

This interview is being taped with Mr. Roemer McPhee in Mr. McPhee's law offices on F Street, Washington, D.C., on November 18, 1974. The interviewer is Dr. Maclyn Burg of the Eisenhower Library Staff. Present for the interview are Dr. Burg and Mr. McPhee.

BURG: I might start then by asking you when and where you were born.

McPHEE: Ames, Iowa, January 11, 1925.

BURG: And educated there in the state of Iowa?

McPHEE: Never. The family left at age 3, my age 3.

BURG: Moving where, may I ask?

McPHEE: Princeton, New Jersey.

BURG: Safe to say that you are then a Princeton undergraduate?

McPHEE: That's correct.

BURG: And then from there to the Harvard law school?

McPHEE: Right.

BURG: What year did you leave the Harvard law school?

McPHEE: '50, the class of 1950.

BURG: Now, were you too young for military service Mr. McPhee?

McPHEE: No. At the end of my freshman year at Princeton I went into the Navy. I was in the Navy for three years and then finished at Princeton and then went to the Harvard Law School, all after having been in the navy, ultimately as an ensign. I was in the V-12 program at Princeton which led to midshipman's school and then a commission and then sea duty, but that was all at the very end of the war. I went to sea in, well let's see, I guess I joined my ship in January of '45, possibly. It was the spring of '45. The war was nearly over.

[Interruption]

BURG: So you think that you joined the ship sometime in the spring of '45.

McPHEE: I'm surprised that I can't remember exactly when I did.

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I was on two ships. One we decommissioned. Then I went back in January of '46, and I got out in about June of '46. But when I went on that first ship, it must have been, maybe, the summer of '45. I think the war in Europe was over, and that ended in April of '45.

BURG: Early May of '45 and it was over.

McPHEE: I think it may have been June of '45 when I joined it, which was the tail end of the war. My age produced that result more than anything else.

BURG: Right. I am two years younger than you, and I was not drafted until August of 1945. What kind of ship was it, may I ask?

McPHEE: Destroyer escorts, both of them.

BURG: Now, was that assignment in the Pacific.

McPHEE: Both ships were in the Pacific.

BURG: You weren't on that destroyer escort over in the Japanese home island waters were you, off Okinawa and--

McPHEE: No, well yes. What we did was escort duty in front of whatever we were assigned to guard--submarine attack. The Japanese never really used their submarines that way, but we always ran escorts nevertheless. I went all over that Pacific area Ulithi, near Okinawa. But our principal point of contact or travel northward before the war ended was to Iwo Jima, that area. We were escorting vessels to and from there, but our base was Saipan. We operated out of there. All of these islands had been secured. We never fired a shot in anger.

BURG: Your classes of ship and those a little larger, the full size destroyer, so many of those took a heavy beating from kamikaze attack, that's why I asked.

McPHEE: Once off Iwo Jima we heard a destroyer off Okinawa on the voice radio talking about the kamikazes. It was just terrible to hear that. They came right in on them. The voice radio was open; it was bouncing off the ionosphere, and you could hear everything being said. They were orbiting at three or four points of the compass, several of them, and then they all came in at once, converging from four directions. You know, there is no way to stop them all. We took one destroyer, it was a destroyer called the Newcomb, and it was hit by kamikazes off Okinawa, and was so badly damaged amidship that there was really not much more than the keel holding the bow and stern together. But they patched it up. It was just determined to be salvagable; so it was to go home to be rebuilt in a navy yard. I've forgotten where we picked it up, but we escorted it from somewhere, Ulithi possibly, maybe from either Iwo or Saipan to [unintelligible] and then the tug that was pulling it went on without escort from there. That was considered to be, at that point, safe water. But there was a ship that had taken a terrible beating.

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BURG: She had been gutted out.

McPHEE : That's right. Heavy loss of life.

BURG: Now, let me ask what your major shipboard duty would have been.

MCPHEE: Well, when I first went on board the first ship I thought I was going to be the anti-submarine warfare officer, but I think every officer on board with but one or two exceptions had been trained in that. I was just a sea division officer, communications, assistant sea division officer and maybe assistant gunnery officer. I think I had those two responsibilities. And then as time wore on, I don't really remember. I remember doing both of those duties, but I never had the seamanship side of the thing. I was always in communications or gunneries and a combination of both. On the second ship I was on I think I probably wound up being maybe the sea division officer.

