

INTERVIEW WITH

ALVIN S. MCCOY

on

May 11, 1967

by

DR. JOHN E. WICKMAN

DIRECTOR

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Abilene, Kansas

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH ALVIN S. MCCOY OF THE KANSAS CITY STAR

DR. WICKMAN: This interview is with Mr. Alvin S. McCoy of the Kansas City Star and I'm going to start off, Mac, by asking you, first, when did you go to work for the Star, the first time?

MR. MCCOY: It began in November 1930 which would make it a total of 36 years.

DR. WICKMAN: Were you always on the political beat, a political news beat?

MR. MCCOY: No, for the first three or four years I covered the Chamber of Commerce and some of the Pendergast activities in the city, later gradually I began working into Kansas politics and I made my first trip to Topeka in 1936 when Alf Landon as governor began his campaign for the presidency. My time in Topeka increased after that until I was covering regular sessions of the legislature from then on and gradually during national campaign years I was assigned to travel with various candidates for the presidency. This was particularly true in later years beginning in '48 and '52 and '56 when Dewey and Eisenhower and Truman were running.

DR. WICKMAN: Now, you were the legislative correspondent for the Star over in Topeka from when to when?

MR. MCCOY: Officially, I was Kansas correspondent from a period after the war, oh, about 1947, to a period of about 1960. My responsibility was the State of Kansas, the political campaigns, covering the governor's office and the various political activities in the state. Then in national election years I would frequently be detached for a period to travel with one of the candidates, cover meetings in this area or sometimes attend the national convention. I think I've covered meetings with every candidate for the presidency since Alf Landon in some period or other.

DR. WICKMAN: Now when did you become science editor of the Star?

MR. MCCOY: About 5 years ago.

DR. WICKMAN: So that would be about '62.

MR. MCCOY: Yes, approximately, '62.

DR. WICKMAN: O.K. Let me ask you one other thing, your work resulted in one or two Pulitzer prizes?

MR. MCCOY: I have a Pulitzer prize awarded in 1954 for local reporting.

DR. WICKMAN: Reporting, I see. I knew there was one I never did know--

MR. MCCOY: I did not have two.

DR. WICKMAN:--just what it was for. O.K., well then let's start on the--your association then with the General's campaign. I had a couple of questions here I wanted to start off with, first, can you recall, was there an Eisenhower boom in Kansas in the late 1940's. There was such a thing. We know there were some people in various parts of the country who were interested in '48 in trying to get the General to run, either as a Republican or a Democrat. I was wondering about that in Kansas, was there--

MR. MCCOY: My recollection is not sharp on that phase. There may have been some letters or suggestions in the newspaper but as far as any organized effort I do not recall it at all in Kansas.

DR. WICKMAN: When would you say it first--the first pressure started then for the General to run?

MR. MCCOY: I would suspect that the pressure started when various newspaper people interviewed him in Europe after the close of World War II. These stories in the paper, in the newspapers carried by the National Press services had some impact so that there was a great deal of conversation and talk that the General might be a candidate and it didn't reach an organized phase until rather close to the time he decided to run. I do recall some activity in Abilene it may not have been too apparent on the national picture but I know that a great many residents of Abilene did sign petitions asking him to be a candidate

as a home town--

DR. WICKMAN: Now, who on that, because you know we do have some other information about that too, but this was a--didn't Charley Harger start this? Isn't this his, or was this after his time?

MR. MCCOY: Charley Harger, I'm sure, was very much a factor in organizing and starting petitions signed by local people to the extent that eventually--I don't recall the number, but there may have been as many as a thousand signatures of local citizens for Eisenhower which made a news story because the General had not announced at this time and when his home town residents felt that he would be an acceptable candidate it made a national news story. I think I was out there in Mr. Harger's office at the time and we--there was a national story sent out and I think I wrote a story.

DR. WICKMAN: Would this be about what, 1951? I'll check it later.

MR. MCCOY: It was about that time, it was not too far in advance of his decision to be a candidate. My memory isn't real clear after 16 years but I did--

DR. WICKMAN: Well, I think you were out there then.

MR. MCCOY:--send the story to the Star about the large number of citizens in Abilene who had signed a petition asking the General to

be a candidate.

DR. WICKMAN: O.K., then. Now, from your recollection then we have this activity in Abilene, the petitions. When did the Republican Party in Kansas as an organized group get into this?

