law was bad. I do not think it was bad and I think history has proved that it has not been a bad law. But at that time it was so considered among labor circles.

BURG: He carried that law on his back to his own political detriment, very definitely.

TAIT: Exactly, which created a dilemma for we who liked Taft and would have liked to have supported him.

BURG: Indeed, it did, because he has been described to me many times by many different people as a man of rectitude and of ability, intellectual quality. I've also been told that he was not totally the conservative that he was portrayed as being--

TAIT: I didn't think so.

BURG: --his views on public housing for example have been given to me--



TAIT: Yes. In fact the Taft-Hartley law has been good for the working man. In many ways it has helped protect them from their leadership.



BURG: Now there was a Citizens for Eisenhower movement that gained ground in some areas. It was going in the late summer of '51, and in other places I notice that it picked up momentum in the autumn of '51. Did you yourself join that group?

TAIT: I did not join the Citizens for Eisenhower group although, as a member of the Young Republicans in both Pittsburgh and the state, I became somewhat of a spokesman for Eisenhower and expressed my desire that he would agree to permit his name to be submitted. Then when Eisenhower agreed to permit his name to be submitted, an organization was formed in Allegheny County to secure delegates to the convention committed to vote for General Eisenhower. Now this particular organization was not the Citizens organization; it was more the regular party organization. And Congressman James Fulton and I were co-chairmen of that group to secure delegates.



BURG: In Allegheny County?

TAIT: In Allegheny County. Fulton being more part of the regular organization and I being a part of the Young Republican. The Citizens group for Eisenhower worked very closely with us, and they acted as a support to our drive through regular party channels.



BURG: Now, forgive my ignorance of Pennsylvania, when we say Allegheny County are we speaking of the city of Pittsburgh as well?

TAIT: The city of Pittsburgh is in Allegheny County and is the major city although there are a number of other much smaller cities within Allegheny County.

BURG: So we're talking about a great deal of voting strength?

TAIT: Very much so.

BURG: Second only I assume to Philadelphia?

TAIT: Yes.

BURG: If you don't mind let me ask you some questions about Pennsylvania Republican politics at that point in time in 1952. You and Congressman Fulton were very active in this movement. Can you give me the names of other Pennsylvania Republican political leaders? It seems to me that Pennsylvania was clearly viewed as one of the key states.

TAIT: Yes, and it was badly split.

BURG: It was, the regular Republican ranks?

TAIT: Yes. Many Republicans were great admirers of Senator Taft and to the best of my knowledge the people who were supporting Eisenhower were also admirers of Senator Taft. But they believed that General Eisenhower would be the better candidate of the two for the purpose of unifying the country and for the pragmatic purpose of being elected.

BURG: How did the state national committeeman, in fact I don't know who it was.

TAIT: I believe the state national committeeman, I'm not sure of his name, was a Taft supporter.

BURG: An older man, Mr. Tait?



TAIT: Much older.

BURG: You yourself would have been about thirty-two at the time wouldn't you?

TAIT: Correct.



BURG: How about Congressman Fulton: Also about your age?

TAIT: No, Congressman Fulton would have been maybe fifteen [years older].

[Interruption]

BURG: Hugh Scott was then a congressman from Pennsylvania?

TAIT: Correct, yes.

BURG: It seems to me that he too was very active in his support of General Eisenhower, or is that not the case?

TAIT: Yes.

BURG: It may be that his support was being sought by the Eisenhower people. That may be--

TAIT: That was at a level higher than mine. Scott had been

the Republican national chairman prior to that time, very active in national politics. It's my recollection that he was an Eisenhower supporter, but I cannot speak with any knowledge as to his role. I recall that he later helped during the campaign, but I do not know what his role was pre-convention.

BURG: Now if we go to your own particular role in 1952, you're at that point the committeeman for Allegheny County.

TAIT: The committeeman position was for this neighborhood district in which I lived.

BURG: More like a precinct committeeman.



TAIT: Correct, precinct or ward. It's not a county-wide office at all.

BURG: I see. Now can you tell me who handled that role at the county level?

TAIT: Let me try to remember while we're talking. I know the man. I can picture him. He's been dead some years.

BURG: And I suddenly pop him on you twenty some years later. But let's go on then, I'm sure it will come to you.

TAIT: He was a Taft supporter as I recall.

BURG: The Republican party in Pennsylvania was organized at precinct level with precinct committeemen?

TAIT: Yes.



BURG: And as you come up toward the Pennsylvania State Republican convention, you're going to choose delegates then at the precinct level?

TAIT: In Pennsylvania, the delegates were elected by counties. It's either county or it may be congressional district basis, I'm not sure. But my efforts were devoted solely to the Allegheny County area. It's my recollection that our area was entitled to elect four delegates to the Republican convention. We did not use the state convention system in Pennsylvania.

BURG: Oh, you did not?

TAIT: No. The delegates were elected locally, and then they went to the convention with some having been elected to support Taft, some having been elected to support Eisenhower.

BURG: I see. So in your local area, you would be organizing Republican voter support to choose four delegates who would go to Chicago?

TAIT: Committed to Eisenhower, that was our purpose.

BURG: If you could possibly do that.

TAIT: Yes.



BURG: And the Citizens for Eisenhower group in your area, your realm of responsibility, also committed to getting Eisenhower delegates selected. Now was there fighting, in the political sense, between some of you in the regular Republican ranks and the Citizens for Eisenhower group on one side and Taft Republicans on the other side? That's commonly what--

TAIT: We had a strong difference of opinion--

BURG: I'm leading the witness and I've got to stop doing that.

TAIT: Please do, go ahead, feel free because, although I'm not an adverse witness, you can lead me.

BURG: I shouldn't do that. Professionally it's not good for me to do it either. So you--

TAIT: The Citizens group and the committee to which I refer worked together to elect these four delegates for Eisenhower and there were similar organizations supporting Senator Taft, conducted just like any other campaign.

BURG: Now the financing. For example in some states where I've done some state level interviewing to understand the '52 campaign a little better, in some instances the regular Republican, for lack of a better term, sir, I could use the term "Old Guard", the Old Guard Republicans were pretty much in control of the available--

TAIT: Party machinery.



BURG: --party machinery and money.

TAIT: Yes.

BURG: And therefore the Citizens group had to raise their own with little or no help whatsoever from the regular Republican party and other areas it looks as though the regulars broke but the Eisenhower faction had sufficient strength so that they did get some of the available machinery and money.

TAIT: I was not involved in the financial activities. We had a finance committee which took care of that. My recollection is that the Republican machinery as such stayed out of this delegate fight with your Taft supporters going their way and the Eisenhower supporters going the other trying to get help from all sources. I'm not aware that any of the, let's say the party machinery as such, was used by either side except as members of the organization would align with one side or the other. I'm not aware of any, say, Republican party money going to Taft. It could have, but I'm not aware of it. Each group had its own fund-raising and leadership.

BURG: I see. When it came to getting the vote within the precincts, in some areas there was bitter recrimination as I think you'll remember--

TAIT: Oh, yes.

BURG: --because at a precinct which traditionally had only had three or four or five people attending and therefore able to elect pretty much anyone they wanted to. Where they used the state convention system, for example, they could elect





almost anyone they wanted to to the larger conventions preparatory to electing Chicago convention delegates.

TAIT: We did not have that problem.

BURG: You didn't have it?

TAIT: No.



BURG: Interesting. And I wonder why you didn't have it, sir?

TAIT: Because it was a county-wide or congressional. It was the popular vote within each congressional district with Joe Jones running in congressional district X committed to Eisenhower and Smith running as a candidate who pledges that if elected he will be a delegate for Taft. So all of the voters in the congressional district were voting as a whole.

BURG: We don't find cases then in Pennsylvania where at a precinct the people who thought they were going to make the judgment found themselves ten or twelve individuals with four hundred people, Citizens for Eisenhower, Democrats who had switched over, independents--

TAIT: We did not have that.

BURG: Oftentimes these people had to leave their homes where the precinct meetings and the voting was going to be done, they would have to vote out in the street because there were more Citizens for Eisenhower there than they'd ever dreamed of having. Pennsylvania avoided that. Basically then your delegates who are going to the convention are announced already. They commit themselves, "I am an Eisenhower man", or, "I'm a Taft man".

TAIT: A man can say, "I am an Eisenhower man," "I am a Taft man," or "I will go uncommitted." And people vote as they wished.

BURG: Yes. It seems to me, Mr. Tait, that that assists Pennsylvania Republicanism to avoid some very bitter factionalism and recrimination.

TAIT: Yes, we did not have those little local conventions or state conventions.

BURG: So that once Chicago has made its choice the Pennsylvania Republicans do not immediately have to whip out their band-aids

and try to patch up a state-wide political organization--

TAIT: There was some ill feeling, but not to the extent of other areas.

BURG: I'm sure there was, yes.

TAIT: Not nearly.

BURG: The party was not riven and faced with a bandaging job to do prior to the election.

TAIT: Oh, there were many old timers who were rather unforgiving. Probably, some of them may be to this day.

BURG: It's a little difficult to say when I interview some of them exactly how deep the feeling does go. Because some will still stamp their foot and say, "Doomed."

TAIT: Oh, naturally. Some of them thought we were not Republicans because if you were a Republican you would vote for Taft. A logic I still do not follow.

BURG: Yes, they seem to feel that he truly represented that Republican philosophy that they felt must prevail. Now did you stand as a delegate to Chicago yourself?



TAIT: No, I did not.

BURG: Did you work in behalf of a particular delegate?

TAIT: I worked on behalf of all persons committed to support Eisenhower.

BURG: Now let me ask you the direction that your work took, your support work. Was it in organizing, was it in finance or in publicity?

TAIT: It was attempting to organize support throughout all of these four congressional districts. I was not involved in finance, and my activities were directed primarily towards the younger persons, say forty and below, voters forty and below. We had our own meetings and some of our own publicity at several campaign rallies for younger persons and all the usual committees which go with a campaign.

BURG: Now I have exhausted the time you can give me; so we will take it up at this point on our next session. I thank you so much for your time this morning.

TAIT: It was a pleasure. I enjoyed it.



INTERVIEW WITH

Edward T. Tait

by

Maclyn P. Burg  
Oral Historian

on

January 30, 1975

for

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

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DR. BURG: Now, when we stopped we had finished out the convention in Chicago, and I wanted to begin by asking you about your activities following that. I know that you were a member of the campaign train. Now, I don't know whether I asked you in what manner were you selected for that duty, that responsibility.



MR. TAIT: I do not know the precise person responsible for selecting me for that committee, but I received a phone call from a Mr. Douglas Whitlock asking me if I could come to Washington if I was interested in serving on the campaign staff for General Eisenhower. I came to Washington, talked with him, and he told me immediately that they wanted me if I wanted to do it. And during the course of that meeting I advised Mr. Whitlock that I would not expect any compensation for my services. Of course, I expected that my expenses would be paid, but there was no salary or other compensation paid to me at any time. And perhaps that is why he picked me-- very inexpensive. At that time I was a young lawyer just starting to practice law in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

I was such an ardent supporter of the President and was so anxious to see him elected that I was very happy to help him.

BURG: What was Mr. Whitlock's chief responsibility on the campaign?



TAIT: I don't remember his exact title. It may have been something similar to Director of Campaign Tour. He was responsible for, with others, in determining which states would be visited--which states and which cities would be visited--when and how they would get there, whether by train or by plane, a coordination effort. And also my recollection is that he was involved in the determination as to which issues were most important in different areas for purposes of emphasis.

BURG: So you knew what you were going to say in Detroit.

TAIT: I was not a spokesman.

BURG: What the candidate would say.

TAIT: Yes, that's right. But that was part of his duty. And during the campaign, he was my Washington contact should

I need help at any time. There was also a person in the campaign headquarters in New York City who was an additional contact.

BURG: That wasn't Arthur Vandenburg, Jr., was it?



TAIT: No, it was not.

BURG: And you did not go to the campaign headquarters in Denver?

TAIT: No, no I never worked out of any of the headquarters; I was in the field during the whole time of the campaign, starting I believe with the first day of the campaign; I believe it was Indiana, the state of Indiana.

BURG: And were you on a train, that was not a flying trip, but rather a train--

TAIT: I would normally arrive in a state, a day or two prior to the candidate, would work with local persons in setting up all the necessary arrangements for the general's appearance. I would stay there all during his appearance and would accompany him at all times while he was there. Then as soon as we completed my area of responsibility,



I would leapfrog to another state.



