

RUTH YOUNG WATT

Chief Clerk, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, 1948-1979

July 19, 1979

Interview #1: Origins of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations



Ruth Watt, far right, confers with Howard Hughes during hearings before the Special Committee to Investigate the National Defense, 1947. Accompanying Hughes are his bodyguard and two unknown visitors. *U.S. Senate Historical Office*

DONALD RITCHIE: I was looking over a brief biography of you and I noted that you were born in Brooks, Maine. Is your family from Maine traditionally?

RUTH WATT: Oh, I think I was the first one ever to leave Maine of the family. My family originally settled on Matinicus Island, which is eight miles off the coast of Rockland, Maine, from England, 1628 I think it was, and they've been there ever since. I don't think many of the family have left Maine since. Now my nieces and nephews, they've all spread out all over the country. But my family just stayed in Maine.

RITCHIE: What did your family do there?

WATT: My grandfather was born in Rockland, Maine. I don't remember much about him. My dad had grocery stores, and always had a store of some kind. I was born in Brooks; Dad was born in Liberty; and Mother was born in Palermo, a

town close by. They're all small towns, wide places in the road. During World War I, we lived in Exeter, Maine, and Daddy worked in a grocery store there. Then he went to Scarborough, Maine, which is right outside of Portland. I think he worked for a dairy or something, I was about seven or eight years old at that point. Then they moved back to Brooks and Daddy had the Farmer's Union there that was a store also. And then in 1923, we moved to Yarmouth, which is 10 miles east of Portland, and Daddy had a store there. During World War II he went to work in Bath Ironworks, which is a shipbuilding area about 30 miles from Yarmouth. And when he retired, my mother taught him how to paper and paint and so in his '70s he had a paper and painting company, just a little bit of one in a small town; Yarmouth has a 3,000 population. So that was it.

RITCHIE: You attended all the local public schools?

WATT: Yes, I graduated from Yarmouth High School. When I was going to high school, Mildred Bishop, who lived across the street from us, said, "If you want to go to college, you can go. You can just work your way." I was the oldest of the

six children, so we didn't have much money. No one in the town had any money, so we were all in the same financial status. But we didn't miss it because we didn't know what it was not to have it.

I had three sisters and two brothers. There was only 10 years between me and my youngest sister, so we all grew up together, and really had a great time, a very happy time, even though we didn't have very much. Then, when we got out of high school, my dad said, "I've got you through high school, now you're on your own." So we went on that premise.

RITCHIE: Did any of your brothers and sisters go to college?

WATT: My brother Hervey, who died during World War II, went to Bryant-Stratton in Providence, Rhode Island, that was a business school. He was in accounting, and then went back to Maine. Then I have a brother, Richard, who now lives at Lake Winnepesaukee, in New Hampshire. He retired and bought a farm up there. He went to Lynn, Massachusetts, and tried out with General Electric. They had an aptitude test, and he passed it. So he was with General Electric for more than 30 years. They laid them

off during the worst of the Depression, and he was back home in Maine doing sheet metal work, which put him in good stead when he went back to General Electric. Then they sent him to Lowell Institute, so he had a good education without having to pay for it. But then he retired about four or five years ago and is having a great time making syrup on a renovated farm in Lake Winnepesaukee in New Hampshire. My three sisters married very young.

RITCHIE: It sounds as if you were the most adventuresome of the family.

WATT: Probably. Of course, the men sometimes get involved with getting married and so on, and can't afford to be adventuresome. But you see I was 42 when I got married, so I had quite a long time to be adventurous. The rest were all married at 18, 19, or in their 20s. My brothers were about 24 or 25 before they married.

My father died in 1965 of emphysema. I went up to Maine recently for my mother's birthday, she had her 94th birthday. I talked to her this morning and she's doing

alright. She's lost her eyesight, that's the main thing wrong with her, and it's very sad.

But I just wanted to get in there that our growing up was a very happy time. No one ever heard of separations or unhappy marriages and so on back then. We were all a very moral town.

RITCHIE: Was it a very religious place?

WATT: Yes. I think the population was around 3,000 and there were five churches in that town. A great many of them were Catholics, because so many French Canadians came down from Quebec when the mills were opened. I was brought up a Baptist. Most of our social life was around the church. We had Campfire Girls, we had socials, we went to young people's meetings and conducted them. Then, in high school, the principal of the school was very active in keeping the high school students busy. On Friday nights we always had a social and square dance and all that. So our social life was always quite well supervised. And then we branched out.

I went to Poland Spring the year I graduated from high school to wait on tables at

a sort of summer-winter resort. There were very few people there in the wintertime, so we could practically do all the things the guests did. Now they are advertising Poland water.

RITCHIE: Is that where it comes from? They used to use that in the secretary of the Senate's office.

WATT: Yes, and now they are advertising on TV for the first time. When we were waiting on tables we used to serve it out of the bottle at the tables. And they had a small plant, about the size of this room, where the water was piped in. The springs were at the bottom of the lake at the foot of the hill. It's good water, I lived on it for a year!

Then I went to Atlantic City in the fall of '29, never been out of Maine in my life. About five or six of us got our preachers and all kinds of recommendations and went to Hadden Hall, it had just been open a year or two. We had to have more of a background and good reputation than you did to get to a boarding school. They practically screened us and everybody who ever knew us. We got there and I waited on tables in Hadden Hall. If you were out after midnight you were fired;

or if you smoked or you drank. It was very, very, very strict. We had a housemother. It was just like being at a boarding school. We had all the advantages of a winter resort, and that was from November '29 until March of 1930.