BURG: But that second ship would have come after the war with Japan was over?

McPHEE: Yes, the war was over. I came back with the Engstrom which was the first ship, the DE50. It was a DE, the keel of which had been laying down with forty-nine others for the British navy. It was built and designed to British navy specifications. It was different than our typical ship.

BURG: Built by the way on the basis of their early experience in the war?

McPHEE: Well, this was true, yes. I guess one way or another it was going to the British navy, whether pursuant to lend-lease or whatever. Then when the war came, our involvement in the war, all of that went by the board, and this became a ship destined for the United States Navy. I don't know how many of those original fifty--there were fifty, one through fifty-- how many went into the U.S. Navy or might have found their way to the British Navy having been built before our involvement in the war. Maybe all of them were in the American Navy, but in any event they were not typical. And then the second ship I was on was a destroyer escort that was designed for the United States Navy. It was much longer, considerably longer, and carried heavier guns and was a larger ship but not as big as a destroyer.

BURG: Just as a point of military curiosity to put in the record, did you find the British designed DE less habitable for officers and men than the American designed ship. I wondered if it showed any of the--

McPHEE: Well it was smaller: so that made it a little bit more cramped. You think of the British Navy as taking very good care of their officers, maybe more so than the American Navy, putting more stress on that. Yet I think the two may have been about equal. Had it been the American Navy, the destroyer escort fifty being smaller might not have had quite the same officer accommodations. Do you follow what I am saying?

BURG: Yes.

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McPHEE: They came out about on a par because maybe the British design was a little better in the smaller ship, but it wasn't that much real difference even to that.

BURG: So many of the British ships were designed for cruising long periods of time at sea, and the men's quarters usually tended to be rather cramped, headroom was a little less I think than in our ships and this kind of thing. But, on the other hand, that ship might have reflected certain things that they had learned with corvettes for example in the North Atlantic up to 1941. I was not aware that we had taken over any contracts of that sort or taken over a large body of escort vessels designed for them? Now, when you were released from the navy, you were then an ensign and you had the GI Bill of Rights and some of your undergraduate work yet to complete.

McPHEE: Right, at Princeton. I went back there. I got out of the Navy in June and was back in college that September and completed college in one year which was not what one would have expected because I had at least three semesters to go, and in two semesters I was out of the university with a degree. They made me double up on some of my work. I had to take all of my departmental subjects and comprehensive examinations in one year instead of two, and so I had very few electives that I could take.

BURG: Your V-12 program had helped in moving your--

McPHEE: Yes. It helped in terms of credits, but I had to take seamanship and communications and naval history. They were all right, but they were also courses that supplanted the electives one would normally have taken.

BURG: Now what was the major field of your A.B.?

McPHEE: Economics.

BURG: Economics. Now could I ask you this question, looking back on those years at Princeton before you were in the Navy and after, do any of your professors stand out now in your mind?

McPHEE: One history professor does, always will, because he was such a remarkable teacher. You know it was such a pressure pot the way I went to college. First of all, I went there when I knew I was in the Navy and going to the Navy somewhere, and when I came back I knew that I had to get out. There were too many people pressing behind me. The university wanted us out to make room for [unintelligible]. Which was all right. It was no way to leisurely approach an academic time in college.

BURG: Who was the history professor that stands out in your mind?

McPHEE: Professor Walter P. Hall, Walter Phelps Hall, now deceased. Several professors in the economics department, Morgenstern and Lutz. Two Lutzes, Frederick and Henry Lutz.

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BURG: Hall, you felt, was a remarkable teacher?

McPHEE: Just a very unusual teacher. He was one of the original preceptors brought to Princeton by Woodrow Wilson. Very especially hand selected, and he was then in his advanced years--

BURG: Grand old man of the profession.

McPHEE: Right. Snow-white hair and just a very appealing person and a good teacher. More teacher than super scholar. Scholar certainly but more interested in the students in front of him than in his being the greatest historian of all times. He just was outstanding.

BURG: Were you married at that time sir?

McPHEE: No, I wasn't.

BURG: When you went up to Harvard, was that a three-year program?

McPHEE: That's correct.

BURG: Were there any activities such as law review, things of this sort?