BURG: Now, was there another advance man or advance team so that you could literally leapfrog the other group having already gone ahead and they're setting up for the next stop and you meanwhile leapfrog out over them--

TAIT: My recollection is that there were six of us. And for the first meeting I worked with a man named James Pittenger from Nebraska--we worked together. And then later after, you know, we got more accustomed to what was required of us, in many areas I would work entirely on my own.

BURG: So you would really be a single advance man.

TAIT: After a while.

BURG: Now, no need really for staff assistance because you and Pittenger knew your jobs well enough--one man was all it took.

TAIT: Exactly.

BURG: Now do you happen to remember the names of the other

advance people--that's asking a lot of you, I know, these years later?

TAIT: I believe for a while there was a man named Welch from West Virginia. I believe Harry Brookshire from D.C. For some time it was Warren Stephenson--I never worked with him. Those are the only names I remember.

BURG: Now, I would assume then that when you arrived on the scene--let us say somewhere in the state of Indiana where the campaign train was going to stop--you are going to be there a day, two, three days in advance; you were given the names, or those who were active in the campaign in that city.

TAIT: Yes.

BURG: Did they expect you?

TAIT: They knew that we were coming, yes.

BURG: And then when you arrived, they met you or you immediately went to them. Now you are going to have to line up with them what the candidate wants to do in that city and what he has time to do. Did you also have to work with them,



for example, in the logistics of handling his stop in their city?

TAIT: I reviewed with them the logistics, and if I was satisfied that they had the logistics worked out adequately then I did not get into the logistics any further. If I saw possible problems, then I would work on the logistics. Oh, I guess, in the very beginning of the campaign only, I remember one time we even toured the route the motorcade would take so we could time it--time the length of the tour all for the purpose of keeping the schedule on time and keep it moving.

BURG: The general was going to arrive on a train and then be taken by car perhaps to an auditorium; brought back; there might be luncheons or dinners. I suppose the job varied enormously.

TAIT: It varied--

BURG:--stop after stop.

TAIT: Completely, depending on how much time we had in a particular area.



BURG: And I assume, too, Mr. Tait, that the real need for your services would be in the cities that had been selected by various staff members as warranting a major appearance, perhaps even a major address.

TAIT: We had more work to do in those cities in which there would be a major address, normally occurring in the evening.

BURG: Whistlestopping off the back of the platform did not concern you?

TAIT: Oh, yes.

BURG: Did it really?

TAIT: Yes, oh, yes. If there were six whistle stops in a state, I would visit every one of the six whistle stops to make sure beforehand that all of the arrangements were agreed upon. Anytime I moved into a state--it was established protocol--the first thing I did would be to call on the governor, if he were a Republican, any Republican U.S. Senators, the Republican state chairman, the Republican national committeeman, national committeewoman, courtesy type call: "I am in your state. I'm here on behalf of General

Eisenhower's campaign, and if I can help in any way, just want you to know that I'm here." So they always were advised of who was there and where I was located so they could get in touch with me as needed. And it sometimes became important with respect, say, to a motorcade--who would ride in the car with the President; who would be in the next car and the subsequent cars. As to primarily evening speeches--who would introduce him, who would be on the platform, where would they be seated.

BURG: The protocol involved in these things must have been enormous.

TAIT: Oh, we attempted to make it as smooth as possible and to make it amicable.

BURG: Mr. Tait, did you have any instructions with respect to who was going to ride where in the motorcade, who was going to be on the platform, or had you been instructed to follow the lead of, let's say, the state chairman or someone else.

TAIT: It varied. Sometimes it was worked out ahead of time.

BURG: By agreement in phone calls, I suppose.



TAIT: Yes. Other times I would be involved, yes. We usually knew before we went into a state the answers to the most sensitive questions.

BURG: And I've interviewed enough people now to know how involved that could have been.

TAIT: Yes very, very much so.

BURG: The injured feelings that result from being assigned to a jump seat instead of a back seat or something of this sort.

TAIT: Absolutely right. And you recall at that time, there were a few men named Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin and William Jenner of Indiana. Joseph McCarthy had been terribly critical of General George Marshall for whom Eisenhower had the greatest admiration. And Eisenhower's attitude toward Senator McCarthy and Senator Jenner affected every arrangement I made in those states.

BURG: I'll bet it did. I was going to ask you, since you opened with Indiana and knowing what I knew about Senator

Jenner, can you recollect now any special pressures that this put upon you or special arrangements that you had to make in Indiana as a result of this?



TAIT: Well, it was helpful to keep them as far apart. In the motorcade, Senator Jenner should not be put in the same automobile with General Eisenhower; Jenner should not introduce Eisenhower for a speaking engagement. On the other hand he was the U.S. Senator from Indiana and had to be involved to some extent.

BURG: Was there any pressure put on by either Jenner's people or by Republican leaders in Indiana to place Senator Jenner in the General's car?

TAIT: No pressures were ever put on me to do that.

BURG: None on you?

TAIT: No sir, no.

BURG: And you, I assume, were making suggestions, very tactful suggestions, that, well the General's car--

TAIT: As to who should be in there and it was never either

one of them. You see, I did not handle the Wisconsin tour.

BURG: You were not advance man in that state?



TAIT: Not in Wisconsin. I'm not familiar with what the problems may have been there.

BURG: Well, I think ultimately we'll come to where there was advance and check with them.

TAIT: Ask them.

BURG: And I assume that never so much as an uplifted eyebrow in Indiana when you said, now, here's where people will be in the motorcade. We would like to have so and so introduce the General, and it was not Senator Jenner's name that you gave.

TAIT: Almost always the people would accept my recommendation without argument.

BURG: Do you recall any unpleasantness at all, let us say, in Indiana?

TAIT: No.

BURG: So anything that did happen, even where people put a



little pressure on you perhaps, it was quiet; it was not pursued.

TAIT: That's correct.



BURG: Left alone.

TAIT: And that being the first day of the campaign, it's quite possible that a lot of this had been ironed out before I ever got there.

BURG: Now, let me ask you, in general terms, before pursuing matters any further: Do you recall, from this phase of your work in the campaign, any particular problems that you had to handle? I can imagine a diversity of problems that might have arose, but anything still stick in your mind that amuses you or still perplexes you or confounded you at the time?

TAIT: Oh, yes. I remember working in a state just before the General was to go into Wisconsin. We were attempting to establish a pattern as to who should ride with the General, who should introduce him, partly for the purpose of, when we went into Wisconsin, whoever was there could say that this is the way we've done it in every other state. In one state,

I recall, Minnesota, there were reasons why that pattern should not be followed. And the local committee, as courteously as they could, just couldn't understand why I was saying what I was saying. They were very perplexed by it all. We discussed this for quite a long time and then I suggested that we take a five-minute recess during which I whispered in the ear of the leader why I was doing what I was doing. The leader reconvened. The leader got up and said, "Before we ask anymore questions of Mr. Tait, I've had an opportunity to speak with him during the recess. He has explained to me the reasons why he is suggesting what he is. I think he is absolutely right, and I think we ought to go on to the next subject."

BURG: Very nice.

TAIT: And on a national level I remember the tour in northern California where the General appeared for one whole day, starting with Sacramento on down by train to San Francisco with various stops in between ending up with an evening rally at the Cow Palace. Now, the only living ex-Republican President, Herbert Hoover, lived in the San Francisco area, and the role of

ex-President Hoover during the San Francisco rallies was discussed at length. The views seemed to be almost equally divided. Everyone had affection for ex-President Hoover. But there were differences of opinion as to the political implications of his role, keep in mind now this was 1952. Ever since the depression years, the Democrats had been basing all of their campaigns against Hooverism and charging that if you elected a Republican you would have another depression. And I repeat, I think all persons involved had great admiration for ex-President Hoover. The question simply was--those days are over; this is another campaign; in the desire to get the General elected, what is the best thing to do. I remember one evening discussing this question with four U.S. Senators who were in San Francisco. I raised the problem with them: What should I do? And two of them recommended going one way and two recommended going the exact opposite way.

BURG: Who were the four, do you remember? Who gave you that balanced conclusion?

TAIT: I'm trying to remember their names. They were Senators [Homer] Ferguson, [Francis] Case, [Bourke] Hickenlooper--the fourth name escapes me at the moment.



{Interruption}

I'm not certain of the other name--it might have been Mundt.

BURG: Karl Mundt? All right, we can check into that too, perhaps find out which the four happened to be--

TAIT: Those four senators were in San Francisco at that time under the Truth Squad Program and they--

BURG: Following what the Democratic--

TAIT: Correct.

BURG:--candidate.

TAIT: Coincidence, they happened to be in San Francisco while I was there. Another recollection which sticks out there were more than two candidates for the Republican nomination that year. Not only Senator Taft but also General [Douglas] MacArthur.

BURG: Earl Warren, too.

TAIT: Earl Warren earlier.

BURG: And the [Harold] Stassen candidacy, the perennial Stassen candidacy.

TAIT: And Stassen, yes, he enjoyed campaigning; you can throw him in there.

BURG: Almost taking one for four years, yes.



TAIT: General MacArthur was a serious candidate and later in the campaign Senator [Robert] Taft declared his support for President Eisenhower but General MacArthur never did. I remember one evening while I was in San Francisco, a man who was a friend and admirer--personal friend of both General Eisenhower and MacArthur--and who knew MacArthur's aide said, "Do you have any objection if I call General MacArthur's aide to see whether any overture from General Eisenhower's staff to General MacArthur would be favorably received?" I replied that that was not my area of responsibility--that question was much too big for me to handle--but if he as a personal friend wanted to make such a call I couldn't see where any harm could come of it, but that I could not be associated with the call in any way. He said, "All right, I think I will call," and he asked me to listen in on the other phone. He

called General MacArthur's aide and said, "If overtures were made by General Eisenhower to General MacArthur, would they be favorably received?" And there was a rather long explanation, the conclusion being, "No." MacArthur was unforgiving and, to the best of my recollection, never did support General Eisenhower.

BURG: The aide, the MacArthur aide, was this his former military aide?

TAIT: Correct.



BURG: The gentleman who wrote a book about--

TAIT: I don't believe so.

BURG:--MacArthur?

TAIT: No. I don't think the man I have in mind--Colonel Sidney--wait a minute--Colonel Sidney Huff.

BURG: I was thinking of another man entirely. So it was Huff that took this call and--

TAIT: I believe he had been--he not only was aide then to General MacArthur, but that he was very friendly to General

Eisenhower. He was completely loyal to General MacArthur, but he had no ill feelings--none whatsoever--quite the contrary. His feelings were favorable towards Eisenhower. He regretted that this feeling still existed in General MacArthur, but his advice was: Do nothing.



BURG: So your friend, as you listened to the conversation, your friend met with a friendly rebuff--

TAIT: Correct.

BURG:--based on Colonel Huff's knowledge of MacArthur's--

TAIT: How General MacArthur would react were he to receive any overtures whatsoever. Keep in mind that the man who made this phone call had no authority from anyone on the Eisenhower staff to do so. He did it solely on his own and he knew that. However, had he received a favorable reply then I'm sure that favorable reply would have been conveyed to General Eisenhower's staff and to the General himself. I don't know what would have happened then.

BURG: Yes. I was going to say, may I assume that you yourself did not report this back to the Eisenhower staff.

TAIT: I did not.

BURG: So as far as they were concerned the entire incident never happened. They never knew of it.

TAIT: Any they never knew of it, right.



BURG: Might I ask also, Mr. Tait, how was the Herbert Hoover matter ultimately resolved?

TAIT: The problem solved itself. President Hoover was not in that area at the time General Eisenhower arrived.

BURG: I see, I see.

TAIT: So it was a moot question.

BURG: You didn't then find it necessary to call back for instructions and say, "Here is my problem and I've had two conflicting sets of advice."

TAIT: I had called back for instructions.

BURG: Did you?

TAIT: Yes. But then the problem solved itself so the question became



BURG: Who was it that you called? Was it Whitlock or someone else?

TAIT: My recollection I called--I'm not a hundred percent sure of this--may have been to former Senator Fred Seaton.

BURG: Ah, yes, of Nebraska.



TAIT: Yes. He was traveling on the train or the plane almost a hundred percent of the time.

BURG: I would also like to ask, as you carried out your duties, were there instruction calls being sent to you continually as you did your work and reflecting perhaps changes of policy?

TAIT: Very few changes of policy. I was on the move a great deal of the time and I would report in at least every evening, at least that often, at which time I would receive further instructions. But normally they related to matters of local interest for my next assignment. Oh, I think at one time there may have been a change as to cars--maybe cars two and three were switched once but nothing of any greater significance than that. I remember a personal incident about the General which I would like to put on the record.

BURG: Surely.