RITCHIE: Were you working to earn money to go to college?

WATT: Yes, so when I had saved a thousand dollars—which was a lot of money then—Mildred, who was also my Campfire Guardian—she was about six years older—said she had told me in high school, “If you want to go to college I will go with you when you graduate from high school.” And she had been out of high school for six years. I had been accepted at Bates College, in Lewiston. She wrote me from Florida, she was down there for the winter with her family, and she said, “Washington, D.C., would be kind of interesting. Why don't we look up the schools there?” Which was what we did. We came to Washington and went to G.W. [George Washington University], and she went home and got married after that first year, and I stayed on.

Here I waited on tables, too, at night, and nobody knew that I even worked.

RITCHIE: Where was that?

WATT: Over at the All-States Hotel at 17th or 19th and F, right down there beyond G.W. I worked Sundays and Saturdays and then evenings. Got my meals, and so on, and made 35 cents an hour. My meals, that was the main thing. Back then I would go to school, and then at lunchtime I'd have a chocolate milkshake and a grilled American cheese sandwich, and it was 25 cents for the two at People's Drugstore. I can remember all these prices because I know how little money I had. But I made out all right. My room was \$3.50 a week, I think. I lived right by G.W. in a sorority apartment (Delta Zeta); I belonged to a sorority and they had some rooms there; they had a bedroom there that helped out paying their rent. Another girl and I paid \$3.50 a week. And there were kitchen facilities if you needed them, but I worked right around the corner so I didn't need to cook my meals.

RITCHIE: What kind of a school was George Washington back then?

WATT: It was a big, big school, 10,000 people. That was a big school then. They had the gym, which was right in back of the schoolyard—they had called it like Yale—the gym was a

big old building, I'm not sure if it's been rebuilt or not. Of course, they have enlarged the school. At that point it was Stockton Hall on one side of the block and on the other was Corcoran Hall, and it was just one block. Now it's spread out for blocks and blocks and blocks.

RITCHIE: It's taken over the whole neighborhood.

WATT: Yes, I notice way up above George Washington University Hospital that they've got big buildings up there even. I come in on the Metro, you know. The hospital back then was downtown in the center right off H Street, in that area not far from the shopping center of downtown. So they really have enlarged. The football team was something else again. I think some of them were almost professionals. We had Tuffy Leemans and ZooZoo Stewart, and one of the Blackstones, they were older boys on the team. They had good teams. Of course, I remember Tuffy Leemans particularly because he was a professional player later. But it was all quite an experience.

RITCHIE: Did you have a particular major while you were at George Washington?

WATT: No, as money ran out I took part-time courses and I never did. I started out in library

science and it wasn't my thing. So then I "over-did" and had to quit. Then I went to business school.

RITCHIE: The Depression hit in the middle of all that?

WATT: No, the Depression hit in 1929. Up in Maine, things were really bad. But I went home for a year, my health sort of went on the blink, came back, and I got a job as an assistant manager at what they called the Blue and Gray Cafeteria at 19th and F, or up in that area, and my main job was tasting food before they served it, to make sure everything was flavored right. It was government people mostly, up in that area. And it was \$10.00 a week. I asked for a dollar raise a week, but it was unheard of, they were horrified that I would ask for that big a raise. But I got it. I made out on \$10, \$11 a week very well. I lived with a private family. In fact, I lived with private families pretty much until I came on the Hill to work when I could afford an apartment.

Then I went to Temple School for Secretaries the next year, on a shoestring. Francesca Steere, with whom I went to G.W., was married to a Naval Academy graduate, and her

Aunt Margaret Hanna worked in the State Department. She was the first lady to come up through the ranks that President Roosevelt appointed as an envoy to The Hague. Her great aunt was 91 years old, and Francesca's father, who was up in his '60s, worked for the German-American Mixed Claims Commission here in town and he was out quite a bit. They wanted somebody to stay with Aunty, who was 91 years old. So she wrote and asked me to come back to Washington to stay with her for the year that Aunt Margaret was going to The Hague. So I thought, that's great, because I was engaged to be married and I wasn't quite sure I wanted to go back to Maine for the rest of my life, and I couldn't think of an out. You know, it was one of those things. So I jumped at the chance. I went up to 16th and Lamont and I remember the day I got back, here was the 91-year-old aunt canning peaches. I was so impressed that somebody that age was able to do that sort of thing!

But it was a really good year. I went to business college and got through there, and then I went home for the summer and

when I came back, I had to brush up a little bit at the school. The president, Mrs. Stevens, said, “Can you spell?” She said she had a friend who belonged to a Zonta club, or one of those clubs, that wanted somebody older and more responsible who could spell. So the next day I went to work for Children's Hospital, as secretary to the superintendent. It was really a dedication—all you thought of was that hospital. And during World War II, of course, you were tied to your job, you couldn't quit. You had to quit for two or three months and not work elsewhere if you quit. But I had no desire to. I made just barely enough to live on, I think I was making \$80.00 a month. Of course, three square meals a day didn't hurt, that was in addition.

RITCHIE: You said that they had quite a bit of extra food there because of the rationing.