MR. MCCOY: This happened rather gradually and it took the form of some of the key figures in the Republican Party--

DR. WICKMAN: Such as--

MR. MCCOY: Such as Senator Frank Carlson, Representative Clifford R. Hope, I think they were the two prime movers and Harry Darby, the national committeeman, was rather active in the group and what it amounted to at the beginning were the various political leaders expressing the view that he would be a good candidate and hoping that he would and as this radiated out to the political organization, there was, you might say, a substantial amount of political support developed. At the same time there was, also, some, among the more conservative elements, there was support going for Senator Taft at the same time. This didn't crystallize to a clear cut endorsement, you might say, or organization really until after the General's announcement. My recollection is that any formal organization of the state political leaders took place after the General, himself, had decided to be a candidate and his real first press

interview. His announcement party was at Abilene in a motion picture theatre, probably attended by about 300 members of the press. It was a very novel situation because for all previous candidates for the presidency or high political office had made some record on the issues so that you knew whether they were middle road, conservative, liberal, or how they felt about a great many issues but here was the General who had made a public declaration on virtually no issue and so here was a situation in which a great many newspaper people had questions to ask. What do you think about foreign policy? What do you feel about civil rights? What is your position on the tax question? There had been no previous background that could have been done as a General and so this rather hectic and tumultuous press conference went on for 2 hours at least and I think the general impression of the press, at least mine was, that he handled himself extremely well under difficult circumstances, at this first, well, you might say he took off his uniform and became a candidate for political office and he had some extremely difficult questions and met them rather well under the fact that they had to be so broad and comprehensive.

DR. WICKMAN: How long were you out in Abilene that time, one day or two, do you recall?

MR. MCCOY: I think this was a one day affair--

DR. WICKMAN: Just a one day affair--

MR. MCCOY: I think he--it constituted his declaration and his first press interview, it may have been his announcement, I'm not sure of the exact day of the announcement, it may have been that the press and everyone know he would make an announcement and this might have been considered his formal announcement, I'm not sure of that, but in all events, it was the first time the press had access to him as a candidate for a political office rather than a military leader.

DR. WICKMAN: Then, following that, when, you were assigned to, what, to cover the primary campaign, was that--

MR. MCCOY: My assignment then was to go to Denver where he established headquarters in the Brown Palace Hotel and this was the beginning of the effort to obtain favorable delegates for the nomination. I don't remember the exact date, but there was a number of the Washington press corps there, probably only a dozen or fifteen at the start but it kept growing, and this lasted for a number of weeks, oh, three or four weeks, in which, there was a period in which in the different states the delegates' meetings were being held and the delegates were being chosen and this was the period when the sharp contest for delegates began between him and Senator Taft and so, shall I go ahead--

DR. WICKMAN: Yes, go ahead--

MR. MCCOY: My recollections then of the Denver meeting or Denver section, we would have daily press conferences, there would be delegates arriving from the various states and I remember a few things that happened that would point to the General's general lack of experience in politics not in a critical way but he made mistakes that a politician would not have made and one of them was, I believe on the day of my arrival. He had accepted an invitation from Charles Lucy, who is a writer for the Scripps Howard syndicate, to a private luncheon with about 3 or 4 other newspaper people, a trout luncheon, old times-sakes, but completely off the record. This outraged a dozen or so other reporters there and they promptly drafted a letter of protest and I think I was one of the signers because this was not the traditional experience. A candidate for the presidency ordinarily does not involve himself in what could be interpreted as favoritism to certain newsmen. Well, during the so-called confidential luncheon the General is reported to have made a very caustic remark about Mr. Taft which to the members present was off the record, but some related it to other members of the press who were not present who felt no inhibitions and promptly filed a story that proved quite embarrassing to the General because he had not intended to have it publicized. Well, what it pointed up was that he needed some improvement in his press relations and his effort to remedy it was shortly thereafter to have a meeting with all the press in which

his remarks were not to be quoted but is simply, "this is what the General thinks", without attribution, which people in politics do frequently and in this session my one recollection is that we were discussing the fact that there had been some charges made that some of the, in some of the states, notably Texas, delegates committed to Mr. Taft had been chosen perhaps not by wholly democratic processes or perhaps not by majority vote and there was controversy over this. One of the reporters asked General Eisenhower what his reaction would be if he discovered that some of his delegates were chosen not by wholly Democratic processes and the General exclaimed, "Well, I would rather have you take out my .45 and shoot me", as if such a thing were incredible. Well, then, this was the beginning of the period when newspaper reporters and the candidates began traveling by airplanes. It probably marked a transition in American politics. Heretofore almost all campaigns had been made by trains, whistle stops in which the candidates would make a speech off the rear end of the platform--

DR. WICKMAN: These were commercial planes that were---

MR. MCCOY: Yes, not on regular schedule, it would usually be a --

DR. WICKMAN: Charter.