TAIT: The more I saw the man the more affection I had for him. He had a touch, the common touch. He was good to everyone. I remember one day we had a whistle stop in the midwest--it may have been Iowa. When the train stopped the President has to get off the train and walk perhaps seventy-five yards to a platform from which he spoke to the persons there. He got off the rear of the train and as usual there were security people around him and any number of persons in the welcoming party. He was completely surrounded by a large group of people. He got off the train; he walked about fifteen feet; he stopped, turned around, and said, "Where's Mamie?" And this impressed me because with all this group of people around him and talking constantly wanting to say this, that and the other thing to him, the thought occurred to him and his concern was, "Where's my wife?" And he stopped and he went back and got her and he walked with her to the area over to the speaker's platform. I also remember one night after the meeting in San Francisco; it was a very busy day--a major speech--and we went back to the suite at the St. Francis Hotel and he had one or two old army buddies with him

and they were sitting just relaxing a while before we went to bed. I was in the dining room adjoining the living room where he was visiting and the phone was ringing in the living room where he was and he would get up and answer the phone. Calls were supposed to be put into the dining room where I was located with Homer Gruenther who was with me. So I called the operator and gave very strict instructions that no further calls were to be placed to the phone in the living room. All calls were to be directed to me on my extension. She agreed. A few minutes later the phone rang in the living room again and I was about ready to pick up the phone and call the operator and tell her what I thought of her efficiency when I heard the President pick up the phone and say, "Yes, Mamie." So the operator used outstanding judgment. She ignored my instructions and she put Mrs. Eisenhower--

BURG: Directly through.

TAIT: --directly through to her husband.

BURG: So much for Edward Tait's management of the incoming phone calls.



Were there many occasions, Mr. Tait, where you in your capacity of advance man found yourself in a situation like that, where you were present, the campaign group had reached the city, and you had duties then closely associated with the candidate?

TAIT: It varied. At times, yes, and other times, no. Often depended upon the circumstances: Number one, whether I was even going to stay in the city that night or whether I would be leapfrogging ahead to another--or whether Mrs. Eisenhower was with him.

BURG: I wondered, in those places where your paths coincided, if he'd ever discussed with you any of the problems that you might be facing out there in the field running out in advance.

TAIT: No, no, we did not do that. At the end of the day he needed to relax. Also, he had been so accustomed to having so many thousands or millions of people working for him--I always felt that I knew what he wanted; I knew generally what his guidelines were, and it wasn't necessary for me to ask anything of him. And apparently he never had the need to issue instructions to me.

BURG: When you did wind up with the campaign group, even though you might only be there for a few hours and then you had to depart to do the rest of your job, can you tell me which people--

[Interruption]



For example, on this one occasion in San Francisco, you happened to be with Homer Gruenther.

TAIT: As far as the train was concerned, normally the top contact was Governor Sherman Adams. For my purposes, the second contact would be Senator Fred Seaton. At times Leonard Hall, he was very active in the campaign and later Republican chairman, was in a position to be helpful. If I had a matter which involved the press, I would discuss that directly with James Hagerty, who was press secretary. I would communicate with whomever it was necessary, depending upon the type of question.

BURG: You were one of our people who was--as I take a possessive--one of our people who was uniquely placed to see some of these people at that particular point in time. How

did you find Governor Adams and how was it to work with him in this association that you had?

TAIT: My work with Governor Adams at all times was strictly business. He was terribly busy, terribly pressed. All of us who worked with him knew this and we attempted not to use any more time than necessary. If I had a question to ask of him, I would ask it; I would get my answer, and that would end the conversation, because there were always fifty or a hundred phone calls and there were other people waiting to talk with him next. The relationship was a good one. He was always decisive. He wasted no time whatsoever in making up his mind.

BURG: You always knew where you stood with him.



TAIT: Yes, sir, always.

BURG: Did he ever have occasion to chide you in any way?

TAIT: No, thank God! Now that is one of the biggest compliments that someone ever gave me; maybe it was the lack of a compliment which I remember, and I never was chastised in any way. My relationship was a very nice one to begin with since I was not on anyone's payroll.

BURG: Yes, of course, that's right.

TAIT: I was a rather independent person--

BURG: Pretty much volunteer labor.

TAIT: I was in a position to be independent. Should anyone order me to do something I didn't want to do, I was in the position to say no and did say no.

BURG: Oh, you did?



TAIT: Absolutely. I remember Jim Hagerty and I had a great argument on the very first day of the campaign. Jim said, in a loud voice to the group, "Who in the hell put the press car where it was?"

I said, "I did."

He said, "Who are you?"

I said, "I'm Ed Tait. Who are you?" And he stopped, and he started to laugh. That night he came to my room with a bottle and we sat down and we had an absolutely delightful visit and we have been good friends ever since.

BURG: What a very fine story, Mr. Tait.

TAIT: Jim Hagerty also was a very decisive man and over-worked man. He did an outstanding job on the campaign under very difficult conditions.

BURG: Yes, the pressures on those two men--Adams and Hagerty--would have been very high.

TAIT: They were.



BURG: Now, by way of contrast, Mr. Tait, was Fred Seaton similarly hard-pressed or was his work of a nature that--

TAIT: Fred Seaton was hard-pressed, but not nearly to the extent of Adams or Hagerty. Hagerty was our top man as to relationship with the press. Adams was the top man with respect to all--really all campaign matters. Whereas Fred Seaton had a position subordinate to Governor Adams, working in narrower areas, and it often seemed that his responsibility lay more in the area of greeting, welcoming, or talking with VIPs who came on board. VIPs often would come on board one of the cars in the train and stay with the train for maybe an hour or two or three in the so-called VIP car. I'm sure Fred Seaton had many duties other than that, but he was a former



senator, played a very helpful and very important role in meeting with those men and giving them some attention because the candidate had to make appearances all day long. And as we would go from one stop to another, the candidate would have to just get a few minutes to himself and prepare his remarks for the next stop.

BURG: It would sound as though Mr. Seaton would have to have been a very tactful man in--

TAIT: Yes.



BURG: -- in dicking with these local political leaders.

TAIT: He was, and he had great knowledge of people, at least in the midwest area from which he came. And he was very helpful; he knew national affairs and was effective in that role.

BURG: Did you see much of Art [L. Arthur] Minnich at that stage?

TAIT: No, I really did not get to know Art Minnich until I worked on the White House staff.

BURG: O.K., fine. I'd like to ask you this after--

[Interruption]

I don't want to shut off any other reminiscences that you have out of the campaign period, but I did want to ask you also whether--as that campaign advanced, as time passed and you got closer to the election--your duties and responsibilities changed in any way, or were you able to follow the same basic routine?

TAIT: The responsibilities continued pretty much as they had been all along with the one change being that on the first day of the campaign two of us worked together and thereafter, in most areas, I worked by myself.

BURG: So we have pretty well covered most of the kinds of work you did and the special problems or incidents that came up during that period of time.

TAIT: We have. I'm sure we relish reminiscing, but--

BURG: You must have found that, since it was quite divorced from anything else you had ever done, you must have found that entire experience a very enlightening one.

TAIT: Yes, very much so. I don't think there is any way one can prepare himself for that type of responsibility, and, once it's over, you know you'll probably never do it again. I don't think--I never wanted to do it again; once was enough.

BURG: The fatigue factor--of course you were at the time--as you pointed out--you were a young man--

TAIT: Yes.



BURG: --but that was an enormous pressure--the amount of travel you did, the responsibility you had and literally almost never stopping, had to keep moving.

TAIT: That's correct, constantly.

BURG: And it must have been most difficult.

TAIT: It was. There was absolutely no schedule at all. You were on your own in carrying out your responsibilities, no one present to assist you. You had to handle the problems as they came up by yourself, and I never did ask for instructions from headquarters except on the most major questions such as

the President Hoover question I mentioned earlier. Sometimes you might start--

[Interruption]



TAIT: We might start in, let's say, for example, Wyoming and we might end up in New Orleans in the evening. You would go from a very cold climate to a warm humid climate all within one day.

BURG: And the travel all by propeller driven aircraft--

TAIT: Yes.

BURG: --which is another thing that should be mentioned. I think we have forgotten now in the day of the jet aircraft that propeller driven aircraft were fatiguing things to fly in.

TAIT: Very, very much so. The days were so long. Sometimes we'd start six, six-thirty in the morning. I remember one trip we started--the campaign itself started, say, around eight o'clock in the morning in Fort Worth, a brief appearance, and then a trip over to Dallas by train, a talk in

Dallas, and then we got on board a propeller-driven plane and landed in New York fairly close to midnight--making it a long exhausting day. I did become ill once from fatigue, but it was just a common cold. At that time I was working in upper New York state, going, say, from the New York City area over to Buffalo ending up with a night rally in Buffalo. And I remember being ill at that time from a bad cold, that's all. Major General Howard Snyder was the President's physician. He said, "You belong in bed. Go to one of the compartments and put yourself in bed."

And I said, "Sure you want any more dead wood on board?" It wouldn't be too bad if I got off for a day or two until I recovered. And I'll never forget how Howard laughed at my dead wood remark.



BURG: Another piece of dead wood was all right though; he could take that. One would have to remember, Mr. Tait, that the sensitive nature of the work you were doing--and what I was thinking was that day after day, week after week, the fatigue would tend to build up and yet you, yourself, despite fatigue, would have to be courteous, attentive and alert, tactful in dealing with the people that you were dealing with.

TAIT: Yes, sir, at all times.

BURG: Because their feelings could so easily be hurt.

TAIT: No matter how tired you were.

BURG: I think one tends to forget that about a campaign tour.

TAIT: But enthusiasm will carry you far.



BURG: Yes, yes, indeed.

TAIT: If you believe in what you're doing, that helps you forget fatigue.

BURG: Now, did you go back to New York then as the campaign wound up--did you go back to New York for election eve--were you with the group at the Commodore?

TAIT: I've thought about this. I was on the first day of the campaign and also the last. My last responsibility was Boston. The President appeared in Boston for the last major campaign address. The election was Tuesday so he campaigned there on Monday with a huge night rally in Boston followed

by a national telecast. I'll come back to this later about Vice President Nixon coming in. To answer your question, after the national telecast and after the clock had dropped on the General's head, we all got on board--

BURG: A clock dropped on his head?

TAIT: A clock dropped on his head. As we all got on board a train--I remember the President saying goodbye to Senator Lodge who was a candidate for re-election. You know he was defeated by John Kennedy. We rode the train back to New York; we had a party in the club car with the shades down and we all relaxed; the campaign was over. We arrived in New York. I flew to Pittsburgh, voted, got my wife, flew back to New York to the Commodore and celebrated the election there that night. And I was in the room where the President was for a fair amount of time that evening.



BURG: That small private room--

TAIT: Yes, sir.

BURG: --upstairs.

TAIT: As the results came in.

BURG: Now, one thing, as you mentioned Mr. Nixon, it struck me I shouldn't leave this part of your career without asking were you at all in contact with the campaign train, the staff at the time when the Nixon "Checkers" speech and this whole problem arose?

TAIT: I was not with the train the night of the "Checkers" speech; I was in Charlotte, North Carolina. I watched the "Checkers" speech in the Republican headquarters there with the man who was responsible in North Carolina for that campaign. He and I were the only two in the Republican headquarters when that speech came on. We listened to it and the moment the speech was over, I think every phone in the headquarters started to ring.



BURG: Really?

TAIT: He and I took all the calls we could using both hands-- no one else around.

BURG: The calls said--were the calls then referred



TAIT: "What can I do." And our advice was to send a telegram, and we told them where to send the telegram, headquarters, expressing their sentiments, whatever they might be. My recollection was they were almost a hundred percent favorable --that is--keep Nixon on the ticket.

BURG: And then the two men met in West Virginia--

TAIT: Yes.

BURG: --just a very short time after, but you were still south, I assume.

TAIT: Correct, I was not in West Virginia.



BURG: All right, then let me ask you this: After the favorable results of the election, what was your course of action? Did you then return to your law practice--

TAIT: I returned to my private practice in Pittsburgh.

BURG: Had anything been said to you, Mr. Tait, by anyone about--"Now, you've done a good job; you may hear from us." Was there anything like that transpired?

TAIT: Oh, the former, not the latter. A number of people were complimentary, but no one made any reference whatsoever to a job. At no time during the campaign did I ever indicate any interest in a job. I do remember several newspapermen on board the train, unknown to me, cornered me one day and said, "What do you want out of this campaign?"

And I said, "I don't want anything."

"Oh, come on, what job do you want in Washington?"

I said, "I don't want any job in Washington. I want to go back to my practice." They used a very profane word to indicate they didn't believe me; they thought I was putting them on. It happened to be true; I did not want anything.