WATT: Oh yes, because I had charge of getting the points together, and they had all the children, each formula was counted as a meal. You counted the number of meals served per month in the hospital. And they were always donating extra canned milk and so on for the children, so we ate very well, but we almost went broke

as a result. We sort of forgot about the money because the ration points were scarcer for the most part than money was. Then, of course, oil was also rationed.

I lived with a private family, and they had my ration card, because I ate at the hospital. Another family came in with a baby, the Banworths—he worked at the FBI in fingerprinting. They came in during the war, so there were eight people in the household with eight rations, and two infants, so they ate pretty well, too!

RITCHIE: I guess it was pretty common for people in Washington to rent out rooms during that period to people coming in.

WATT: I guess so. I lived with the Wescotts with whom I had gone to school, and double dated with them when they were at G.W., and then I went to live with them after I had been at the Martins, when Aunt Margaret came back—Martin was the last name. They were related to, I think, Mark Hanna. Washington has so many of them you almost forget.

RITCHIE: Where was this house located?

WATT: First we lived on Lamont Street, in an apartment. That was at 16th and Lamont, right next

door to where I lived when I first came to Washington. Then we went over to 13th and Monroe. Then, in 1941, they bought a house out on the ninth hole of the Indian Spring Country Club; they had built houses on the first nine holes. They bought a house out there and it was something like \$6,500.00 and it had three bedrooms upstairs, and a den downstairs, which was sort of a living room for me. I think they had that built on for about \$1,000.00 more at that time, so I think they paid about \$7,500.00 for the house and the lot. It was a pretty good size lot, a quarter of an acre probably. Later, when my husband and I were married, we went out there and looked at the houses—this was '52—the houses were selling at that point for \$23,000.00. I hate to think what they would be now!

RITCHIE: Washington must have been a very exciting city to live in, in those years.

WATT: It was, really. I can remember going to the parade when Roosevelt was elected in 1933. The parade came up right in front of the Willard Hotel on Pennsylvania Avenue. I put my camera up over my head like this and

then couldn't get my arm down! I have a little picture of the car that I took this way. You can just barely see the car, and I've got an arrow pointing to it saying, "President Roosevelt." Nobody would know it even with a magnifying glass!

RITCHIE: Did you see a lot of the government in action in those days?

WATT: Well, I was insulated from it, working at Children's Hospital. Politics wasn't something I paid attention to. The only thing I remember really over the years was the fact that there was a write-up or a feature or something on the front page on [Harry] Truman every single day. He got well known because he got good publicity as chairman of the War Investigating Committee. So I didn't even think about politics, it didn't mean a thing to me. Except I went downtown to watch the king and queen of England when they came up the avenue—I was so impressed with the pink complexion of the queen with her umbrella, riding up there with Mrs. Roosevelt. In the front car was the king and President Roosevelt. That was a thrill. The first year I was

in Washington I went to every parade there was; 1930 was a centennial year.

RITCHIE: George Washington's birthday, wasn't it?

WATT: Maybe it was. I went to every parade in sight, and I think they had one every week that year.

RITCHIE: It must have been exciting to have just left Maine to come down to the big city.

WATT: It was. The only other time I had been out of Maine was when I went to Atlantic City. We took the train to Philadelphia, first trip on a subway, too. It's amazing how those things were exciting then.

RITCHIE: After all those years, though, you've still maintained your Maine residency.

WATT: Well, I haven't since my mother sold her house in Yarmouth. She's in a retirement home now in Brunswick. I voted in Maine, now I vote in Virginia.

RITCHIE: I was looking in one of the old staff directories and saw that you had a Maine residence.

WATT: Yes.

RITCHIE: And you belonged to the Maine Society here.

WATT: Well, that's actually how I happened to get on the Hill, indirectly. I had been very active in the Maine State Society, and as

usual, like at the hospital, I handled funds, donations, and so on, and at the Maine State Society I was treasurer and handled all the financing for the big Maine lobster dinners they had.

RITCHIE: Was it sort of a social group?

WATT: Yes. Of course, during the war, it was quite active with all the soldiers and everybody here. I remember we had a reception for the governor of Maine and so on. The people in the congressional offices were active in it because there were a lot of people here they could keep in touch with. Roy Haines, who was [with] Senator [Owen] Brewster's office, was president. We had meetings frequently down in Senator Brewster's office. Then I got to know Mrs. [Margaret Chase] Smith, because she was our congresswoman, not well but I met her. Then there was a congressman by the name of Frank Fellows, he was quite active, and then Senator [Wallace] White was here, too. Before Brewster, there was Senator [Frederick] Hale. I wasn't active then, I just got tickets to go to the Army-Navy game through him one time, that was how I remembered him, from 1935 probably.

They really were interesting times. For instance, the first year I was here I would go to the movies and I was highly insulted because I wasn't used to people being impolite. I was taught that if you didn't like something, just stay quiet and talk about the things you thought were nice. But anyway, anytime the newsreel came on, they would hiss when President Hoover came on. I was horrified. I thought, gee, how can people be that rude, and to the president of the United States? Polly Morrison, whom I used to go with, was from down in the Shenandoah Valley and was going to the Corcoran Art School, she said, "Well, we express our pleasure, why shouldn't we express our displeasure?" That had never occurred to me! But I was just horrified when they would hiss when Hoover came on the screen. Of course, in later years he became quite a senior statesman, he was really well revered. They were interesting years. Washington gets in your blood, I don't care what they say. No matter how short a time you go home you want to get back here. Of course, it was like a

small town then, everybody was from somewhere else. You never heard of a native Washingtonian.