MR. MCCOY:--charter plane from one of the major airlines. And so one of our first trips was to Texas, and I think Dallas was the city. This could be checked, but since this was one of the early flights the entire press corps and the General went on the same plane. Later it proved more convenient to put the candidate and his entourage on separate planes and the press on a separate plane but in this first one we all rode together, were served meals together and there was just informal visiting back and forth with the press. Well, at Dallas there was an enormous crowd of newspaper people, I would guess, 2 or 3 hundred, simply because here was a candidate for the presidency in the south and, of course, everyone wanted to ask him questions about civil rights. I don't remember his answer, but it was apparently satisfactory. It neither irritated the Negroes nor irritated the southerners and so here was a conference in one of the hotels in which television was beginning to be used. There were cables all over the floor. The reporter would arise and identify himself and his paper and the white light would go on and so the interview had gone for several hours with crowds of watchers around. They occupied a whole ballroom floor. I was sitting by a reporter from the Washington Post, I think his name was Bob Aldrich or Bob Alford, and it just occurred to me and I said, "Eob, we are in an oil country do you think it would be fair to ask the General a question about oil?" He said, "Sure, go ahead." So about the end of

the conference I identified myself and my newspaper, the Kansas City Star, which, incidentally, was supporting him quite strongly, and I said, "General, in some circles it's been suggested that we repeal or reduce the depletion allowance on oil and gas, what do you think of it?" "Well", he said, "I never heard of it, I'll have to ask an oil man." Well, this almost broke up the conference, the anti-Eisenhower reporters whose papers were not supporting Eisenhower promptly filed a story suggesting the General was showing great favoritism to the oil industry. I was sort of horror stricken because I had not intended to get the General in any trouble. My paper would be unhappy and I wasn't sure whether I would still have a job so I filed not too strenuous a story but I'm quite sure that the next day the General was thoroughly briefed on the--

DR. WICKMAN: Briefed.

MR. MCCOY: Briefed on the 27 1/2 per cent depletion allowance about which incidentally Mr. Truman had made some remarks just a short time before and had suggested its repeal and so this is what happens to a candidate who has not been thoroughly briefed on all the issues and this was part of his problem in the change-over from a military life to a political life.

DR. WICKMAN: Just on that point, Mac, I'd just like to get your impression

of this, but do you feel that his briefing got better as that campaign of '52 wore on.

MR. MCCOY: Sure it did. That was inevitable as these little mistakes, or minor irritations, would come up there was inevitably an improvement because his advisors would tell him 'this is what people think' and yet the General himself had a great independence of mind so lots of times he would use his own judgment but he would always listen to suggestions. Shall I go on now with--

DR. WICKMAN: Yeah, go ahead.

MR. MCCOY: Well, I recall one. We were in Mamie's home town, Boone, Iowa, on the Fourth of July, on her birthday anniversary, but this was the time that we were still riding a train. The General was on his way into Chicago to the national convention at which he was nominated. There was a very large press corps on the train. The arrangements were for a Sunday stopover in a little town of Iowa, but the plans were not for a political speech but, in a sense, a Fourth of July oration in the city park in which the towns folk turned out in Mamie's hometown with banners over the streets saying, "Welcome, Mamie." Most of them brought fried chicken luncheons and it was just simply down to earth old fashioned picnic in the public park and we'd guess about 3,000 people were there. This, incidentally, was the driest section of Iowa, the county, I think