BURG: Were there others, Mr. Tait, with whom you came in contact in the campaign, whose view was similar to your own-- that they had other lives that they were leading--

TAIT: I don't recall discussing this with other men with whom I came in contact.

BURG: So that tells me then--neither did you run into men who said to you, "Gee, I sure hope that I can get this kind of a position out of my work on the campaign."



TAIT: I don't recall anyone ever saying that.

BURG: But at least two members of the press were probing around to find out--

TAIT: All I know is they asked me, and when I gave the answer they didn't believe me.

BURG: Now, you did not stay with your law practice for too long a period. In 1953 you did come to Washington, D.C.

TAIT: Correct. I returned to practice after the election which would be early November and I came here, I believe it was July '53, but not for reasons one might assume. A lawyer in Pittsburgh, Ralph [H.] Demmler, (we were not with the same law firm; our law firms were in the same building and he did live fairly close to me) had been selected by President Eisenhower to be his first chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission. Ralph Demmler was not actively engaged in politics and he did not take a role in the campaign other than--I don't know what he did in Pittsburgh. I know he was a supporter of the General then. He was a spirited citizen who probably helped the best he could. But I mean he did not

have an official campaign role as such. But he did happen to be the best SEC lawyer in the country and was tapped by Eisenhower to be his first chairman of the SEC. Ralph Demmler talked to me and I told him I did not want to go to Washington. We talked about this several other times and he finally said, "Ed, you are a lawyer and you've had the campaign exposure to politics." He said, "I need someone very badly to go with me whom I trust; in whom I have confidence--one who will help to protect me." And I had great admiration and affection for him, and the idea became appealing, and I did come. But there certainly was no direct relationship in any way to my services on the campaign. The offer was not given by anyone with whom I had worked on the campaign. The fact that I had worked on it, no doubt had an influence on Mr. Demmler as to my qualifications to help him.

BURG: Now, it might be possible that he had checked with people on the campaign for their impressions of you, but Demmler himself knew you from Pittsburgh--

TAIT: Yes.

BURG: --and needed no outside recommendation.



TAIT: I doubt very much that he checked with anyone else on the campaign. He didn't need to.

BURG: And your position with him--

TAIT: I started out as Executive Assistant to the Chairman. Later my title become Executive Director of the SEC.

BURG: I'm going to look at--yes, I still have a little time. How are you on time?

TAIT: I'm running out.



BURG: Are you, because I was going to say we can break here. Let's get this on the record right now if we may. Let me ask you to describe your responsibilities with Mr. Demmler. This would be the first kind of job of this sort I believe you had had.

TAIT: Yes. I played a dual function. In one sense, I was his legal assistant, and it was my job to help him in his legal duties which were very extensive. We had countless problems, and he had opinions to write for which he was responsible. . . . I had been a law clerk, as I told you before, prior to that time. And I also had responsibilities to help

him assume his role as chairman, because he did have the executive responsibilities of the Commission and he asked that I help him and take over in the areas of personnel, budget, and such matters--

BURG: For the commission.



TAIT: --without direct involvement in, say, the work flow through the operating bureaus, although frequently I would serve some function in that respect, yet that was not my primary responsibility. Mr. Demmler knew his SEC work so well that he had little need for a legal assistant. It appeared that more and more of my time was going towards administration which perhaps had something to do with my later becoming Executive Director, which was solely an administrative job.

BURG: Now, did you yourself have key subordinates in that position with Mr. Demmler--people upon whom you relied?

TAIT: Oh, yes.

BURG: May I ask who they were?

TAIT: Well, there would be the director of personnel with the Commission--his name was William [E.] Becker. And then the man in charge of the budget--Jim [James J. Riordan]. And there was another man [Hastings P. Avery] in charge of the records, property, supplies, things like that.

BURG: These were--



TAIT: But, as time went on more and more I would have work with the General Counsel of the Commission, the Director of the Division of Corporation Finance, the Director of the Division of Corporate Regulation--

BURG: How did that job strike you? Was this to you a satisfying endeavor? The legal part of it began to fall away a bit and the administrative, executive side--

TAIT: I found it to be challenging, but it did not appeal to me nearly as much as legal work. I did the best I could. I was not a professional administrator.

BURG: Now, let me ask you about Mr. Demmler, too. What kind of man was he, the quality of mind, the kind of personality that he had?

TAIT: I think I mentioned, in my opinion and the opinion of many people, Ralph Demmler was probably the finest SEC lawyer, SEC and corporate lawyer in the country. He was with the Pittsburgh law firm of Reed, Smith, Shain and McClay. It's impossible for me to refer to him except in most complimentary terms. He was so able and so intelligent and yet so modest, unassuming. I would not say that he was a quiet person. He certainly was never a boisterous person; he was in the middle range of temperament--generally unruffled. If someone acted unfairly towards him, which occurred a few times, I remember a column by Drew Pearson which upset him one day.

BURG: Oh, really?



TAIT: That was par for the course for Drew Pearson.

BURG: Now was Mr. Demmler, to the best of your knowledge, was he receiving instructions out of the White House in 1953, '54 and if so, I wondered what form--

TAIT: He never received any instructions out of the White House, unless they pertained to budget, personnel policies. When we arrived at the SEC, the first thing I was told was that the budget had been cut, that we would have to get rid of five percent



of our employees. Well, perhaps that in a sense is a direction from the White House, but all other agencies had been cut too. Anything which came out didn't come out of the White House; it would come out of the Civil Service Commission, the old Bureau of the Budget. I don't recall any contact from the White House with respect to the work of the Commission.

BURG: I see I have run low and I'm about to get a beep from my machine; so we will break at this point and take up your career--. Now, I will ask you this, was the change of title to Executive Director, did that make a substantial change or was that merely a recognition of the role you had come to play?

TAIT: It was a little bit of both. There was an Executive Director before me; he had left, and when he left I was put into the position because I was, after he left, fulfilling that role anyhow.

BURG: Who was your predecessor in the role--



TAIT: John Bowser.

BURG: Bowser, all right. Thank you very much, Mr. Tait.



INTERVIEW WITH

Edward T. Tait

by

Maclyn P. Burg  
Oral Historian

on

July 3, 1975

for

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

This is an interview being conducted with Mr. Edward Tait at his offices in Washington, D. C. on July 3, 1975. Present for the interview are Mr. Tait and Dr. Burg of the Eisenhower Library staff.

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DR. MACLYN BURG: When we broke off, my notes tell me, we had been talking about your work with Ralph Demmler in the SEC [Securities and Exchange Commission] and my note to myself reminds me to start the next interview with that point where you yourself became executive director of SEC. So, if we could, what I'd like to know is what that job entailed. What was the nature of the job? I'm afraid I only have a layman's knowledge of what SEC does and what you would be doing as its executive director.

MR. TAIT: I became executive director of the SEC during the latter part of my stay there and was executive director for a matter of a few months only. The executive director is the top staff position at the SEC, but the position deals more with the administration of the commission than with the substantive day-to-day operational type work. It was not my function to give legal opinions or to review registration statements or proxy statements, but more or less an overall administrator responsible to the chairman for the function of the commission.



BURG: And how big a commission staff would you have to work with?

TAIT: My recollection is very hazy as to the number of staff we had at the time. I think a fair estimate would be eight or nine hundred with a number of field offices scattered throughout the country.

BURG: And those fell under your responsibility too?



TAIT: Yes, the staff was composed of many lawyers, accountants, economists and financial analysts. They were the primary working group.

BURG: Plus the clerical--

TAIT: Plus support staff.

BURG: --staff that were necessary.

TAIT: Yes.

BURG: Good Lord! I'll put it bluntly--what would be the biggest headache for a man who holds that particular job at that time?

TAIT: During my period with the SEC, the SEC had a legislative program before the congress which was enacted, and the purpose of the program was to change the securities laws in a manner which would permit earlier dissemination of information about forthcoming securities issues so the information could get to the potential investing public as early as possible and yet not too early. There was a constant conflict. You want the investing public to know as much as possible. You also want them to know everything material, everything which they should know before they make the investment decision. So there's a matter of degree, as information is compiled for prospectuses, registration statements: when is there enough information put together that the registrant can put that out to the public?

BURG: But always the danger of a premature statement--

TAIT: Yes. Always the danger of a broker making a premature sale--sale before the SEC permitted the registration to become effective. That's a key word. Until registration



becomes effective, the registered securities cannot be sold. That legislation consumed an enormous amount of our time. We also had some interesting substantive problems concerning the so-called Dixon-Yates contract which in hindsight was not worthy of all the attention which it received, but it received a great deal of political attention at that time and thus consumed a substantial portion of our time.

BURG: Forgive me, Mr. Tait, how did Dixon-Yates thing come before SEC. How did that involve you people?

TAIT: The SEC, under the Public Utility Holding Company Act of 1935, and the Securities Act of 1933, has certain responsibilities with respect to the sale of securities of public utility holding companies. Even those names are hazy to me now. The two southern utility companies, which were headed by a Mr. Dixon and a Mr. Yates, were planning a new joint utility project which many people thought would put it into competition with TVA?

BURG: Right, the Tennessee Valley.



TAIT: The details are awfully hazy to me anymore. The Middle-South Utilities was one. My recollection is that this was an attempt to establish a new utility, not via the TVA route, but through private enterprise.

BURG: That's right.

TAIT: And these two companies headed by Mr. Dixon and Mr. Yates were going together to put this new generator capacity into effect, and various studies had been made by--it was then called the Bureau of the Budget--as to need and feasibility. The Atomic Energy Commission was involved in it also.

BURG: Because of the Oak Ridge--



TAIT: I think they intended to use nuclear power.

BURG: Might have been. What I'd forgotten was that there were two companies involved and, of course, stock selling companies and that naturally SEC would have come in on it. I'm sorry for that lapse.

TAIT: And over and above the sale of securities the SEC has regulatory functions over public utility holding companies, going beyond the sale of securities.

BURG: That involvement too.

TAIT: Yes.

BURG: Now, you say, with the benefit of hindsight, far more was made of it than perhaps ever needed to be. Could you expand a bit on that?

TAIT: By that I mean it turned into a political issue.

BURG: This was during the Eisenhower administration?

TAIT: Yes, this would have been about 1954. Some members of congress were for the program and others, particularly Senator [Estes] Kefauver and others from Tennessee were greatly opposed because they thought it was an encroachment on TVA, and they fought it very hard.

BURG: And all of that also hit SEC.



TAIT: Yes. Further, in those days we had a number of very serious proxy fights. The SEC laws and regulations have changed. You still have fights but they do not reach the peak which existed in those days when Robert Young of



Allegheny Corporation, was attempting to take over New York Central Railroad and succeeded. There was a big proxy fight with these two companies fighting for control of the railroad. The SEC has jurisdiction over disclosure in proxies, and, thus, we became involved in the middle of the fight. There was another one, I recall, involving Montgomery Ward and a man named Wolfson.

[Interruption]

BURG: Oh, yes. That name Wolfson really rings a bell.

TAIT: Yes.



BURG: Montgomery Ward--I can vaguely associate something with Montgomery Ward but Wolfson's name really comes to mind.

TAIT: He got into a lot of trouble later on and I think he went to prison, but I have no personal knowledge of that.

BURG: Nor do I, but you're right yes. An unfortunate circumstance.

TAIT: Is this off?

BURG: No, it's on now.

TAIT: And there was an elderly man who headed Montgomery Ward at that time, Avery, does that sound correct?

BURG: Yes, now isn't that the man, Mr. Tait, that had to be carried out--

TAIT: That's the man.



BURG: --do you recall in World War II. The soldiers had to carry him out of the plant.

TAIT: That's the man. The basis of the fight against him was that he was too old; that he wasn't running the company properly; that he was permitting Sears Roebuck and others to get ahead of them. But, in any event, there was a great battle for control of Montgomery Ward, and once again the SEC was in the middle. There were a number of similar proxy fights during that period which assumed top level attention.

BURG: And so all this would create a certain amount of problem for you in administering the staff needs--

TAIT: Yes.

BURG: --during some pretty hectic times.

TAIT: And at other times the commissioners would consult with me--

BURG: Oh, they did?

TAIT: --as to the problems. I was still the assistant to the chairman while I was executive director.

BURG: I'm sorry, I didn't realize that.



TAIT: I had both functions.

BURG: You were wearing two hats--

TAIT: But I was still adviser to Demmler. He was so able he didn't need much advice.