Then, in 1947, the superintendent of Children's Hospital retired—she had been a nurse in World War I, and she was getting up towards 70. She was a beautiful person, she was the only woman I ever knew who was able to think and act administratively like a man but still stay completely feminine, she was really an unusual person. I hated to leave, but I thought, well, there's no future here. There was no Social Security back then for eleemosynary institutions. I think they went under in about two years after I left. So I had no retirement, and you know, you made just enough salary to live on, period. So I was looking around to find out if I liked something else, and my next door neighbor was Harold Beckley who was the superintendent of the Senate Press Gallery. (I used to go to the beach with him and his wife and was quite friendly with them, and got to know quite a few of the press because they used to take me down to the Press Club to parties, and to parties at their house.) He was trying

to think of something that I would like to do. First he thought, “Well, we’ll just get a private organization set up to give information for documents and so on.” And I thought that didn’t sound too good. So then he said, “Well, the Republicans have just won the Senate and House, and you’re from Maine, and Senator Brewster and Senator White both are going to have chairmanships of committees. You know all those people, why don’t you go see them?” Well, that had never occurred to me, to come on the Hill.

I came down to Senator Brewster’s office and saw Mrs. Dustin, who was his top secretary or administrative assistant. I’d known her for quite a long while, and Mr. Haines, who was president of the Maine State Society. I called and said I was interested in making a change. One of the resident doctors brought me down, and I had an interview with Mrs. Dustin and Mr. Haines. She said there were two jobs available, on the Commerce Committee, which was Senator White’s committee, and this War Investigating Committee, which was going to wind up in a year. I said, “Well, I think

that investigating committee sounds more interesting than this other.” They said, “Well, it’s only going to last a year.” I said, “Well, I’ll take a chance on it.” So the next week they brought me in to see Senator Brewster. He said, “I don’t know you personally, I know your reputation and so on. If Frances Dustin recommends you, that’s good enough for me.” So that was on a Friday. I went to the hospital that Saturday and came to work at the Senate on Monday, the 10th of February. That was the beginning of my working on the Hill.

RITCHIE: What type of a person was Senator Brewster?

WATT: Well, I got along with him fine. But there were those who thought if he could walk a crooked mile, he would walk it rather than go a straight mile. It was said he was intellectually dishonest, let’s put it that way. That was the opinion of people on the staff who worked closely with him. In my job I didn’t have that much contact, of course, just for hearings and so on. Anything I had to be done I took to Frances Dustin, and she took care of it for me, so I really didn’t have that much personal

contact with him. So from my own viewpoint, I saw nothing wrong with him, but I was a good listener.

RITCHIE: One of the descriptions that I've read of him was that he was probably the best interrogator on the committee, because he had been a prosecutor, but he was also the most partisan person on the committee. Do you think that's an accurate assessment?

WATT: I don't remember that. I was new and politics didn't mean a darn thing to me, except that I was being loyal to the person who hired me. I remember going to a hearing in the Caucus Room, it might have been the Hughes thing, I don't remember now, but I remember there were several people there that had been on the committee for quite a few years. When things I didn't like the sound of were said, I would glare at the senators, and I remember this Mr. Cole came to me afterwards and said, "Ruth, you're going to have to learn to keep a deadpan face. Every time something goes on that you don't think is loyal to the chairman, you glare at them. You're working for the whole Senate, you're not working for just one man." I never forgot that, and after that I got so that nobody

could tell if I liked anything or not. That was my first lesson.

RITCHIE: I guess a lot of the staff had carried over from the earlier years?

WATT: There were quite a few of them that worked for Senator Ferguson, who had been on the committee for many years, and Senator Brewster had several. I think they were the only two that had been on for any length of time. And Senator [Claude] Pepper was on that committee. He's the one that I used to glare at, that was when I got corrected. I remember one time, I hadn't learned all the things you were supposed to do in the Senate. They put an exhibit in, and the chairman is supposed to authorize it, and say, "This will be made an exhibit," and so on, or, "This will be made a part of the record," to make it official. Senator Pepper put something in, and I just made that an exhibit, too. It was very controversial, those days were very partisan, the issues were political. So Senator Ferguson called me up in the office, "What do you mean putting in stuff that I haven't seen?" Then Bill Rogers said, "Don't worry about it Ruth, he's not

that angry.” Anyway, I always learned things the hard way.

RITCHIE: What were your functions at first with that committee?

WATT: The same as they have been all through the years. I handled all the finances, set up the hearings, and was sort of a housekeeper, ordering anything in the office, typewriters, telephones or anything, and assigning work for the girls.

RITCHIE: Did you handle the structure of the committee room where they met?

WATT: Oh, yes.

RITCHIE: Who sat where, and who was admitted?

WATT: That was a routine. Ordinarily at a hearing, you have the chairman in the center, the Republicans on one side, the Democrats on the other. The name plates are placed according to their seniority on the full committee or the subcommittee. Then the staff, usually the counsel, would sit next to or just in back of the chairman. Back then there were no staff that were minority and majority. They had people who were hired, from Maine for instance, but they were not considered minority or majority. That didn't happen until many

years later. But people became very political along the line. I think it was more so then because the Republicans who were just coming in were feeling their oats a little bit. The Democrats had been in so long they had taken everything for granted, run the show for so long—I don't remember when there was a Republican Congress before that.