McPHEE: Well, to be on the law review you had to stand in the top eighteen of the class, and I was not. I had a B average, but I didn't have an average like that; so I was never on the law review.

BURG: And the training there was general training for the law. There was not much opportunity, I would suppose, to specialize in corporate law or some--

McPHEE: Well, that's not the way--well, your senior year in law school, then you can take elective courses. The first year was totally prescribed, and I think maybe the second year was. I'm not sure of that, but certainly in the third year there was a certain freedom of choice. So if you thought you wanted to be, oh, a lawyer of one sort and tax was never going to be important to you, you would probably omit tax or something like that, but most people didn't. It may have been the only required course in the third year. I just don't remember.

BURG: Now when would you have completed that course?

McPHEE: 1950, June of • so.

BURG: Presumably you then began to study for the bar examination in a particular state.

McPHEE: Well, not really. Something very unusual came along, and I went to work for the governor of New Jersey, Alfred E. Driscoll, right straight out of law school even before I had been graduated. I think I went to work for him on June 1 or something like that, June 2, I guess, in 1950, and my graduation was two or three weeks later, but I had completed my courses and

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my examinations. So when I worked for him I wasn't practicing law, but he was insistent that I take the bar exams for which I shall be forever grateful; so I was given the time to study for the bar examination--

BURG: For the New Jersey Bar?

McPHEE: New Jersey Bar, and I took it, and I passed it somewhere in there. You had to have a clerkship of nine months in New Jersey before you could take the Bar. You had to clerk in some law office--no longer a requirement. But my service in the governor's office, working as his deputy counsel and as an assistant to him, was deemed by the authorities to be sufficient to qualify me as having done the clerkship. So after the nine months, I took the bar exam. I didn't take it right away, maybe after a year.

BURG: Now, may I ask what had sent you to Governor Driscoll's office. How did that job opportunity come along?

McPHEE: I wrote a letter to him. There was an article that appeared in Time magazine that spoke of him, and I knew very little about him, but this was a very interesting article. It spoke very well of him. I had always been interested in the government, and I just wrote a letter. I was at that point thinking about what I was still going to do, but I just sat down and just wrote a letter. He was also an alumnus of Harvard law school--Driscoll--and I just wrote a note; took some care in composing it; just said that I had always been interested in government and would be interested in helping him if there was any way that I could, any job. Never thought another thing of it. He was very interested in one particular law firm in New York, and he had given that letter to a friend of his who was a professor at Princeton, professor in the politics department named John Sly who I knew very slightly. I knew his children--reared in the town. He wrote me and suggested that I come by sometime. I figured that was the end of it.

It had gone from the governor's office and was now in the hands of some friend in Princeton on the faculty and I figured that was it. But I remember I did agree to come by and see him in the spring, April, spring vacation of that senior year in law school. I almost forgot the appointment, but I did remember it fortunately at the last second and got up there on time. He was very nice and quizzed me very thoroughly, I began to sense about halfway into the meeting with him that this wasn't just any kind of a routine thing, that he really was doing some function for the governor.

BURG: Professor Sly?

McPHEE: Yes. He was sort of testing me as to did I realize the insecurity of working for somebody in political office and on and on, which I certainly did, but I had no wife or children. And then he ended the interview or came towards the end, and he said, "Well, the governor needs you, and I am going to recommend that he take you on," or something like that. It absolutely flabbergasted me, and that's how it happened. I went to work for him.

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BURG: So you were never actually interviewed by Governor Driscoll?

McPHEE: Oh, yes, I was. That happened after that.

BURG: Now that interview was less probing perhaps than--

McPHEE: Oh yes. Well he had much less time. I went down, met him, saw him, but he had apparently a good strong recommendation from Sly. I don't know, but that seems to have been it. He was looking for someone to fill a corner of the whole office operation and staff.

BURG: One thing I would like to know is how much more time did Governor Driscoll have to go before he had to stand for re-election.

McPHEE: Well, he was not standing for re-election. In fact, he was in his second term and could not succeed himself.

BURG: Was the New Jersey governor's term four years?