had local option, there was no liquor sales of any kind and the majority was strongly opposed to the sale of liquor all of which the General was wholly unaware. In his oration, or his Fourth of July speech, he was quite eloquent, it expressed his strong feeling, primarily about the American form of government and the democratic process and so the General was waxing eloquent on how he felt that one of the great strengths of this nation was the fact that the people could create their own government and if there were defects in the government they had the means to change it, they didn't have to go to a dictator or something like that. This was democracy in action and it was getting a very good reception and the General said then, "I'll give you an example", he says, "remember national prohibition, the people didn't like it so they got rid of it." You could see Senator Carlson and some of the other politicians turning pale because of the reaction on the bone dry audience, all of which the General was blissfully unaware. Next day we were going into Chicago and so in a press lounge car there must have been 25 or 40 reporters and so in a very friendly way General Eisenhower came back to tell the press corps good-bye or it was just to say 'Boys, you've been with me a long time and I appreciate it' and just a very informal visit and one of the reporters said, "General, do you realize that you made quite a boo-boo in Iowa yesterday. That this remark you made about national prohibition which

you didn't express great approval, this was given in probably the driest section in all Iowa and probably made those people very unhappy." And Ike said, "Well, that's what I believe, what else could I say?" and this was his reaction.

DR. WICKMAN: Let me ask a point about this, now this would have been this was before the convention.

MR. MCCOY: This was before he was nominated just as we were on our way to Chicago to the convention at which he was nominated, this must have happened just a week before, a few days before.

DR. WICKMAN: Now was Senator Carlson traveling along, was it just to go to the convention or was this in his role as farm advisor or what?

MR. MCCOY: Frankly, I don't remember but possibly as farm advisor. Carlson did travel with him quite a bit and I do recall that he was on the speakers' platform in this little Iowa park. The speech was quite well received because it was not political at all. They were hearing from the General of the Army and this was his great strength in the campaign.

DR. WICKMAN: I was just wondering, I was trying to get Senator Carlson's role in this if we could, I mean, is--

MR. MCCOY: My recollection is that Senator Carlson was one of his principal farm advisors on farm program during the campaign, and, incidentally, Carlson, and Clifford Hope, I think, both headed up the national Eisenhower for President campaign organization, I believe, this can be checked--

DR. WICKMAN: Citizens for Eisenhower.

MR. MCCOY: Yes. I'm not sure it was the Citizens--

DR. WICKMAN: Citizens, that came out of New York, I think.

MR. MCCOY: No, this was an organization started in Kansas but they did have titles in which they were co-chairmen, Senator Carlson and Cliff Hope were co-chairmen of a national campaign organization for president-- for Mr. Eisenhower's nomination.

DR. WICKMAN: Did you cover the convention, then, for the Star?

MR. MCCOY: Yes.

DR. WICKMAN: In Chicago.

MR. MCCOY: I covered by not seeing the convention. I covered it by watching the doorstep at the General's headquarters in the Blackstone Hotel and this is part of the ritual at a convention.

DR. WICKMAN: All right, do you want to explain that a little bit?

MR. MCCOY: Well, I don't remember the details too clearly except that many of the newspaper people were assigned to the Eisenhower headquarters in the Blackstone Hotel and what was done there was simply to watch who went in and visited and who the political leaders were and perhaps try to interview them and attend the various press conferences that went on during the convention. I don't think I went out to the convention itself until the time of the nomination and I remember only one incident and this was, I believe, Jim Hagerty was in charge of the press corps and Jim had to be a sort of a mother hen to a lot of chicks and be sure that every correspondent got aboard a truck and most of us were hauled out in what looked almost like a cattle truck, an open truck bed and we were scrambling on and he was checking off names to try to see that everyone was aboard when the truck took off madly through traffic to get us to the convention on time. I don't think that has any great meaning.

DR. WICHMAN: That was out at the amphitheater.

MR. MCCOY: Yes. Out at the stockyards there. Now on this campaign train, I do recall one stopover in Lincoln, Nebraska, in fact I hadn't been with the General on his entire trip but I went to pick up the train there and was assigned aboard. There was to be an evening speech on the steps of the capitol and as I recall it there must have been, we estimated, 15,000 people, which seemed to be an enormous crowd for

a town the size of Lincoln, Nebraska. So several correspondents remarked about the great fecundity of the Nebraska population it seemed that almost every person in the audience, every woman in the audience had a babe in arms and they said "we have never seen such a prolific area of the United States" and I said, "No, I think you are mistaken, there are no babysitters, and what's happened here, what you are seeing is a person who is a national hero and these people want their children to say they've seen him too, so what you are seeing is not a normal political audience. What you are seeing is the entire family, the mothers and children turning out to see a candidate for the presidency because of the great regard and respect for him as a General of the Army who was Commander in Chief of our forces in Europe and who took that war to a successful conclusion and so this accounts for the great number of children and babies that do not attend normal conventions" and so they accepted that, this seemed to be a better explanation, 'cause there was not an unusually high birth rate in Lincoln.