RITCHIE: Nineteen-thirty was the last one.

WATT: See, I was not even curious about politics at that point. That was the year I came to Washington, as a matter of fact. Yes, because I remember after that, President Hoover tried to put in all these reforms and he couldn't get anywhere because there was a Democratic Congress. The same thing, when Roosevelt took over he was able to do it because he had a Democratic Congress with him, and they were doing the same things that Hoover had tried to do. I remember that much of politics.

RITCHIE: You handled all the paperwork, then, in the committee?

WATT: Yes, the exhibits, making sure that the senators attended committee hearings, sending out the notices, and those things.

RITCHIE: Did you find this a little overwhelming at first, to come in to something like this?

WATT: Not really, because I had worked at the hospital. No, I wasn't overwhelmed. I was impressed with the senators. In fact, I had a great deal of respect and awe of them, and I still do. I've gotten over it some, but not too much. I still thought they were elected by the people and I feel that they are to be respected. In fact, I've heard people call a senator by his first name, and I couldn't do it if I had to. I think once in the Press Club, when Senator [Joseph] McCarthy was there, I called him Joe, but it was because I had had a cocktail. But to me they are all Senator and they deserve respect for having been elected by the people. Of course, it was quite a contrast from working with doctors for almost 10 years and then coming to work with senators. They were sort of a different world. No, I wasn't overwhelmed at all.

RITCHIE: Even with all the klieg lights and the press pouring into the Caucus Room for some of those big hearings?

WATT: No, because I had gotten to know so many of those people, being good friends with Beck. All of the press liked him very much and he was included in a lot of things that the press had. So I knew so many of them that there was no awe there, and the lights didn't mean anything to me. For some reason, I don't know why, I wasn't overwhelmed with anything like that. I think I still am more overwhelmed with seeing a movie actor than anything with all these VIPs down here. You're used to them but you're not used to people from Hollywood and so on.

RITCHIE: How was the committee staff set up back then? Were there people that you reported to?

WATT: Just the chief counsel, that's the same as it is now. And the senators, you are responsible to the senators through the chief counsel. I never went over a chief counsel's head, or did anything senator-wise or chairman-wise that I didn't tell our chief counsel. Because after all, he was the head of the committee, as far as I was concerned. If I went over and saw, say Senator Brewster or Senator McCarthy or any

of the senators, I just went back and reported what had gone on to our chief counsel so there was no surprise to him if something was mentioned, if a senator mentioned something to the counsel. I think the strange thing was that, being from Maine, and I had been here 17 years when I came to the Hill to work, one of the people in the office said, “Now we expect you to report the goings on on the committee to us.” And I said, “I think that’s up to the chief counsel. I don’t think it’s up to me to report anything.”

RITCHIE: People in Senator Brewster’s office wanted you to report back to them?

WATT: Yes, and I have never done that to any chairman or anybody. I think if there is anything to be reported—and we’ve had problems along the line, even when Senator McClellan was chairman, we had a problem, I wouldn’t report it—I figured that somebody else should do it. If it had gotten bad enough so that it affected me personally, I would have, because I’m pretty good about fighting my own battles. But I wasn’t about to report back, and I kept that policy right straight through.

I think that's one reason why I survived so many chairmen, that I didn't make it a partisan thing.

RITCHIE: Your first chief counsel was William Rogers?

WATT: No, when I came it was George Meader, who later became a congressman from Michigan. I don't know if he was hired by Senator Mead after Truman became vice president or not. I don't remember how long George was there, but he was the chief counsel. Then Brewster picked Bill Rogers, who had worked with Governor [Thomas E.] Dewey in New York, and Brewster hired him in April and then George left about the first of July that year, and Bill took over as chief counsel. It was a matter of Brewster wanting his own man, and they do that. George left, I don't know if he practiced law, but there was a congressman from Michigan who was not going to run again, so he asked George Meader to run against him so he would get well known, because he was not going to run again the next time, so after that George Meader became a congressman. He was in for 14 years and then he was defeated. He was at my retirement party.

After that, Bill Rogers took over and Frip (Francis) Flanigan, who had been the chief investigator—he was a lawyer and had been with the FBI for many years—he was the assistant. The two of them worked together closely, and they were good balance for each other. Then, when the subcommittee was set up, that was in January or February of '48, the committee was only to last for one year and officially was supposed to be over the 31st of January of that year, but then they extended it just for writing the report. So I had two or three payrolls to do then! But the hearings for that year were quite something.

RITCHIE: I wanted to ask you just a little bit about Rogers himself. What type of a person was he to work with?

WATT: Bill was just starting out, but he had had investigative experience with the prosecutor, Dewey, up in New York, and he and Frip Flanigan worked together. If Bill was going to get a little bit way out in problems, why Frip could slow him down, because Frip had been there for three or four years.

RITCHIE: They did seem like such different personalities.

WATT: Yes, and of course Bill had come up the hard way, but he sure enjoyed life. And back then we all did. You know, it was just a year and a half after World War II, when things were getting back from when we didn't have that much. For instance, automobiles and rents and everything else were not back so you could afford them. They weren't there, because they hadn't started building the country up again. I remember Bill Rogers, and he brought down four people from New York, Jim Sheridan and Jerry Adlerman, Felix Larkin and Robert Brosnan. But anyway, he brought some of his own people in that he had worked with, so he had a nucleus, which is a wise thing to do, I think. They all got rooms over here at McLean Gardens, and some of the girls, a couple of stenos, they all had rooms over there. Can you imagine Bill Rogers now in McLean Gardens in a little room! With all that he's done since.