BURG: Did you find that kind of tough to have to divide yourself between two rather dissimilar--

TAIT: Not really. It required more time, but the SEC was very, very well organized, had an outstanding staff, both

with respect to its substantive work load and with respect to its personnel officer, budget-fiscal officer. They were professionals and they--

BURG: They were career--

TAIT: They were career.

BURG: --types.

TAIT: Correct, yes.



BURG: Could I have their names. Do you remember who those two men were?

TAIT: William Becker headed personnel. I do not remember the name at the moment of the budget man. [James J. Riordan]

BURG: We'd be able to find that, I think. And who was the chairman of SEC at this point?

TAIT: Demmler.

BURG: It was still Demmler.

TAIT: Yes, during most of this period. Then Mr. Demmler left approximately the end of June of '55. J. Sinclair Armstrong was designated chairman. I agreed to stay with Armstrong for one month only. I had planned to leave the commission at the same time as Mr. Demmler. Armstrong asked me to stay during the transition period until he could find someone else to take over my function.

BURG: Was there a statutory limit to the amount of time that Mr. Demmler could stay on?

TAIT: The terms of the SEC commissioners are five years. But he left before his term expired.

BURG: He had personal reasons for--



TAIT: Yes, he had to get back to his practice.

BURG: And you had determined earlier that you would stay only so long as he was there.

TAIT: That is correct.

BURG: And when he left early, your decision was that you would leave with him.

TAIT: Yes, at that time I was a young man starting the practice of law, and I knew that I could not stay away from the practice too long or I would lose my clients. And that's what happened.

BURG: You lost your clients?

TAIT: I lost the clients. They can't wait while you're off doing something for the government; they must use someone else in your absence.

BURG: So at that point, 1955, your thought was that you would return to your own practice of law.

TAIT: That's correct.



BURG: And is that what in fact happened?

TAIT: No. During that interim period I received a call from the White House asking me if I could see the President the following morning at eight o'clock. I did not know what it was all about, but I said, yes, I would and then--

BURG: You didn't look at your calendar, Mr. Tait.

TAIT: I said, "Yes, sir."

BURG: And people will have to remember your work during the campaign itself--although you say now with great nonchalance, the call came, "Would you see the President tomorrow morning?" --it was really not the shocking thing it would be to one of us to have such a call come in.

TAIT: No, no, it wouldn't be that shocking.



BURG: Do you remember who made the call to you?

TAIT: I believe former Senator Fred Seaton called me. I met with him the following morning, and Governor [Sherman] Adams. They explained to me that I was going to be offered a position on the White House staff in charge of presidential nominations and appointments, succeeding Charles Willis.

BURG: Charles Willis, Jr.

TAIT: Right. I had the meeting with the President. He remembered me from the campaign; we talked; the offer was made, and I accepted.

BURG: Now, Mr. Tait, let me ask you this. Was it Mr. Willis' decision to leave that position? He had been, with Stanley Rumbough, one of the founders of Citizens for Eisenhower.

TAIT: Citizens for Eisenhower.



BURG: And had handled patronage work up to that point.

TAIT: I cannot give a definitive answer to that question. I know that Charlie Willis was absolutely exhausted from the work. He and I had conversations during the transition period. I also know that he had run into some difficulties because of his involvement in an attempt to set up a system whereby more Republicans would be recommended to--on a systematic basis and employed by, when they were qualified, various department and agencies. He received a lot of adverse press criticism for patronage activities.

BURG: And yet was under fire also, Mr. Tait, I'm quite sure from various party stalwarts for not having enough--

TAIT: Absolutely.

BURG: --Republicans in.



TAIT: Yes, it works both ways.

BURG: He couldn't possibly win in that situation.



TAIT: The Republicans had been out of power since the Hoover days. They believed that government was not heading in the direction it should head; that the federal government was thoroughly dominated by the Democratic party; and that, with the people having elected a Republican President, that the Republicans should assume control of the policy-making functions of the federal government. And, in essence, a President cannot really manage an executive branch as large as we have unless he has people who agree with his general policy, his general philosophy, working under him and carrying out his programs. That is essential. There is often a difference of opinion as to what is a policy function; how far down a department or agency need a President go to assume working control of the agency?

BURG: Yes. We might suggest, for example, the Department of the Interior, is it necessary that the Bureau of Reclamation be under the control of one of the President's appointees--

TAIT: Yes.

BURG: --in order to get the policies--



TAIT: The government is so huge there is just no easy answer to that question. I believe the answer varies from department to department from agency to agency. You have to look at each one individually to determine: Who has a policy-making role at SEC; who has a policy-making role at Interior.

BURG: And then it would also be complicated by the fact that, I suppose, you would find some civil servants in positions where they could make policy whose only interest was in, let us say in a broad sense, serving their country and therefore willing to make recommendations on the basis of their expertise and carry out policy that they felt was justifiable.

TAIT: Absolutely. Some of them without question were some of the finest, most able men I have ever met; they would have been loyal to anyone who was President.

[Interruption]

BURG: Yes, I felt that it would be like that. It's another factor that must be considered because you may have fine civil servants whose cooperation is wholehearted, save in the cases where they think that a gross error has been made, and you have other civil servants--and I'm sure did have-- who dragged their feet, and I've heard examples of this and you know examples.



TAIT: There were some when we went to the Securities and Exchange Commission. We rather quickly determined who would cooperate wholeheartedly and who would not, and two of the top men were quite frank in admitting that they would not be believers in the policies of the new chairman, and those men left.

BURG: They realized that having spoken frankly of this that they were going to be replaced?

TAIT: Yes. One of them--the general counsel--was a very fine gentleman about it. He said, "Mr. Chairman, I think you are entitled to your own general counsel, and I don't know that I will be able to carry out your policies,"--

realizing of course at that time you don't know what all the policies are going to be. These are formulated as one goes on. You don't come to government with, oh, a complete set of plans of everything you're going to do; your plans evolve while you're working. This gentleman told the chairman that he questioned his ability to carry out the chairman's policies, and he voluntarily submitted his own resignation.



BURG: Were attempts made in cases like that, Mr. Tait, to place these people elsewhere?

TAIT: Yes, in fact the chairman found a job for that particular man.

BURG: I know that it seems to have been done. I happen to remember in the Department of Agriculture that this--

TAIT: Able, able man. In that particular instance the chairman recommended him to a company and that company, to the best of my knowledge, was happy to have him at that time.

BURG: In this instance he left government service and went back to private life.

TAIT: Correct.

BURG: Now, Mr. Willis then had in motion a plan to expand the numbers of Republicans placed in policy positions, and had the plan been at all implemented or was it simply in the formative stage when you came on the scene?

TAIT: I think he probably had more than one plan.



BURG: And of course he had been doing that from the outset.

TAIT: Yes, from the outset there had been attempts to bring in new personnel who would be loyal to a new administration, not in a very systematic way, however. I think what Mr. Willis was trying to do was to systematize some sort of reporting system, but the plan was not implemented. Now whether that was related to Mr. Willis' departure, I really can't say.

BURG: It hadn't been done?

TAIT: The plan was not implemented. I was aware of the plan and I knew that little was done to implement it.

BURG: Governor Adams and Mr. Seaton spoke about these things with you?

TAIT: On one occasion only and that was when Seaton said that nothing would be done about the Willis plan. I don't believe Governor Adams ever said anything to me but Seaton did.

BURG: They just were not going to do anything with it.

TAIT: I needed to know, when I went there, whether further work would be needed on that plan. And I did not learn immediately but, oh, I suppose within a month or so, that the decision had been made to cancel the plan.



BURG: Did you ever hear any particular reason or reasons why? It would seem as though this could be considered a relatively harmless endeavor. That is, it didn't have to be pursued hard. It might be politically advantageous within the Republican party ranks to be able to point with pride to a plan which you were--

TAIT: I heard no discussion of it.

BURG: None whatsoever.

TAIT: None whatsoever. They just said that it's--it has been canceled. Maybe canceled isn't the right word because it hadn't even gone into effect.

BURG: It's been still-born--

TAIT: Yes.

BURG: --is what happened to it. Now, what position did that leave you in with respect to appointments--and I'm assuming that your job, like Willis's included searching out people for key positions throughout the executive branch and the departments and agencies.

TAIT: Yes.



BURG: Was the work, I want to see how I must put this--

TAIT: Could I take a crack at it?

BURG: Yes, because I wanted to know exactly had you gone over the hump? Was the bulk of the appointment work done at the time you came in?

TAIT: My primary responsibility related to presidential nominations and appointments of which there were then roughly 22,000, and that was more than enough to keep me busy. I had five secretaries and myself. As for Republicans generally seeking employment in the federal government, those persons either went directly to the agency or they would go to their congressmen and senators who would recommend them to persons at agencies or they went to the Republican National Committee, and the Republican National Committee would send these applicants to various agencies where their skills appeared to fit for interviews. The final decision always rested with the agency. I became involved in some of those, but it would not be large in number.



BURG: Although that number of jobs would not indeed be large in number, the number that touched your--

TAIT: The number which came to my attention were relatively few. But the ones which came to my attention were the names of persons who were seeking a presidential nomination or appointment.



BURG: Now, these jobs, Mr. Tait, would include various postmaster positions; I would expect there would be many of those all over the country.

TAIT: The jobs which would come to my attention would range all the way from chief justice of the supreme court to all the cabinet officers, heads of agencies, departments, boards, bureaus, judges, U.S. marshals, postmasters. Postmasters at that time were presidential appointments. The volume of those was so great that the postmaster general normally took care of the postmasters, and the attorney general's office handled the applications and the interviews and the checking with respect to U.S. marshals.

BURG: All of this a part of over 22,000--



TAIT: Yes, once a recommendation for a judgeship, for example, or U.S. marshal, would come from the attorney general to the President, it went through me. I had a review function, and I went over those lists and those recommendations, made whatever check I considered to be necessary, and then I would forward the recommendation to the President. The President

wouldn't even look at the recommendation unless it had my signature and Governor Adams' initials over the signature of the attorney general's office. The same would be true of diplomatic appointments from the state department.

Secretary Dulles would make those recommendations; they would come through my office and I would look at them sometimes more closely than others and forward them on to Governor Adams--the recommendations went from me directly to Adams, and Adams forwarded them to the President.



BURG: Let me ask you then--you're receiving a plethora of these appointments and the checks that had been made. What did you do, if I may use this term, as a reviewing officer, what were you looking for as something came from State or from Justice, recommending somebody, and you're looking over the paper work and investigations that have been conducted by those departments. What keys were you looking for before you could put your initials on it and forward it to Governor Adams and thence to the President?

TAIT: I would do very little with it as far as postmasters were concerned, other positions at that level.

BURG: And marshals I would presume.

TAIT: Yes. The higher the position, the more looking I did. I knew, as far as President Eisenhower was concerned, his number one requirement was: Can the man do the job?

BURG: He was less concerned about party membership and--

TAIT: Number one, the man had to be able to do the job. That was step number one. At the same time, the President didn't believe in the appointment of persons who would be antagonistic to him and to his program.

[Interruption]



BURG: Interesting.

TAIT: In many instances, the recommendation would come, let's speak in terms of departments only, the recommendation to fill a vacancy as assistant secretary would often come from the secretary himself. If we found someone who was interested in

being an assistant secretary, that was brought to the attention of the secretary and the secretary would do whatever he deemed necessary to satisfy himself that the man could do the job; if they were compatible, and could work in harness together.

BURG: Then based on whatever he discovered, he would go ahead and make his recommendation then on that basis to you.

TAIT: I don't mean to get ahead of our story, but I think this is relevant. Even though I had worked on the campaign and had worked on the White House staff and was known to the President and to Governor Adams, personally, when later before I was appointed Commissioner of the Federal Trade Commission, they asked me to visit with FTC Chairman John [W.] Gwynne, talk with him; give him an opportunity to object to me if he wished to do so.

BURG: To size you up; see how he might get along with you.

TAIT: Yes, but not in the sense of security approval, disapproval or veto, but of getting people who are capable of working together. And that is important. Perhaps this came from the



President's military training. I don't know the background of that policy.

BURG: It would seem quite reasonable. Because I think that's the way he did function in Europe. Trying to line up people often as you know there would be a British officer and an American officer, one the deputy of the other. And not only was there that inter-allied feeling to be handled, but there was also the problem of can these two men support one another and work together.



TAIT: Absolutely. We follow the same practice in our firm. I wouldn't think of hiring a lawyer without consulting my partners.