DR. WICKMAN: One thing I was going to ask you about the aftermath of the convention, after the General had won the nomination at the Republican National Convention, what kind of effect did this have back in Kansas with the Taft people, because there had been this split, anything on that particular point?

MR. MCCOY: No, the Taft fight in Kansas was very bitter at the outset but, I do not recall any particular great opposition after the nomination simply because one of the cardinal rules of politics is that you rather close ranks and go with the party's choice, I can not say that I recall a single person that "took a walk." So, there was an intense bitterness though in the early stages of the campaign, shall I go on--

DR. WICKMAN: Yeah, go ahead, follow the point out.

MR. MCCOY: Well, some of the Taft supporters, Cliff Stratton of the Topeka Capitol was one, had done a lot of ground work in the north-western old 6th district in these days, visiting precinct committeemen and county chairmen who essentially pick the delegates anyway and this was before the Eisenhower people got cranked up and really did much organization work and so in over a period of a few weeks it was possible for people supporting Taft, they were numerous, to get enough commitments and that is the key thing in politics apparently to get a person to make a commitment that I will support him. Now when the 6th district convention met the majority support for Taft delegates was quite obvious and it was rather rough-shod and they did run over the Eisenhower people and they picked two district delegates committed to Senator Taft in Eisenhower's home state which was something of a

blow to the Eisenhower people, I think I covered the convention. The air was quite heavy with emotion as many of the district meetings were, shall I go on--

DR. WICKMAN: Yeah, go ahead.

MR. MCCOY: The Eisenhower people began to organize their forces and called on what was essentially the majority element in the Republican Party in Kansas to do ground work and the result was that, if my recollection is correct, all of the other district delegates that were nominated were committed to General Eisenhower, do you want to turn off the machine now?

MR. MCCOY: These will be my confidential recollections about the fight for delegates in Kansas. Early after the selection of the two Taft delegates in the 6th district a realization began to grow in Kansas among the Eisenhower people that there was not one group of Eisenhower supporters but two. One group was thoroughly dedicated to the General's nomination and were going to stick by him through thick and thin. The other group--and these were strong elements in the dominant Republican faction--the other group had a feeling that perhaps Eisenhower wouldn't make the nomination, therefore, it would be of enormous political advantage to them to vote for Eisenhower as the home state Kansas candidate on the first ballot and on the second or third about halfway down the roll call shift to Taft and start the stampede that would win the nomination and give them great political preference. Identified with this group, primarily, was Wesley Roberts, C. Wesley Roberts, the former state chairman; John McQuish, who actually was, I guess, office manager of the Eisenhower campaign in Kansas. He had offices in the Hotel Jayhawk; Walt Fees, a former state chairman, these were some of the people as opposed to the staunch Eisenhower supporters who included Harry Darby, Senator Carlson, Clifford Hope, Bill Smith, in those days, Fred Hall and--

DR. WICKHAM: Bill Smith was a judge--

MR. MCCOY: Bill Smith was a justice of the Supreme Court. This began to be apparent as I'd had some confidential information from various people associated with the campaign that this was going on so I expressed my fears to Harry Darby, former Senator, I guess he'd been Senator by then--

DR. WICKMAN: Yes, he had, it was '49.

MR. MCCOY: --Senator Darby and he found it hard to believe but after much persuasion I think he was prevailed on to have a dinner meeting, privately, at the Jayhawk Hotel, the mezzanine floor, in utmost secrecy with the, you might say, the dominant elements of the Republican Party, representing both these groups trying to work something before the matter got to a crisis. And so the group did meet and as a reporter, I attended because my paper was very much interested in supporting General Eisenhower. The discussion was largely over who would be delegates in the southwestern district of Kansas, the old 5th district. There were two prospective delegates supported by the what, facetiously, in Kansas, was called the "double-cross Eisenhower" group and two others supported by the ardent Eisenhower supporters. After the steak dinner, the participants began to argue heatedly about the merits of their respective candidates and, for example, I remember John McCuish argued strongly for selecting Mack Nations as one of the delegates