And of course, he became close to [Richard] Nixon when he was a congressman, and they were good friends. Then when Bill

left the committee after being a year with [Clyde] Hoey, I guess it was 1950 or '51 that he left, he went into a law office with Kenneth Royall who had been secretary of the army, from North Carolina, and I remember one of his first cases was for Drew Pearson, a lawsuit or something, he won it for Drew Pearson and he was on his way after that.

RITCHIE: Was there any difficulty on the committee between Rogers and Brewster? You said Rogers didn't particularly care for Brewster.

WATT: No, except that you get all the backlash in the office. I'm not too sure because I didn't know the politics between them all, but I remember Senator [William] Knowland was on the committee, and he left because there was a conflict of interest with the Arabian Oil. We had hearings on Arabian Oil and I don't even remember what they were about because they've been so long ago. Knowland left because he had a conflict of interest there. Then Senator Brewster had some tie-in with Pan American, and what's his name—?

RITCHIE: Juan Trippe?

WATT: Juan Trippe. And so he stepped down from the chair on the hearings on the

Howard Hughes matter, and Senator Ferguson acted as the subcommittee chairman for all that. Then along comes Mr. Howard Hughes. We had an executive session the second day I was on the committee. He had just had that plane accident and was sort of crippled up. And I can remember the atmosphere there was, “He’s going to be a pushover” because he’s kind of—you know, he wasn’t quite with it because he was still all stunned from his airplane accident. But they thought he was going to be a pushover. This was in February. I think we had the hearings on that in July. He came to the committee and he had them fooled, he fooled them. He had a hearing aid, and when he didn’t want to hear anything that hearing aid went off.

RITCHIE: Didn’t you have some trouble trying to get a document from him?

WATT: Yes, because he turned his hearing aid off. He had a book, and I got it from there. That was the second or third time he was back. I remember the last time he wore his sneakers or tennis shoes, he could have cared less. It was kind of sad because that last hearing we had, when he gave the

committee such a bad time, poor Senator Ferguson had poison ivy all over his feet and he was miserable! So everything worked against him.

RITCHIE: That was a famous hearing. In fact I've heard it recorded by Edward R. Murrow on one of his albums, some of the dialog. Hughes gave out as good as he took.

WATT: Better. He made some of them look a little silly. But poor Senator Ferguson. If I had poison ivy I'd be pretty silly, too. That was in August, as I remember, the "I don't think I will" remark to something they wanted. In the meantime, one of the witnesses they called was Elliott Roosevelt, because apparently this flying boat that Hughes was working on all those years, he had been getting government money, and it was sort of drying up as far as I can remember, and so they got this public relations man, Jonny Meyer I think his name was, and he had all this social stuff going. I remember, I was so impressed, they had all these exhibits and there was one that said for some party they were throwing, I suppose for some government or Defense Department official,

saying, “\$50.00 for one girl late,” or something like that, and I remember them asking him what that meant, and he said, “Late meant after dinner.” Then there was a story when Roosevelt was on, you remember he married Fay Emerson?

RITCHIE: Yes.

WATT: They got them together on a plane trip to try to influence Elliott Roosevelt to get his father to see about getting more money for this flying boat.

RITCHIE: I’ve just been reading about this in the old newspapers, and I noticed that you had to subpoena a lot of records from the FDR Library.

WATT: Was that then? I remember we had a lot of trouble getting them, I had almost forgotten that.

RITCHIE: That was when they were investigating Elliott Roosevelt. That was quite a precedent-making event.

WATT: I had forgotten all about that. I had charge of making up all of the subpoenas and getting them ready to be signed by the chairman.

RITCHIE: A lot of people thought that Brewster was using the investigation to attack Roosevelt and the Democratic administration through Elliott.

WATT: Very possible, but of course I wouldn't even have thought about that. No, I don't know if that was so as far as he was concerned. Of course, I was here all during Roosevelt's administration and they were pretty independent people. His children did what they wanted to do, his daughter and all, but I never thought about that. It was very interesting, about three or four years ago we had Elliott Roosevelt back as a witness.

RITCHIE: Oh, what was that about?

WATT: On this Vesco thing. We brought him back from Portugal. I reminded him of the fact that he testified back then.

RITCHIE: Did he recall the occasion?

WATT: I think so. He was a little vague about it. But it was many wives later I think. But he was still married to Faye Emerson at this point in time back in 1947.

RITCHIE: At that point Brewster had stepped down—

WATT: As chairman of the subcommittee. He was still chairman of the War Investigating Committee, which was the Special Committee to Investigate the National Defense Program, which was the official name of the committee.

RITCHIE: He had become something of a target in the Hughes hearing.

WATT: Yes, because of the Juan Trippe thing, and because, with unlimited funds, Howard Hughes had this public relations firm that set out to defeat and ruin Brewster, which he succeeded in doing. I mean, he was really responsible for his demise as far as being reelected to the Senate. That was sometime later, but not that much later.

RITCHIE: But at the time, Ferguson was chairman of the subcommittee when Elliott Roosevelt testified, but Elliott Roosevelt pointed out that the telegram inviting him to testify was signed by Senator Brewster.