BURG: So you would have to then judge each of these cases as an individual case really, because in some instances--

TAIT: With varying degrees of--. Further, we were interested in security clearances. Many times I would review the FBI files on these men, and I don't think this is generally known,

and it's unfortunate, but those FBI reports were far more helpful to us in determining the suitability of the man rather than whether he was a security risk or not. Because you learned a tremendous amount about a man from his full-field investigation. In almost none of them would anything turn up which would indicate that they might be disloyal to the United States. I could give you an example. There was a vacancy in one of the regulatory agencies, a position which, by law, had to be filled by a Democrat. And a name came forward, I have no idea who recommended him, but he just seemed to have enormous support. He had had prior experience in his state on the state regulatory agency, which would be dealing with similar type problems. This man just seemed to have every qualification for the position and had the support of the senators and other people within his state. The man looked like a shoo-in, so to speak, until we received the FBI's full-field investigation; which, upon reading, I discovered the man was a "dead beat." When the FBI went back to the various places where he had lived, they



discussed him with different people and learned that he had left town without paying the butcher and the baker and he owed everybody around. I immediately recommended against him on the grounds that a man who won't pay his own debts, one who doesn't know how to handle money, his own personal affairs, and more importantly that this man might be subject to temptations, temptations which would provide more money to handle his own personal finances. That man was turned down for that reason only. I caught hell from the senators in his state and from his supporters--why that man did not get the appointment. But I never disclosed the reasons; the man was a dead beat. We had received that information from the FBI full-field investigation.

BURG: I take it that this was not a case of a man having committed a blunder as a very, very young man, but rather--

TAIT: Constant.

BURG: --constant behavior.

TAIT: Recurrence. Yes, it was just a long line.



BURG: So in some instances, traits of character or lack of character surfaced readily in those FBI reports. It wasn't just a question of here's the man's total work experience and educational background and everything else, but things of this sort.

TAIT: Yes. Those FBI reports do not give you conclusions or recommendations. They merely tell you what they were told. You decide for yourself what you think of the facts. They are strictly factual reports. You read them and appraise them.

BURG: Were there other instances of that sort? Or was this a fairly rare occurrence?

TAIT: That was quite rare for a man to get that far in the recommendation process without such traits having surfaced before. Another role we played, which I haven't mentioned, before a Presidential nomination was made, clearance was received from the senators from that state. Some people consider this patronage. Really it is not patronage; it is a constitutional requirement. So long as the senate has the right to confirm or not confirm a





nominee, you have to have the approval of those senators. The custom of the senate is such that if either senator from a man's state does not approve of the nominee, the senate will not confirm him. It makes no sense to wait and go through all of this work and forwarding these nominations to have the senate consider a man, only to be turned down. Far more efficient, expeditious, in my opinion, is to check ahead of time to see whether the senators are going to object. This does not mean that the senators pick the man. But if a senator says, "Nominee Smith is personally obnoxious," nominee Smith will never be confirmed. And if they're from the same state, Smith will never make it. Sometimes the senators would approve or in the situation where, oh, let's assume you had two Democratic senators from a state or one, the senators are merely saying, "No objection." That's satisfactory to the other senators and the man would then be confirmed or not confirmed strictly on the merits.



BURG: And then I think we should observe that these things frequently, probably more frequently than not, have nothing to do with partisan politics, but senators did not hover

around on their perches waiting for a presidential appointee to come along so that they could knock it down. But it seems to me that they generally proved most cooperative with any reasonable candidate that is proposed, whether he is from their party or not.

TAIT: Exactly. They were.

BURG: This I believe to be the general rule.

TAIT: Here again, using myself as an example, we had a Republican senator, at that time, Hugh Scott. There was also a Democratic senator from Pennsylvania, Senator Clark. He did not know me, had never met me. I have no idea that he knew about me. But there was no advantage to him in my being nominated to the Federal Trade Commission, none whatsoever. But he did not oppose it. He just said, "No objection."

BURG: Well I've been watching my time and on your watch too, and I think we have reached your luncheon appointment.

TAIT: I can give you a few more minutes if you wish.



BURG: Okay. Let me ask this: Was there still in existence the "Blue Boy" file which Mr. Willis had put together?

TAIT: I don't even know the expression.

BURG: This was an expression which he evidently used for those people recommended. Let us take for example Senator [Everett] Dirksen recommends somebody for a presidential appointment of one sort or another, and the person he has recommended for an appointment is really not a person of great talent. But Senator Dirksen, having the position and the influence that he had, Mr. Willis and the staff evidently felt something had to be done. So all instances of this type that came to Willis went into this "Blue Boy" file and then they did their level best to find some place. I can give you one example of a human being who went to an international water commission which met, I suspect, once a year, just in case anything happened to the water coming from Canada to America. He drew for that a fairly high salary; the politician involved was quite content; evidently the recipient of this appointment was content. This would be a case out of the "Blue Boy" file.



TAIT: I see. We had similar problems, but I never heard the expression "Blue Boy" used. If strong supporters of the President were anxious to help someone, if that person was qualified, we would keep their names on file and if something came along, for which they might be suitable, yes, we would consider those persons. Some people want work, money, others just want prestige of some sort of a Presidential appointment. Oh, if a President is sworn in in some foreign country, there's frequently a delegation sent representing the President of the United States. And many people just loved the honor of being the President's representative to the inauguration of President Kubitschek, of Brazil, for example.

BURG: Did that give them one of the Presidential appointment papers that could be framed and put on the wall?

TAIT: Yes. That was a prestige matter, no money involved. Probably cost them money.

BURG: They would have to pay their own way--



TAIT: I don't know the details on that. I don't know how that operated.

BURG: I don't either. Do you recollect during your tenure in that position any heavy pressure coming to you from prominent politicians of either party for a particular candidate that they might have had in mind?

TAIT: When they talked with me, they did not use terms of pressure. It was subtle, yes--so-and-so is a very strong supporter of mine and he's very qualified and he has done this and that and so on and he would do a great job in there and it would help me very much if he could get it--that kind of pressure. I remember one real, oh, threat of pressure in a way. In a particular commission there were two vacancies. The new appointments, one would have been for one year, one would have been for seven years, and one happened to be a Democratic appointment required by law to this commission and one Republican. And the Democratic senator, from Florida, Senator Smathers, called me and really did start to lay on the pressure on me. He said, "I want the man from my state to



get the seven-year term." One was a Republican and one was a Democrat, and I had lined it up so the Republican would get the seven-year term and the Democrat would get the one-year term. However, the Democrat would be eligible for renomination one year later and we intended to renominate him one year later, but Senator Smathers, not knowing this, called and really started to put the heat on to give his constituent the seven-year appointment. I told him that I had it already lined up and had made the determination that the seven-year appointment was going to the Republican and the one-year was going to the Democrat. He said, "Mr. Tait, you realize I'm a United States Senator and as a senator, I can see that the other nominee is not confirmed."

I said, "Yes, Senator, I agree with you completely. And as you fully realize, I don't have to send either name up."

He said, "Touche."

BURG: Really.

TAIT: They both went through. If that's what you mean by pressure, that is an example. It was not a fighting type of conversation.



BURG: It interests me that that is the one that you recollect. And it seems to me from the way you told the story that was an unusual example in your experience.

TAIT: Yes. Yes.

BURG: That you would even have that much pressure put on you.

TAIT: Correct.

BURG: Very, very interesting. Doesn't fit the common picture that one has.

TAIT: No, no. Not in the slightest.



BURG: Of course maybe Charles Willis got a lot of that in the first six, eight months when, here, twenty years of drought were over and the Republicans were in, and there may have been a scramble.

TAIT: He might have. This is a generality: there's some truth to it, the higher rank of the person calling, the less pressure. But persons further down say in the party if they were to call, they would use more adamant language,

harsher language. You know, "Dammit we ought to get more Republicans in there and why don't we do something about this."

BURG: Would calls come to you, Mr. Tait, from state chairmen for example?

TAIT: Yes. Republican state chairmen.

BURG: Directly to you?

TAIT: National committeemen, national committeewomen. Not frequently, but occasionally. Normally they--

BURG: The party tended to play a little tougher than did politicians in both parties active here in Washington, D.C.

TAIT: Your state chairmen and your national committeemen and women also were pros--professionals.

BURG: Would think so.

TAIT: So they didn't use pressure. They asked and talked in a very friendly sense. They weren't in a position to exert pressure anyhow.





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BURG: Thank you, Mr. Tait.





INTERVIEW WITH  
MR. EDWARD TAIT

BY

DR. MACLYN BURG  
Oral Historian

ON

August 24, 1976

FOR

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER LIBRARY

This interview is being taped with Mr. Edward Tait in Mr. Tait's law offices in Washington, D.C. on August 24, 1976. Present for the interview are Mr. Tait and Dr. Maclyn Burg of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library Staff.

DR. BURG: When we last were talking we had discussed your position regarding patronage, and I think about the only thing that remained to be discussed there was--you took over that office from [Charles] Willis--was everything all set up? That is, were there biographical files established on people? Was a routine of watching when people finished their appointments at FTC or wherever so that, as they came up for replacement or reappointment, you had sort of a tickler file?

MR. TAIT: Yes, we did, yes. It was a well-established tickler file. Don't hold me precisely to these dates, but my recollection is that I received in my office notification six months before a fixed term would expire. I would start then surveying the field. Then, another tickler would come to me ninety days before that fixed term expired, a reminder. At that time we, of course, attempted to resolve--would we reappoint the person whose term is expiring? Would we replace that person, and if so, with whom? If the man was to be retained,



the situation was quite easy, although there would be numerous inquiries, some favorable, some unfavorable. Our real work occurred when a determination was made that a person would be replaced or if we knew from him that he did not desire to be retained. And it was our goal to attempt to have the replacement known, checked out, and announced approximately thirty days before the term expired. This was not only done for purposes of efficiency, but we knew from experience that if you did not announce that you were going to reappoint the incumbent or name some person to take his spot, you left yourself and the President and members of Congress open to inquiries, recommendations, or pressure of some sort to appoint a particular candidate to that spot. And we knew that if we had time we could save ourselves and other people a lot of headaches by trying to find the right person, by making announcement, which closed off alternative candidacies. There was such a system, and that is my recollection of the reason why we handled it as we did.



BURG: You allowed the incumbent to move out gracefully also with that kind of system.

TAIT: Yes.

BURG: Do you remember when you took that job on, were you given instructions--now those might have come from Sherman Adams; they might have come from, I suppose, from Wilton Persons--with respect to how you were to handle the people that you had to interview, because I think that your work involved talking with some of these people?

TAIT: Yes. The work involved, at times, locating them, talking with them. The procedures were under the over-all supervision of Governor Adams. However most of these procedures had been established by my predecessor, and we continued on pretty much following the established procedures. But that, however, is an oversimplification because it didn't always work out as smoothly as I have described. Sometimes for various reasons we were not able to meet the thirty-day schedule or sometimes an incumbent would notify us that he wished to resign or he might send us a letter of resignation, at which time we'd just have to move as quickly as we could to find a successor. If the incumbent had not publicly announced



that he was leaving, we would ask him to keep it confidential, give us a period of time within which to find a successor. Sometimes that could be done; other times it could not; the man could not wait; he might have other commitments--in which event then we would be flooded with candidacies for the vacancy.



BURG: Including candidacies that, under no circumstances, were going to be successful.

TAIT: The overwhelming majority fell into that category.

BURG: And yet you would have to, if I understand how things worked, you would have to, in many cases, interview these people, speak with them. Had you any instructions about being gentle and tactful--

TAIT: No, no.

BURG: --in dealing with them?

TAIT: Not at all. I'm sure they assumed that I knew that, but no one ever said any such a thing to me. Nor did we have the time to interview people who did not really have a good opportu-

nity of being a candidate. My recollection, I can think maybe of two, three, four times a person might have been interviewed as a special favor for someone else. But we were just much too busy to waste our time talking to people who were not going to get the position. Someone else might have talked with them, but I didn't.



BURG: But you didn't. Let me ask you this, because it crossed my mind at the time I thought about that, too. We have someone going off or whose appointment to the FTC is ending and it is the decision of the President, or the President and others who are advising, that this person should be replaced, but this person does not want to be replaced. Whose unpleasant job was it to tell him that he was going to be replaced? Did that fall to your lot, or did circumstances dictate who passed the word?

TAIT: It frequently fell to my lot. In some instances wherever someone had a particular relationship with the incumbent, someone else might tell him. Or a few times the man did not know until the name of his successor was announced.

BURG: Oh. And if he said anything--

TAIT: I think generally he sensed, he knew, one way or another whether he was going to be reappointed. Sometimes they were told flatly they would not be reappointed, but there were instances in which they did not know until a successor was named.

BURG: But it sounds to me as though at no time did you have to face someone thoroughly irate, politically upset, and have to cope with an incensed man.