because he says, "I can handle him. I have just sold him my newspaper and he'll do anything I tell him." This had followed various other remarks by Walt Fees and other people about whether candidates would be flexible to their wishes or not, whereupon Fred Hall, I believe he was Lt. Governor then, later to become Governor, a strong Eisenhower supporter became furious, rose up, pounded the table and with some degree of profanity, I think he said, referred to the sons of bitches, in effect, said, "this is the damndest thing I ever heard of, you're all trying to double cross Eisenhower, are you for him or against him" and he made quite an impassioned plea, an argument to the people who had not been too warm for Eisenhower. When he quit there was sort of shocked silence. Rather impishly, I asked Walt Fees, a former state chairman, I said, "Walt, who are you for?" Walt swallowed and said he was for the Eisenhower delegates and this seemed to break the dam. After that the two delegates in the Dodge City area were Eisenhower delegates and things went smoothly from then on but the fight continued and the chief source of the difficulty appeared to be Wesley Roberts, who had not attended the meeting, incidentally, and neither did Governor Arn. I think the Governor had been invited but he declined but we always had a feeling that he sent the press up later to the meeting to cover it. While the other district conventions were pending and at this point I think there were two Eisenhower dele-

gates and two Taft district delegates in Kansas, and yet here was Kansas with two of the strongest Eisenhower supporters, co-chairman of the National Eisenhower campaign, Darby and Hope, so there were signs that there were to be contests in some of the other districts. I went in one day in the Capitol building to the office of Justice William A. Smith, a Justice of the Kansas Supreme Court, who was a somewhat active participant in politics in the sense of a consultant advisor role inasmuch as he loved politics as a hobby. The lawyers of the state frequently would go in and visit with him and he was very curious about the political situation in their counties, and of course with cases in court they were very happy to tell him, so Bill became quite a political figure. And of course as a newspaper man I used to interview him too and visit with him because I learned a great many things about Kansas politics. I went into his office during this period one day in the State House and he closed the door and turned up his hearing aid and we began talking about the fact that the main problem to selecting Eisenhower delegates in Kansas was probably C. Wesley Roberts who was a very astute person in manipulating small groups of people. He seemed to have an uncanny knack to persuade precinct committeemen and county chairmen to his way of thinking and with all sorts of ingenious methods. This followed his long experience as state chairman. He was a very able politician.

And so my recollection is that Bill Smith says, "Al, our biggest problem is Wes Roberts, if there was some way we could get him out of Kansas this delegate matter would not be difficult." Bill thought a minute and he said, "I wonder if we couldn't unload him on Frank Carlson in Washington."

DR. WICKMAN: Let me just clarify that a minute, Alvin, was this unloading on Frank Carlson to get him in the Senator's office or just in the overall effort, that was one point we ought to make.

MR. MCCOY: My judgment is it was to get him in the Senator's office, to get him out of Kansas physically and, in fact, his thinking that Frank Carlson could find something for him to do either for his own good or the campaign to keep him out of Kansas, mainly Kansas people wanted to get him physically out of the geography of Kansas and to Bill it seemed a good idea, he said, "I wonder if we could unload on and", his literal quote was, "that dumb Swede won't know the difference", which is not very complimentary. So only a few minutes later, in walked Harry Darby, national committeeman, and C. I. Moyer, who was then state chairman, Kansas State chairman. And the conversation went back to Wes Roberts and the delegates and without any direction whatever Harry Darby brought up the remark, almost identical, he says "I wonder if we could get Wes Roberts out of Kansas and send him to

Carlson, I wonder if we could get him to take him", well, both Bill Smith and I said, "Gee, that's a wonderful idea, how did you ever think of it? This would solve all your problems", to which Meyer agreed. So here were four people with a meeting of minds--

DR. WICKMAN: By coincidence, really.

MR. MCCOY: By coincidence, almost, that if Wes Roberts could be sent to Washington, Kansas delegate procedure would move apace and, as a matter of fact, it did. I do not know how it was arranged. There had been intimations that it cost Harry Darby a substantial sum which he was willing to pay. He is quite wealthy and he was quite willing to spend money in politics. He has never said, but there have been implications that he did make a payment to persuade Wes Roberts to go to Washington. In all events, he did, and the other district conventions went on schedule and the Eisenhower people had considerable majorities and they named, not only the district delegates, but the delegates at large and I think Kansas went into the convention with a delegation with only two Taft people and all the rest were committed to Eisenhower. This is my recollection. One other thing happened then, after the nomination the national committee was to meet, I believe, in December. No, this would be after the election, Eisenhower was elected but not yet President. The National Committee was to meet