McPHEE : Well, it had been three. He was Governor for seven years. He was a remarkable man who accomplished more as a governor in seven years than most people who were governors anywhere would accomplish in three times that much time. He just had nothing but ideas--good ideas--and he had a knack of somehow getting through. There had been an effort to write a new constitution for New Jersey back in the early 40's, very early 40's, something like that, and he had been a part of that. He was determined there would be a new constitution, and he announced this not too long into his first term. He always said, "It was the only and the best kept secret of my governorship." It was the one thing that never got out, never leaked. Nobody expected it; it was considered impossible to try and write a new constitution when an effort had been made and failed only, you know, less than ten years before, whatever it was. But he, nevertheless, undertook that and was successful. That provided that a governor could succeed himself and also gave the governor a four year term where, I believe, it had been a three year term, one term only, if my memory is correct, in the old constitution which was archaic, outmoded, in any number of ways. The new constitution, his constitution, became a model state constitution. People would come from all over the country to find out about it, talk about it, use it in plying their own constitutional efforts

BURG: Had that work been accomplished by the time you joined his staff?

McPHEE: Yes. I think he was re-elected in '47. That would be right; I think that's right. He announced in '48 that in '51--it's one year after--forty-seven plus four--the New Jersey governor's election comes one year after a presidential election so that would have made it '53. I don't know what you call that--well anyway '49? Well, without getting into all that-- wasting your time-- what was your question again?

BURG: Well, it had all been completed, the constitutional work--

McPHEE: Yes, yes. He was in his second term when I went to work for him.

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BURG: So what kind of duties were assigned to you, the general run of your duties?

McPHEE: Well, as his assistant, I just helped him in whatever ways I could that he asked me to, whatever projects, lots of letter writing. He thought I wrote very good letters—tried to get me back after I had left just to write letters--helping with some things that had to culminate in letter writing. I think he found in me, which is always nice to find in any- one, someone who wrote about the way he would write himself: so it needed very little editing really, if any. Then I also worked with the counsel to the governor, and that was working on the bills, the legislature, all that kind of stuff.

BURG: In effect then you were getting an education in the executive branch at the state level.

McPHEE: Correct, very much so.

BURG: A certain amount of contact with the legislature.

McPHEE: Oh, yes, everything, all across the board. It was marvelous, a year and a half I did it.

BURG: And that did not coincide with an election and would not have mattered if it had because he would have been forbidden by the new state constitution to succeed himself.

McPHEE: Correct.

BURG: Now during that period of time did you take any kind of interest in or active role in New Jersey politics in the sense of belonging to the Young Republicans or anything of this sort?

McPHEE: Oh, yes, I've always belonged to a Republican organization of Princeton, New Jersey, but that was all.

BURG: So during that period of time that you were with Governor Driscoll, your work was really with the administrative affairs of the state government, and you were not playing an active role in the states'--

McPHEE: Could never separate the two within that office any more than you can in the White House. The politics is always there; so it was part and parcel always. I thought you meant had I been running for office or being the state chairman or something of that sort, but it was all political. All of the politics was there, no escaping it. I wasn't a drone in a corner who was cut off from and oblivious to and I wouldn't have been there if that had been so, the politics of it. That's part of, you know, what interested me about the--

BURG: The work sounded quite familiar to me. It sounded so much like much of what John Wickman [Director, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library] did with Governor [William] Avery in the state of Kansas with the same kind of opportunities. But, yes, I did wonder whether you had had any office in the state Republican organization coinciding with this period of time.



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McPHEE: No.

BURG: Now, you left merely because Governor Driscoll's term came to an end?

McPHEE: No, he was still in office. I left to go to work to practice law with one of his dearest friends. He had asked the governor before speaking to me if he could ask me to come with his firm. He had lost a son who had been in the firm with him, and there was a vacancy, and he was looking for somebody to come in and thought about me and asked the governor, and the governor thought that I should do it. I mean, he thought it was an excellent opportunity.

BURG: Was the firm in New Jersey? In what city?

MCPHEE: New Brunswick.

BURG : A firm which handled a general kind of law practice?

McPHEE: General practice.

BURG : So once again you are getting an experience across quite a broad gamut of the legal profession itself, criminal cases, civil cases?

McPHEE: No, no, it would have been all civil matters, and then, you know, a great deal of what a lawyer does doesn't involve the courts. You're working on problems, agreements, things of that nature which can eventually be court actions, but most of the time don't.

BURG: This is the first time that you are actively practicing law as part of a firm?

McPHEE: Yes.