WATT: Well, it would have to be, because he was chairman. Ferguson was just appointed, he was not an official appointee. The chairman had a right to appoint anyone.

RITCHIE: I see. There was some suspicion at the time that Brewster was still pulling the strings behind the scenes.

WATT: Well, that's very possible, of course, being new and not knowing behind the scenes things, I wouldn't have known. As time went on I became more aware of finagling and the different

things that go on on Capitol Hill, but as far as I was concerned it was just open and shut, the same as Children's Hospital, you're sick or you aren't.

RITCHIE: Were the senators and the staff surprised by the turn of events in that investigation, when Hughes proved so successful at rebutting them in the public hearings?

WATT: Yes. Many of the staff were carryovers, but the new ones coming in weren't that much with it. They didn't have the experience, in fact, to me, I think they were political hacks. They hadn't had experience on Capitol Hill, any more than I had. I don't think they did Senator Brewster any good. Let's put it that way.

RITCHIE: What about Senator Ferguson? He's the one who carried the ball for the subcommittee. What type of a person was he?

WATT: As far as I was concerned he was a delightful man. I became very close to his office, which I have generally avoided, getting too close to any of the senators' offices. Then they don't feel too bad if you get the ax, but I did become friendly with them. They were just people I naturally took to. I

knew the people in Senator Brewster's office but I didn't get too close to them because I was new and I felt that I should be my own person. He had a delightful staff and they were approachable but not really intimate. He was just a nice person, I liked him very much.

RITCHIE: How did he compare to Brewster as chairman of the committee?

WATT: Well, you really couldn't compare them because Brewster wasn't chairman for that long. You see, Senator Ferguson was chairman of the subcommittee after it was set up so I got to know him better as the chairman. About the only time that Senator Brewster was chairman was when we had the Arabian Oil hearings and some executive sessions, and we had one hearing on renegotiation of way contracts and industrial mobilization. On either renegotiation or industrial mobilization we had Bernard Baruch, and he was up in years. I was so impressed because I had been hearing about him being a great man all those years. He came in, and his secretary, who must have been with him for many years—he was very deaf, too, and had a hearing aid—but she

wouldn't let anybody get anywhere near him. I remember when he was a witness and I'd go to hand him a piece of paper and she would take it from me, she was not letting anyone get within a mile of him. I'd go and she'd take the paper and hand it to him. I was so impressed because she was just protecting him all the way right down the line. I remember him as well as anybody in those earlier years, he was really something.

RITCHIE: The committee, as you pointed out, only had a year's life left to it, and then it became the permanent subcommittee in 1948. I was interested that instead of Brewster chairing the permanent subcommittee it was Ferguson.

WATT: Well, see now what they did was make it a subcommittee of the Committee on Expenditures in Executive Departments, so the subcommittee had to be set up from membership of the people who were on the full committee. Senator Ferguson, Senator [Herbert] O'Connor, Senator McCarthy were all on that committee.

RITCHIE: But Brewster wasn't?

WATT: No. I don't remember what committee he was on. Commerce, because I remember I took the

minutes when they first set up a subcommittee on aviation. Aviation was not in its infancy, but it hadn't gotten to the point where it was necessary to have a committee; it was a Commerce subcommittee and I remember taking the minutes because they hadn't hired anybody else, and that was in '47. He was on another committee, I think maybe the Armed Services Committee, I don't remember the other committees he had. But he was not on the Expenditures in Executive Departments, which was a minor committee. The District Committee, and that, and I think the Rules Committee, were the three minor committees at that point. The Reorganization Act of 1946 was just going into operation then. That's when Floyd Riddick came aboard over in the Daily Digest. We started out together practically up here.

RITCHIE: Looking over some of the other members of the special committee, people like John Williams of Delaware, and George "Molley" Malone, and Joe McCarthy, and Claude Pepper, were there any of them in particular that stood out in your mind as more impressive or interesting?

WATT: That year I remember Senator Pepper. I was very much impressed with him because he was unusual.

RITCHIE: In what way?

WATT: Well, it was just his approach, and his southern accent. And then Senator Malone was a rough and ready sort of person, didn't care what he said or what he did. Senator [Harry] Cain was on that committee. He was from Washington State—Senator Jackson defeated him later on.

RITCHIE: What was Cain like?

WATT: He was nice but he never set the world on fire, let's put it that way. There was Senator O'Connor, I liked him.

RITCHIE: Senator Carl Hatch was on it also.

WATT: Senator Hatch, yes. I think he liked his schnapps a little, but I never saw him under the influence or anything, but he had that reputation. He didn't—in fact, if you hadn't mentioned his name I would have forgotten him. Among those who made an impression was Malone, I'd remember him. I think he and Joe McCarthy were friendly at that time.

RITCHIE: That was McCarthy's first year in the Senate, too.

WATT: Yes. He was a bachelor around town, dating all of these beautiful girls.

RITCHIE: He was sort of getting his feet wet in these hearings.

WATT: Yes. But I don't remember his having anything to say. I don't remember except that he was there. So he didn't do much. The ones I remember the most for making the biggest splash were Senators Brewster, Pepper, and of course, Ferguson. I can't remember if the others made any noise. They said back then when you were in your first term you were seen and not heard. They're all different now. We had so many that were elected this year and then on the subcommittee, and they would say, "Oh, they're first-termers, they'll never make it beyond this term." That was the consensus then, and some of them didn't. Of course, we had some carryovers from the War Investigating Committee, but we had some new ones too, Cain, and Malone, and Joe McCarthy, O'Connor, they were all new that year. And there was also the fellow who became attorney general briefly, from Rhode Island.