to elect a new national chairman, and some of the papers had been suggesting that Wesley Roberts, who had incidentally played a rather active part in the Eisenhower campaign from Washington. They had found his talent was quite valuable in the campaign and he was generally credited with the idea or the authorship of what was called "the fair play amendment" which proved most effective during the convention. The fair play amendment, at my recollection, is that a great many governors who were disturbed by the methods of the delegate conventions, particularly in the south, of overriding majorities and powerful political figures picking delegates in contested fights, and perhaps not with a majority of the delegates. This matter was pretty rife in the south. A large number of the governors had signed a petition in effect protesting the methods of electing some of the delegates, in effect strongly supporting the Eisenhower movement because they had questioned the method by which some of the Taft delegates had been selected. Wesley Roberts was credited with this authorship and he made such a deep impression on Herbert Brownell, Brownell wanted him to be the national chairman. Harry Darby, the Kansas national committeeman, who sent Roberts to Washington was very disturbed about this. He and I had luncheon several times at the Muehlebach. We discussed it and Harry was quite concerned because he thought he should do everything in his power to oppose it and he strongly implied that he

feared that if Roberts became national chairman that he would be subject to pressure for political appointments that might be embarrassing. I am sure, I remarked only that, "Harry, if he does become chairman and if the patronage backfires and is corrupt or anything of that nature", I said, "General Eisenhower being a General would hold you accountable just as he would a 2nd Lt. who failed under fire." So Darby went to the committee meeting determined to oppose Wesley Roberts. Nevertheless, Wesley Roberts was chosen. I did not attend the committee meeting. When Darby returned I asked him, "What happened?" He explained that the matter had gotten completely out of control; that Herbert Brownell had demanded Roberts' selection and that Mr. Darby could do nothing whatever about it and the only arrangements he could make was an agreement that Wesley Roberts would have absolutely no hand in patronage in Kansas, that this would be handled wholly through the Kansas national committeemen and the Kansas state chairman, Mr. Darby and Mr. Moyer, and so, that was the way the matter was settled and so Mr. Roberts did become national committeeman and he held the post--

DR. WICKMAN: National chairman.

MR. MCCOY: National chairman and held the post for a month or two until the legislative investigating committee in Kansas, found that he had violated the spirit of the law against lobbying in Kansas,

whereupon he resigned and Mr. Eisenhower accepted it. He had had the national chairmanship a month or two, perhaps two months when all this happened and I understand the national committee paid him a year salary and that was that.

DR. WICKMAN: That was that.

MR. MCCOY: Now do you want to turn off--

DR. WICKMAN: O.K.

MR. MCCOY: I learned of General Eisenhower's heart attack in Denver when I was returning by car from a trip to Topeka. I was approaching Lawrence listening to a football game on the radio trying to decide whether it was worthwhile seeing the last quarter or not, and the news came over the radio that the General had had a heart attack and was in Fitzsimmons Hospital. I decided to drive on to my home in Johnson County and as I came in the door the phone was ringing and it was my office saying, "Alvin, how quickly can you get to Denver?" And I said, "I suppose as soon as I can get to the airport except I don't have any money", and the office checked and found that the Star had locked up its safe and it didn't either but it said that maybe I could stop by Roy Roberts' home and pick up some cash. So he was called and he happened to have several hundred dollars, enough to buy an airplane ticket and get me to Denver. I caught a plane on the run by 6:30 o'clock or 7:00, I was out there in a couple of hours, and there was great confusion, all the reporters were arriving from every direction, rushing out to the military base, oh, a half mile or a mile from the hospital. We were at the airfield and I remember reporters were in cots up and down the hallways and they were arriving from everywhere. In a few days, I think, there must have been two or three hundred. There were British reporters, French--I was out with a French group--they must have come from all over the world--

at the moment that was the biggest news event in the world--the President of the United States was either going to make it, or he wasn't, and so we had briefings regularly by Paul Dudley White when he arrived. The press used to have one or two briefings a day, and I remember distinctly the horror of a British reporter when in one of the briefings Dr. White was sketching the heart and where the infarction had taken place, and he says, "Oh, by the way, the General had a very good bowel movement this morning." The Britisher was horrified. He said, "Imagine what you'd say if the British paper should report that the Queen had a bowel movement today."

DR. WICKMAN: Indicative of the tremendous interest, though, in everything that happened.