BURG: Was there any branch of the law, any aspect of the law, that you found more appealing than any other in this law practice?

McPHEE: Well, that's hard to say. I think I always liked the part that related to government.

BURG: The next question was did it satisfy you as much as the work that you had been doing with Governor Driscoll?

McPHEE: In its own way. You know they're different things totally. You never get the same psychic reward out of working privately as you do working in the public sector. But I always enjoyed both, particularly in those early years, you know, after law school: it was just plain interesting.

BURG: What was the next move for you?

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McPHEE: Washington. I came down here--it was January of 1954, one year after the Eisenhower administration had taken office.

BURG: May I ask then how that came about?

McPHEE: I was not married. I came down here to get in the government, that's the reason I came to Washington, but I also wasn't married, and I didn't find Princeton, New Jersey or New Brunswick particularly productive or encompassing of people my age who were unmarried of either sex. But there were a lot of them down here; this town collects them you know; they come in from all over. I had been down to visit here, classmates of mine were in town, and I enjoyed the social life, and the Eisenhower administration had been elected to office, and I thought, well, maybe somewhere down there there's something for me; so I came down and started to look for a job in Washington.

BURG: So you were coming down on speculation?

McPHEE: Oh, totally.

BURG: You had no contacts here, I mean, other than friends that you had here.

McPHEE: I came down and finally then I sort of moved down here to look because I figured I couldn't very well do it from up there.

BURG: Did that mean leaving the firm?

McPHEE: Yes, I did. I did in the turn of the year, '52-3 and just came. By that time, the Eisenhower administration was hiring people. When they first came in, they didn't hire anybody for awhile, one of their positions being that there were too many people in the government anyway. But then after about a year and there had been quite an attrition, and they began to relax that, and they were hiring, and I got in line. I was offered, in the end, about five jobs. I only looked one place outside of the government. I just had a friend of mine who said, "I want you to come and meet my senior partner," and I did do that, and I didn't pursue it. I wanted to be in the government.

BURG: What agencies or departments did you go to?

McPHEE: Plenty of them. I organized it in a notebook and kept track and one door would lead to two more doors opening, and they would lead to ten, and you ought to have seen--people were marvelous--one of the most fascinating experiences of my whole life just looking for that job.

BURG: I'd like to hear more about it as a matter of fact. You really had it organized.

McPHEE: Yes. Just met lots and lots of people, and I just kept a record: I had to, to keep it all straight--who I should see, where I had been, where I was going to go. I had those for awhile: I don't have them any more, all those notes and records.

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BURG: Oh, you don't. What a pity you haven't got them.

McPHEE: I just threw them out years ago; I didn't want them. But, anyway, I can still see some of the people that I met in that process. One of them is a neighbor of mine out in Potomac, Maryland, today. He's a very delightful fellow.

BURG: So you make appointments with—

[Interruption]

McPHEE: --after school then and just you know she liked the people and she of mine and as I say

BURG: —indicate that I'm in the market for a job. I think the thing that will be of interest to people using this kind of material later on, when you think of a man going into an administration as you ultimately did, holding the kind of position that you held. I think most of us, the average man in the street, thinks of God's hand coming down and touching you and you glow and are immediately seized up into the administration and the idea of going door to door and having your--

McPHEE: Right, but I tell you, Dr. Burg, what you say is also true. It was the hand of Providence that put me in the White House because all of this work that I did had nothing whatever to do with my going to the White House. And the job I took was in the Federal Trade Commission.

BURG: The one that you ultimately got out of this process?

McPHEE: Right. How I got into the White House was, after I had been in the Federal Trade Commission a few months, I got a call one day. I think I was at home: I didn't feel well. I worked for the general counsel of the Federal Trade Commission, I was in his office, and he asked me to come in if I could because, I think he said, the chairman wanted to see me-- something about something at the White House, a reporter there.

BURG: Who was general counsel at FTC?

McPHEE: Earl Kintner, and the chairman was Edward Howery. It's a little vague in my mind, but I remember going in, and I remember seeing the two of them, not together but in succession, and the story was that I was being asked to go down to the White House. The White House wanted somebody who had been at the Federal Trade Commission only a short while to give it a report on the Federal Trade commission, his first hand impression of what the Federal Trade Commission was like.

BURG: From a newcomer?