TAIT: Oh, yes.



BURG: Oh, you did?

TAIT: Oh, yes. And there were several instances in which persons were removed because of some action which they may have taken while in office which, in the opinion of the President, indicated they should resign. I'm thinking of Harold Talbott of the Air Force, Secretary of the Air Force. It's my recollection that he received heavy criticism in the press because he had written letters favorable to the business interests of a company in which he was interested, and he wrote these letters on Air Force stationery.



BURG: Oh, yes.

TAIT: Another one I can think of is [Edmund F.] Mansure; he then was head of GSA [General Services Administration].

BURG: He, too, was asked to resign.

TAIT: Yes, that's correct.



BURG: And these were a couple of instances where you had to try to deal with these people.

TAIT: Yes. But usually, more often than not, there was some person in a particularly good position to advise the person.

BURG: To cool them down.

TAIT: To cool them down. It could have been the senator; it could have been the chairman of the agency if we were talking about a member of the agency; could have been a cabinet officer, if you were thinking in terms of an under secretary or an assistant secretary of that department.

BURG: But if those approaches failed, did it mean that these

people would come to the White House and speak with you?

TAIT: I can't recall any situations like that because, first of all, it's not something you look forward to, but that is not why we didn't do it--there just were not enough hours in the day to do all of these niceties.

BURG: In effect, hold someone's hand for them.



TAIT: Yes, and spend an hour or two attempting to convince him that there is some valid reason for his not being reappointed. The effort generally would have been futile in any event. These men all felt they were entitled to reappointment; the reasons would have fallen on deaf ears. But the primary reason was that, number one, it's futile to get into such meetings, to attempt to convince a person for legitimate reasons he's not going to be reappointed, and we just did not have the time to do it.

BURG: Now when you turned over to Bob [Robert K.] Gray, you had been appointed to the Federal Trade Commission yourself.

TAIT: Technically yes, that is correct. However, I had been out of that position for a period of time when I was ill.

BURG: Oh, I see.

TAIT: And when I went to Walter Reed Hospital, Gray filled in for me temporarily and I think Bob always anticipated that, as did I initially, that I would be returning and the position was still open for me. But after undergoing the treatment, primarily ulcer, at the hospital, the doctor asked me, he said, "Do you know how you got this ulcer?"

And I said, "Yes."

He said, "Do you know how to cure it?"

I paused a moment and said, "Yes." His advice was quite obvious. I could not heal the ulcer by going back to a place--

BURG: And sitting on a hot stove lid!

TAIT: --going back to the place where it occurred. And then Bob Gray took over as successor.

BURG: I've always thought of that job as tantamount to sitting in the open greenhouse nose of a B-17 over Schweinfurt with



flak coming up all around. Obviously one of the toughest jobs that one could have in the White House at any period of time; perhaps only Governor Adams had one where more explosive filled the air around him.

TAIT: He certainly had more flak flying at him, as does any other person who occupies a similar position to Adams. But he was in the center of my problems and Jerry Persons' problems and the problems of every other member of the staff, all of whom were responsible to the President through him.

BURG: Had you known, by the way, that that ulcer was developing? The physical symptoms were there and causing you distress for a period of time?

TAIT: Yes.

BURG: And ultimately it flared to the point that you could no longer ignore it and grin through the pain.

TAIT: I went to Dr. Walter Tkach, who was the assistant physician to General Howard Snyder. Tkach's office was located in the



basement of the White House building. I went to him and told him my problem. He put me in a car and sent me to Walter Reed, without delay.

BURG: It's my understanding that both he and General Snyder were the kind of people who were available to the entire White House staff.

TAIT: Yes, sir. Yes, that's correct. General Snyder himself would be available if needed.

BURG: Yes. And that even the lowest staff member could feel that they could approach Dr. Tkach, for example?

TAIT: As far as I know, that's correct.



BURG: That's what you did.

TAIT: Yes.

BURG: Now may I ask you this personal question--

TAIT: I know the secretaries would contact him.

BURG: I was quite interested to hear that description of both of those men and the kind of people they were.

TAIT: Oh, they were wonderful.

BURG: Now when you went into Walter Reed, did anyone then from the staff immediately get in contact with you, follow this up, find out what was going on and how you were?

TAIT: I kept in contact with my office.



BURG: And when you really reached the decision I suppose that the doctor wanted you to reach and realized that job was a corrosive kind of job, did you then call Governor Adams? Is that how you handled that?

TAIT: I don't believe so. My recollection is that after Tkach told me to go to the hospital immediately that I went back to my office and talked to my assistant and asked her to notify Governor Adams.

BURG: And who was the assistant, Mr. Tait?

TAIT: Miss Bourne, Miss Mary Elizabeth Bourne. She continued on in that same position to the end of the Eisenhower administration. But at the time I went to the hospital, neither Dr. Tkach nor I knew it was an ulcer. I think at the time he thought I might have had a slight heart attack. After I went to the hospital they put me through a series of tests and initially it was perfectly obvious to me that the tests being conducted were tests to determine if I'd had a heart attack. Only much later did they discover it was ulcer.



BURG: Now when that had been discovered and it was clear that you were going to have to have a change of jobs, did you then report that to Governor Adams?

TAIT: I went back to the White House for a period of time, and resumed work while treating the ulcer. During my return to work the condition did not improve. It was perfectly obvious that I was not going to heal the ulcer by staying there. And it was sometime later when the doctor said to me, "You know what caused the ulcer, and you know how to cure it." This didn't all happen on my first visit to the hospital. A number

of months transpired during this period.

BURG: Then you would have to say, well, really I cannot continue in this job.

TAIT: That is correct. And with Dr. Tkach being one of my doctors, he too, I suspect would keep Governor Adams advised, because the Governor had to know whether I was coming back and when.

BURG: And in the meantime Gray had been moved in there as a temporary kind of replacement for you.

TAIT: Yes.



BURG: Now what is the next step after that, Mr. Tait? Clearly they recognize that you can't stay in that job for the sake of your own health and well-being. Did they then approach you with the idea of the Federal Trade Commission?

TAIT: I was told, and I can't recall at the moment, that there were two vacancies--one of which existed then and one of which would open up in the future, and I was asked whether I would



be interested in one or the other. One was a judgeship for the Virgin Islands and the other was a position on the Federal Trade Commission. I assumed they thought of the Federal Trade Commission because of my prior experience on the Securities and Exchange Commission.

BURG: Most interesting. And you chose not to accept that judgeship.

TAIT: That's correct.

BURG: Could you tell me why?



TAIT: A most difficult decision, most difficult. Sounded wonderful.

BURG: Well in a way it does to me, too.

TAIT: Yes.

BURG: It would not necessarily have meant a lifetime in the Virgin Islands.

TAIT: At that time, with an ulcer, it just looked like the most

wonderful position in the world to run away to a beautiful place with a warm climate. My wife and I checked into the Virgin Islands; we did some studying of the subject; discussed it with some friends. And I suppose that our primary reason-- well there were several reasons for not going. One, we had four children and we were not satisfied in the mid-'50s with the educational facilities there for our children, and also our recognition, as they got older, they would have to return to the States for education. It would mean we were separating ourselves and our children from their relatives, their family. Also, I was afraid that it might take me out of--I hate to use the word mainstream--but it certainly would take me out of the kind of life which interested me. I was much too young for retirement; I was much too young to go off to an island somewhere where I suspected that, over a period of years, I would not have the same types of opportunities, personal interest, family interest, which I would have being in the States.

BURG: Well I think I can recognize it.

TAIT: I'm not expressing it very well.



BURG: No, I made a similar debate about going to Australia to teach. The job market was very difficult here and there were some university teaching opportunities there. It would have been divorcing myself from the mainstream as far as I was concerned, from my roots, taking my family away from relatives--no, I think I understand.

TAIT: I came from a small town in Pennsylvania. After law school I could have returned there to practice law, but I did not want to do so because the practice was more limited than the type of practice which one can have in a city. I did not want to go back to that small town to engage in that type of a law practice. I was more interested in problems which--I may be wholly wrong about this--but I thought that problems which I would encounter in a larger firm in a city would be more interesting and would be more challenging to me. That, by analogy, is one of the reasons why I did not want to go to the Virgin Islands. I would have liked to have gone maybe for a year or two, but not for a long period.

BURG: Did you discuss this issue, this choice you had to make, with anyone on the White House staff?



TAIT: No. I believe this discussion was solely with my wife.

BURG: The President never spoke of these choices with you.

TAIT: No, no. Nor did Governor Adams or I discuss it; he let me make up my own mind.



BURG: But it seems to me a very interesting thing, a very kind thing that there was that much concern and the two offers, giving you a choice, so that you could continue your usefulness in conditions that were better for you.

TAIT: Yes. And also when these two positions were first disclosed to me, no one said, "You can have either one you want." It wasn't that kind of a commitment. My recollection is they said that here is one vacancy and here is another one which will be coming up in the near future--would you be interested in one or the other? And it was only after I had considered this and made up my own mind and expressed my desire for one of the two that I learned that I would get the one I wanted. In the first instance they were merely held out as possibilities.

BURG: How long was the term on the FTC?

TAIT: A seven-year term.

BURG: That's a splendid thing to do, I think.



TAIT: I thought so. I enjoyed the work very, very much.

BURG: May I ask, in fact I am at this point asking a question or two that my assistant was kind enough to suggest that we put to you. One thing that he wanted to know was who was on that FTC with you at that time? Can you think of the--

TAIT: The chairman was John Gwynne, former congressman of Iowa, who had been on the House Judiciary Committee for a number of years, maybe fourteen or more. He also had been a judge, state judge, in Iowa at a younger age. Also, there was Commissioner Robert Secrest, a former congressman from Ohio. William Kern, who had worked on the FTC staff and was nominated to commissioner from the staff. Kern was from the state of Indiana. And also Sigurd Anderson of South Dakota, a former governor and attorney general of South Dakota.

BURG: That was the staff, the body of--

TAIT: Those were the five commissioners.

BURG: --commissioners. Dr. [Thomas] Soapes wanted me to ask if you discerned a particular pattern in those appointments? All of them are mid-westerners, aren't they? You were about the only exception to that with your Pennsylvania birth and long service here.

TAIT: I've never thought of it in terms of the geographical mix. Quite some difference in ages. At that time I was the youngest commissioner who had ever been appointed to the Federal Trade Commission. Since then younger ones have been appointed.

BURG: How old were you at that point; may I ask?



TAIT: Thirty-six. I don't think Commissioner Kern's nomination really had any relationship to the fact that he was from the mid-west, specifically Indiana. He was a man, highly qualified, who had worked on the staff of the commission for a number of years, whose abilities apparently had been recognized. Bill Kern was a Democrat, and he had been appointed at a time when

the law required that the nominee not be a Republican.

[Interruption]

BURG: So the ages of the members were varied; at least one man had been appointed as a Democrat. Would you say that your fellow commissioners all had backgrounds appropriate to the duties that they were to perform as FTC people?

TAIT: That is a most difficult question. From the standpoint of knowledge of the laws administered by the FTC, Bill Kern, upon his nomination, knew more about those laws than any of the other four of us. However, Anderson, Secrest, Gwynne had varied backgrounds, and I think diversity is good on a commission. I think it would be a terrible limitation if you had, using FTC as an example, five commissioners all of whom came from the staff--sounds to me almost incestuous.

BURG: Yes.

TAIT: You will not have sufficient breadth of experience. Gwynne, having served on the judiciary committee, also had a



very broad background in all the affairs handled by the judiciary committee as well as being a former state court judge. Governor Anderson had the experience of being governor of a state as well as a former attorney general. He, too, certainly as attorney general, had some law enforcement background. Commissioner Secrest's experience--I am not aware whether Commissioner Secrest had experience in private practice of law. My knowledge of his background is solely his experience in the Congress.

BURG: None of these men was a misfit in the job, I assume.

TAIT: No, I don't think so. I think we complemented and supplemented one another. I don't believe that you need two members of Congress on a commission, and you don't necessarily need one. But I think that having the experience of at least one was very helpful to the other members of the commission who had not had that experience, because we did have a very close relationship and dealings with Congress.



BURG: So you have at least two men on the commission whose opinion can be sought conveniently any time issues come up



that puzzle you or where you may not precisely know the congressional procedures.

TAIT: It might have been better, instead of having, say, two congressmen on the Commission, to have had one person who had practiced antitrust and trade regulation law in private industry. I think that would have brought to the full commission experience which we did not have, experience in the private sector. Incidentally, are you familiar with the study made by the Senate Commerce Committee of appointments to the Federal Trade Commission and to the Federal Communications Commission?