MR. MCCOY: Yes, oh, yes, we were completely briefed on every phase-- the first days the reporters didn't even know whether to sleep or not.

DR. WICKMAN: How long did you stay out in Denver then?

MR. MCCOY: I think I stayed two or three weeks when--

DR. WICKMAN: Two or three weeks.

MR. MCCOY: At least two weeks when the fact that he was recovering was evident, that he was going to survive and at no time, I think,

did any reporter see him. We were all a half mile away and we were for the most part going and getting rather brief sleep and coming out early in the morning for the briefings--it certainly was an interest of wide news.

DR. WICKMAN: That had been, of course, one of the major things that had happened as far as presidential health was concerned since President Roosevelt had died, I think, and it was, there was a succession question how and when--

MR. MCCOY: That's right--

DR. WICKMAN: --and disability--

MR. MCCOY: That's right. This did raise the succession question and there was some early criticism of the press arrangements that the General had, in fact, I think one of the early stories had merely reported that the General had a stomach attack--

DR. WICKMAN: Stomach ailment or something like that--

MR. MCCOY: Minor ailment, and there was wide criticism when it developed later that it had been much more severe than that, and there was, I believe, a change in the press secretary while we were in Denver, I don't recall who was put in charge, I think maybe, I'm not sure

who came in at that time, I don't recall the names.

DR. WICKMAN: Was, nominally, who covered the White House for the Star then in those years, did Jack Williams do this or--

MR. MCCOY: No, we had, Jack went back there he may have gone back about that time, yes, I guess he was, but we had a bureau of two men, Duke Shoop, now deceased, and Jack Williams and usually they would cover the White House and the news that came out of Washington. I did not cover Washington, I would cover events in this area.

DR. WICKMAN: Neither one of them, though, went to Denver--

MR. MCCOY: No, neither one of them--

DR. WICKMAN:--to pick you up on that.

MR. MCCOY: No, I covered the Denver session until it was apparent that the General would recover. I do remember what a tense time it was and what wide world interest there was, and I was greatly impressed by the number of foreign reporters that came in to cover the event too, until they were sure he was out of the woods.

DR. WICKMAN: Did you cover any of the other ailments he had, you know he had his ileitis operation?

MR. MCCOY: No, we did it by geography. That would be covered by the men in Washington, he was in then, I think, the Johns Hopkins or Walter Reed at that time. Well, that's about it.

DR. WICKMAN: When, what was the last thing that you covered while the General was President or--

MR. MCCOY: My recollection was that it was the heart attack because primarily we would organize our coverage on geographical basis and so our Washington correspondents, Mr. Sheop and Jack Williams, would cover the presidential office and, matter of fact, they covered, they did some of the traveling with him during the campaign. I did not travel with him during the campaign except to go to Minnesota to cover the meeting when Mr. Stevenson also appeared later.

DR. WICKMAN: Why don't you throw that in we got enough tape I think.

MR. MCCOY: So that when Mr. Eisenhower was President I did go back for the inauguration and covered the participation of the Kansas group and the parades and the enormous ball in the armory and that sort of thing and then as I say I covered the heart attack and that was my only direct coverage, oh, I did go to the 1956 convention in San Francisco when he was nominated, and, incidentally, the nomination was a foregone conclusion and so one thing I recall is a rather

dramatic appearance of virtually all the cabinet officers on the platform during the convention. The Secretary of Defense or War at that time, Commerce, Treasury, virtually the entire cabinet appeared one by one on the platform and gave a report of their stewardship of office to the public, largely not covered by the national press because of an incident in which the General's arrival in town almost coincided with this report so all the leading reporters for the press services were out there covering President Eisenhower's arrival and so only a few of us back in the convention got to cover the rather dramatic story of the report of the state of the nation by the members of the cabinet which was largely uncovered at that time because of that happening.

DR. WICKMAN: Do you want to put that Minnesota visit on, what election was that, what campaign, '52 or '56?

MR. MCCOY: I'm pretty sure it was the '52 campaign in which, yes, because these people were early in his management and so the train arrived in Minnesota--

DR. WICKMAN: Rochester, you said before--

MR. MCCOY: Rochester, for the national plowing contest, that can be checked by the records when that occurred, but I am quite sure

a plowing contest would have to be in July or August, and it brought an enormous crowd of farmers and this was the place where both candidates made their appeal for the farm vote on the issues and that's it. Well, I gave you a whole tape.