RITCHIE: Oh, McGrath.

WATT: J. Howard McGrath, he was one for a while. It was his first year. So we practically had all new senators.

RITCHIE: So the senior senators really took the initiative?

WATT: Yes.

RITCHIE: You mentioned before that you didn't follow politics that much in the press, but I assume once you started working for the committee, you became more aware of the press. How did it feel to read about, in the newspapers, events that you were participating in?

WATT: I got a big kick out of it. But I was more interested in the behind the scenes things that were going on. I would read it and say, "Oh, that isn't exactly the way it is." But I got a kick out of that. My relations with the press were very good, and I made sure that everybody got the same treatment. I was very much aware, from being close to the superintendent of the Press Gallery, what to do and what not to do. So that's why my relations were so good. I didn't have any problems because I knew what to do and what not to do.

RITCHIE: What would you say was what to do and what not to do?

WATT: Back then if you said something was off-the-record, it was off-the-record. You didn't tell people anything even off-the-record. I didn't, because I didn't know all that much about it. But you always showed no partiality to anybody. You just gave everybody the same thing. If there was a press release or if you had some information you couldn't give to all of them, you called the press gallery and let the superintendent or whoever to give out the information. And you notified people of hearings, gave them everything, everybody the same thing, you didn't show any partiality. That's the only way to stay close to them. Now, that's one of the mistakes I think Senator Brewster made. I remember we had a report one time, they were filing a report, and all the senators had it, and I remember that Senator Brewster asked me for an extra copy of it, and he gave it to, I think, it was Ed Hawkinson or Jack Bell of the Associated Press. You see, the other press got down on him because he was showing partiality to others, just giving special

treatment to some, and that's a big mistake. Joe McCarthy, I think, made that mistake, too. It can ruin you, the press can ruin you.

RITCHIE: Did you have much trouble with senators leaking material from inside the committee?

WATT: That's a good question. I remember one time that we had an executive session, I don't remember what year it was. I remember that it was leaked to the press. The chief counsel was told by the chairman to check with everyone on the committee, of the staff members, to find out who had been around and seen it, and he had to question all of us. Of course, I was in on all of them anyway. It turned out that a senator had leaked it, though. We found out, but the staff went through this thing feeling, well you know, feeling as if they were under suspicion and so on. But the senators had a way of leaking stuff that they were not supposed to.

RITCHIE: There wasn't anything you could do about it, I guess?

WATT: No. Well, it wasn't for the national security, but it was embarrassing, and it meant that some got it and others didn't. Usually *U.S. News and World Report*, I think it was,

used to get material. We knew pretty much who had done it each time, but it happened several times. Either a reporter or a senator said what something went on in an executive session.

RITCHIE: Did you have any trouble with any particular reporters who were more persistent than others?

WATT: No, I was very lucky, very lucky. We had a lot in those days, we had many come in the office all the time. As time went on we had fewer and fewer. It depended a lot on the chief counsel, how your press was. Of course, Bill Rogers was very good with them, and Frip Flanigan was very good with them, and Bobby Kennedy was great, he knew how to handle them. He just instinctively knew how to handle people, period. Roy Cohn catered to special ones, and he had a lot of enemies in the press, too. Of course, Jerry Adlerman always got along fine, but after that, after Jerry, the people have not been friendly with the press, they don't know how to handle them. That's been unfortunate, I think. Of the last two chief counsels, one had been on the committee before, and he was impossible. He was there when Senator McClellan was fighting for his political

life, because you know he lost out in the primary and had to have a runoff with Senator Pryor, when he was a congressman. We were pretty much like stepchildren that year, he didn't pay much attention to the committee. In the meantime he also was chairman of Appropriations, when [Allen] Ellender died; that changed everybody's life!

After that, the two chief counsels weren't very with it, the press wasn't their cup of tea really, and I think that may have hurt [Henry] Jackson some, I don't know. Of course, he had his own press man, Brian Corcoran. He was around but you can't cover a committee very well, I mean a press man in a senator's office, that well. I think some of these people did not want to handle the press, and I think this is very important to a committee and to a chairman. Now Senator [Sam] Nunn is handling himself very well, he's got his own press man and he's all right, doing a good job. He makes up for what we have lacked in that committee. Now we've just gotten a new chief counsel, I don't know what he's going to be like because he's just come to work last Monday, and I don't know him that well, just met him once.

There's one other story I just recalled. This was back in 1949 to 1950 when Bill Rogers was counsel and we had a former staff member who had been on the War Investigating Committee, and when we had the "5 per center" hearings with Johnny Maragon and General [Harry] Vaughn and all those people, his name was Charles Patrick Clark, and he ran into Bill Rogers at the Mayflower one night and they almost had a fist fight. I think it was because they were trying to get us not to have the hearings. That just popped into my mind.

RITCHIE: He was with the administration?

WATT: Charlie Clark was a lawyer uptown and drove around in a big chauffeured car. He had come in to write the final report on the War Investigating Committee but never did a nickel's worth of work, somebody else had to do it. But anyway, he was the big wheel uptown and held been on the War Investigating Committee with Harry Truman when Truman was chairman.

[End of Interview #1]