BURG: No.



TAIT: Going back to the period when Truman was President.

BURG: They surveyed the appointees over quite some period of time.

TAIT: Yes. Many of them were interviewed by several lawyers who made the study for Senator [Warren] Magnuson, and following the study a report was made. And there is a substantial portion of that report devoted to appointments made to the FTC

and the FCC during the Eisenhower years. It might serve as supplementary material.

BURG: When was the report issued. Do you remember, Mr. Tait?

TAIT: Approximately six months ago. When we finish, I'll see if I can find a copy. The committee did interview me and did send me a copy of the report on completion. I'll see if I have it readily available, and if so you can get the citation.

BURG: There's every chance that we've not yet run across this, heard about it. Thank you so much. On the commission, were duties in any way divided among you gentlemen, and, for example, did you have certain specific tasks that only you performed?

TAIT: Only in one limited degree. Let me explain that under law the chairman of the commission has the administrative responsibility, personnel, preparation of the over-all budget. But on substantive matters, including all cases, investigations, the final budget, appointments of senior staff, all commissioners



had an equal vote and all cases or any other matter sent by the staff to the commission were assigned to the commissioners in rotation. We just did not have the type of arrangement whereby one commissioner might become more of an expert in this area than another commissioner. The other exception was that the commission had the custom of assigning to the junior commissioner the role of motions commissioner, and he was responsible for approving in those years issuance of subpoenas, handling interlocutory appeals from the hearing examiners as they were then called. Aside from that function, we all shared equally in the case load.

BURG: How many cases might you have before you as an individual at any one time?



TAIT: By cases, I assume we are referring to those formal proceedings which were initiated by a complaint, following which hearings would be held before hearing examiners who would render an initial decision and, further, if the losing party was not satisfied with the initial decision, it would take an appeal to the Commission. That was one area of our work and that is

the area which I would refer to as the judicial function of a commissioner. I find it very difficult to come up with a precise number. I assume in four years I perhaps wrote, oh, maybe forty opinions plus some dissents.

BURG: And each of those opinions that you wrote, including the dissenting opinions, involved a close scrutiny of the case presented by both sides, the hearing adviser, the complainant.

TAIT: That's right.

BURG: You're performing, as you say, a judicial kind of task.

TAIT: It is. Although we could review a case de novo in the sense that a trial court judge or a district court judge does--commissioners had the authority to do that--as a matter of practice we did not hear witnesses. They all appeared before the hearing examiners; so our role was more that of an appellate court than a trial court.



BURG: Did the Commission discuss these cases among themselves, or would you independently review evidence, everything that bore upon the case, and--

TAIT: Before the case was argued we would study the briefs submitted by both parties, the commission counsel and the respondent company. We knew which commissioner would be assigned the responsibility of writing the opinion. Following oral argument we would have a meeting among ourselves at which there would be whatever discussion was required by the complexity of the case, and then the commissioner assigned to writing the opinion would go back to his office and study the record, study the briefs more, and write an opinion any way he desired. After he had drafted his opinion he would circulate it to the other commissioners and they would agree or disagree and there would be further discussion, particularly in the event of disagreement or if one commissioner suggested that you approach a problem from a slightly different standpoint or amplify this or say more about that.



BURG: And a three-to-two result would decide the issue?

TAIT: That's correct.

BURG: Was unanimity at all common?

TAIT: Yes, it was.

BURG: Despite the backgrounds and age and--

TAIT: More often than not. Although I do remember the first opinion I wrote was a dissent.

BURG: Oh, was it?

TAIT: Just happened to work out that way. And I also remember that my dissent was later adopted by the Supreme Court as the proper view.

BURG: What was the case?



TAIT: The case involved the jurisdiction of the Federal Trade Commission over advertising by insurance companies. There is a statute called the McCarran-Ferguson Act which exempts insurance companies from certain federal regulations, not all, when the state insurance commissioners are already regulating that particular type of conduct. When I went on the Commission there happened to be a large number of those cases coming before the Commission at that time. I'm oversimplifying this terribly,

but the majority opinion in that case held the Commission did have jurisdiction despite the McCarran-Ferguson Act. I thought the McCarran-Ferguson Act was applicable and that the Commission did not have jurisdiction. Judge Gwynne joined with me in my dissent.

BURG: And your view later on is upheld in the Supreme Court decision--

TAIT: Became the law of the land.



BURG: Well that must have been a pleasing thing for you. Now Gwynne was with you in the--

TAIT: Yes. I suppose many judgments teeter on the brink of error.

BURG: And the nature of our judicial system, yes. Gwynne was with you in that decision; presumably not always would he be with you. That is--

TAIT: We did not have blocs.

BURG: Yes, that is the phrase I'm looking for. There is no real consistency then in the pattern of the commission's views. These shifted.

TAIT: I think that is accurate, at least as far as four of the five commissioners were concerned. Commissioner Kern could normally be counted upon to take a position which would expand the authority of the Commission.



BURG: Did he take that in a good-natured way? I assume that with four of you going the other way, he lost.

TAIT: Sometimes he lost; sometimes the others would go along with him. He was not particularly known for good nature because he felt very strongly about this. He, to a large degree, had the philosophy that he knew what was best even though the statute we were administering may not have provided that at all. Judge Gwynne and I generally took the viewpoint that we would interpret the statute as we understood it and as was consistent with court holdings, Commissioner Kern particularly was willing to interpret the statute in the broadest possible manner



because he thought it--and I do not question his motives one bit and I think he believed in what he was doing and that he thought that he came out with a result, a good result, which he believed was in the public interest. Whereas Judge Gwynne and I were more inclined to think that it wasn't our role to expand or contract the law; it was our job to read it as Congress wrote it, as Congress intended it to be in effect. And if we were in error, or if Congress hadn't written it correctly, then it was Congress's job to rewrite the law, not ours.

BURG: He was sort of playing John Marshall in his role.



TAIT: And maybe more. Keeping in mind his background, he was far more oriented towards the staff viewpoint than the other four commissioners.

BURG: Yes, that's right. I'd forgotten that. I'm going to ask you this: During the period of time that you are on the Federal Trade Commission, was there any attempt made by the White House to influence FTC decisions?

TAIT: Never. That's easy to answer. Never at any time did any person from the White House discuss with me a case pending before the Commission.

BURG: And so far as you know, never with any of your colleagues.

TAIT: That's correct.

BURG: We might assume that that would be mentioned if--

TAIT: If they were likely to discuss it with anyone, I would have been the likely person to be contacted since they knew me better than they knew any of my colleagues. I don't think that any of my colleagues were ever contacted either.

BURG: And this was true even after the change of administration in 1961?

TAIT: I don't know about that.

BURG: Did your term end then with the--

TAIT: Oh, I resigned from the Commission in the summer of 1960. I did not serve my full seven-year term.



BURG: Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you had.

TAIT: After four years of the Commission and two at the SEC and two at the White House, I realized I was reaching the age where I'd better return to private practice. When you're serving in an appointed position--this was well before the elections so the election had nothing to do with my decision. Because even had Nixon won in 1960, I had no assurance that he would reappoint me in 1963. And certainly my thinking at that time was that should Kennedy win, there was very little chance that he would reappoint me. Or, further, assuming that Nixon won and that I was reappointed for seven years, I had no idea who would be President later; at that time; I would be age fifty and, failing reappointment, would have had to start private practice anew at the age of fifty. I just didn't think that was wise, and I thought I would much prefer to have control over my own life than to have my life subject to political influences.

BURG: Yes. The whims of political winds.

TAIT: The winds of change. The winds of change.



BURG: Did you then come with this firm?

TAIT: When I left the Commission I went with the firm of Gravelle, Whitlock, Markey, and Tait, in 1960.

BURG: Here in the city.

TAIT: In D.C.



BURG: A broad kind of practice or focused on certain aspects of law?

TAIT: The practice of the firm related to corporate law. I did some securities law, but the firm did more anti-trust and trade regulation practice than any other. We also represented a number of trade associations. It was a small firm; about seven men.

BURG: And how long were you connected with that particular firm?

TAIT: I was with that firm for ten years, and at the end of ten years that firm merged with my present firm, Reed Smith Shaw and McClay. The firm I'm with today is a continuation of the same firm.

BURG: And no regrets.

TAIT: No regrets. Quite the contrary. I am sure that I made the right decision in leaving government service when I did. I enjoyed government service very much. I thoroughly enjoyed it, I could have stayed, happily. The work was interesting. You're dealing with major problems. There's an opportunity for service. You never become wealthy, but that's never been one of my main considerations. But I did not want to have my life subject to political processes under which I would not be able to control what I would do.

BURG: And one has to remember your age at the time.

TAIT: That was very important.

BURG: Because you were a young man with many key decisions to have to make at that time, a young man, a family man.

TAIT: That is very true. I further was influenced by having seen over those eight years other men who had stayed in government too long and, going back to our conversation at the beginning of this session as to appointments, incumbents did not



always get reappointed. And I saw many of them try very hard to be reappointed, literally put on a small campaign, round up support, get this senator to help you, and get that congressman and get some state chairman. And they would just worry themselves sick trying to get reappointed. When you reach a certain age, your alternatives are more limited.

BURG: Yes, I would imagine they are.

TAIT: I truly felt sorry for some of them.

BURG: Be a little sad.

TAIT: Yes, it was.

BURG: And in cases, I suppose, it would be pathetic.

TAIT: I think I mentioned to you in one of the earlier interviews that I replaced Commissioner [Lowell] Mason on the Federal Trade Commission. It was not a question of Tait versus Mason; the decision had been made not to reappoint Mason and had Tait not been appointed, someone else would have been. And Lowell Mason was hurt badly that he was not reappointed. In one of the first



conversations we had, he told me that because of some civil service rules and regulations if he could stay on until a particular date that would have a significant effect on his pension, his retirement. So I delayed my swearing-in ceremony to permit him to serve until that date was reached, and then I was sworn in and replaced him. He returned to private practice, and I know his heart lay in staying with the Federal Trade Commission.

BURG: Yes. That's too bad.

TAIT: Yes.



BURG: I'm going to ask you this, Mr. Tait. I'm asking you to look back a number of years and render a judgment to a question that you perhaps are not expecting. If you were asked to single out perhaps the greatest strength of that White House staff in the Eisenhower years on which you served, could you render a judgment at this time?

TAIT: The greatest strength?

BURG: Yes.

TAIT: You're thinking of a person?

BURG: Well I'd like to think of a person. I'd like also to think in terms of that staff as a whole. Who is the strongest member of that staff in your opinion.

TAIT: We are excluding the President by definition, as I understand your question. Because there was never any doubt within the staff as to who the President was and who the boss was and also, speaking for myself, I always felt that I knew what he wanted me to do--I may have touched on this in an earlier interview--not because explicit guidelines were laid down, but that I sensed from him and his conduct what he desired me to do. And then on the staff itself there was never any doubt in the minds of anyone that the next strongest leader was Governor Adams, who shouldered an enormous responsibility. He had responsibility over all areas of the staff, and my particular field was just one of a number. In addition, the stronger members of the staff as I recall them, certainly





have to include General Persons, Andrew Goodpaster, Gerald Morgan, Jack Martin, Bryce Harlow. There were also at that time--keeping in mind now I'm limiting my comments to the two years when I was there--there were men there before and there were men after and I am therefore excluding them. I'm talking about the group with which I primarily worked. There was an adviser to the President named Nelson Rockefeller. I found that he was a very able man and I know that I called on him for help several times and found that I got the help and the help I got was outstanding.

BURG: And easy man to work with, I understand.



TAIT: Oh, yes. Very much so. Very cooperative. He had never run for public office at that time, and I don't know him any more, but from what I see on television he--public office has changed him greatly.

BURG: Oh, has it?

TAIT: At that time he was almost shy. He does not appear to be shy to me today.

BURG: No, no. One watching the convention got the idea he's overcome his reticence.

TAIT: In those days he was just like any other member of the staff trying to do a job.

BURG: Now as a staff, as a unit serving a political figure, what is perhaps the greatest strength or contribution of that group of people? Would they be in your estimation different from the White House staff under Truman or under Kennedy or Johnson or Nixon? If there's something that makes them significantly different I'd be interested in hearing.

TAIT: That is a difficult comparison for me to make since I do not have the personal familiarity with the Truman staff or the Kennedy staff or the Johnson staff. I think, from what I've seen, the staff was quite different from Nixon's staff.

BURG: In what way, Mr. Tait?



TAIT: I think we were more open. We never would have considered engaging in some of the activities used by members of Nixon's

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staff. I suspect the members of Nixon's staff probably were doing what they thought the President wanted them--