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McPHEE: Yes. Well that immediately made me sense that something unusual was afoot here. The man I was to see was a guy named Gabriel Hauge, and I went straight upstairs to the Federal Trade Commission library and got out two books of biography and read about him. When I went over there to the White House, well, to make a long story short he had gotten my name by writing to the Harvard--well he wrote actually to McGeorge Bundy whom he knew was dean of the college at Harvard. I didn't know him at all, and Bundy just turned around and routinely passed the letter to the law school.

But Hauge had put some requirements in there. He wanted somebody under thirty, who was a lawyer, who was a Republican, who had some political experience. He wanted a lawyer because he was working with a lot of statutes and laws, and he was an economist. I guess that the person that he had with him was going on to other work in the White House, and I guess he thought this might be useful. Anyway, he had written up there and he said that, mine was one of four names that they sent him--the law school sent Bundy, who in turn sent them to Hauge, I guess. I never have really known all the details of that process that Hauge went through to find who was going to work with him, but it was detailed, and I'm sure many people were considered; I mean many, many. I even believe that the job was offered to maybe one or more people before it was offered to me. I heard, I just don't really know, that it was offered to an economist, a Ph.D. in economics which is inconsistent with I said about lawyer and so forth and political experience. But maybe that was the letter he wrote to Harvard, and where he wasn't writing to a place or an institution or whatever that had a law school he might not have put that requirement in. But, in any event, after about five months I went and saw Hauge--excuse me one minute.

[Interruption]

BURG: Yes, you met Hauge, Dr. Hauge, and you were saying five or six months.

McPHEE: It was five months after I went to work for the Federal Trade Commission I was working at the White House. The thing at the White House didn't pop up until about two months so there was a period of about three months. I went down and I saw Hauge, had a nice talk with him, and he asked about the Federal Trade Commission, and we went through all those motions although, as I say, I did suspect. And then he called me and asked me to come back a week later, and when I came back he said that he had been favorably impressed by our meeting, and that he was going to have an opening, and would I wish to be considered for it.

BURG: You felt that his original approach to you through the Federal Trade commission was probably a blind?

McPHEE: There was no question about it.

BURG: He had no real interest in your two month impression of FTC?

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McPHEE: Right. I think he wanted to see me, see how I talked, and handled myself, whatever.

BURG: Let's turn it around. How did he talk and handle himself? What was your impression of him on that first meeting?

McPHEE: I never thought anything but the very best of him, just an outstanding person and human being.

BURG: Set you at ease?

McPHEE: Yes, I never felt the least bit ill at ease. He was a marvelous person to work for, a person from whom I learned a very great deal in lots of ways. I don't mean about economics per se; I just mean an overall general--he was a very mature, even, steady, very bright man.

BURG: How old was he at that time?

McPHEE: Thirties.

BURG: Oh, he was in his thirties.

McPHEE: Mid-thirties, that's why he wanted somebody under thirty.

BURG: Just a little under.

McPHEE: I was twenty-eight I think then.

BURG: Now you then went back to FTC after that first meeting and then a week later he called you back and said there would be a job and would you like to be considered for it.

McPHEE: Yes. Well I went down to see him again; there was a second meeting. Then he went through this process of sifting and sorting, then he asked me if I would consider it. I did say to him, "Yes, and I don't need any time to think about it because I've been thinking about it for a whole week." That may have been very flip of me, but it wasn't out of place.

BURG: I was going to ask you because it seems to me--

McPHEE: He realized that I realized that we had been going through this interview process.

BURG: You had been working at a fairly elevated level in the state of New Jersey, but when it comes right down to it the White House is the White House, and you were being invited to join that elite group.

McPHEE: Right, but in a very junior staff position.

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BURG: But do you recollect now a pretty strong sense of excitement at the thought of doing this?

McPHEE: Yes. I very much wanted to do it; there was no doubt about that. Just to be a part of that operation-- I was a very complete devotee of the President, and to be a part of his staff at any remote level was a prospect that made me very enthusiastic.

BURG: Yes, a pretty exciting thing for a twenty-eight-year- old man. Indeed it would.

McPHEE: That's right.

BURG: I notice that I'm approaching the time limit that you have had to set, and this does bring us to the point where you do come on to that staff which would be an excellent place to begin at a future session, if that's all right with you.

McPHEE: Fine, with me.

BURG: Thank you.