

Ann Whitman
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Martin Mack Tassley

Mrs. Ann C. Whitman, 2-15-91

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Q: Did you usually phone for that type of thing or did you send a memo to them? When you wanted something back?

MRS. WHITMAN: Probably with the phone, I don't remember.

Q: And do you know how long it took something to get back? Did it come back the same day usually?

MRS. WHITMAN: Yes.

Q: You know, there has been a controversy about the--and feel free not to say anything about this or not to answer--but about Eisenhower's taping system. I think even the National Enquirer had a story about it many years ago, but that there was this rudimentary system that was installed and this became of interest, of course . . .

MRS. WHITMAN: Yes. I can't think of his name now, but they put this monster in my office and, of course, it didn't work at all.

Q: And were you supposed to activate it when a meeting was going on or something?

MRS. WHITMAN: He was supposed to push a button and the red light on my desk if he wanted me to listen in. And if he'd forgotten, I forgot.

Q: You know, we have about, I think, twenty transcripts in the Library, of meetings that were recorded and most of them are in the early part of the administration, and so I don't . . .

MRS. WHITMAN: My memory, which is foggy, was that [H.E.G.L.] Mehta was coming over and nobody trusted Mehta.

Q: Matiff?

MRS. WHITMAN: Mehta, I guess he was the prime minister of India, I don't know [Indian ambassador to U.S.]. And they wanted a transcript and so this machine was hid, secretly installed. They put it in and I couldn't understand one word that Mehta said.

Q: Do you know who would have made the decision to put it in?

MRS. WHITMAN: Probably Bobby Cutler, or somebody like that.

Q: When it came to transcribing the tape did you do that or did somebody else attempt to do that, I guess, in this case?

MRS. WHITMAN: I tried to do it, but I couldn't do it. And I don't think I ever gave it to anybody else.

Q: I guess other people wouldn't have been aware of the taping system anyway, probably. Would you have not given it to anybody else because it was none of their business or because they wouldn't have known how to do it anyway?

MRS. WHITMAN: We didn't want other people to know about it.

Q: I know that for Dulles' papers we have a--it was a very common practice for a secretary to be on the other line, on the dead phone taking dictation, taking notes of the telephone

conversation. I guess that was a very common practice in Washington, wasn't it?

MRS. WHITMAN: Yes.

Q: You probably did that too, didn't you and use your shorthand to . . .

MRS. WHITMAN: Everybody did it.

Q: Yes, that was a common practice. There's been a lot said about Eisenhower the man and his temper. Did you witness--what's your assessment, I guess, of Eisenhower's . . .

MRS. WHITMAN: He never directed his temper at me. I never was aware of it. You know, he had this vein in his temple and sometimes it would throb and I always thought that that was his temper.

Q: But he never directed it at you?

MRS. WHITMAN: No.

Q: I know when he was in the army he was reported to have used a fair amount of profanity when he got angry. Did you ever . . .

MRS. WHITMAN: Well, "goddamn it to hell" and that sort of thing, yes, sure, but none of the four letter words or anything like that.

MRS. WHITMAN: Everything. He would take home with him scripts of speeches and they'd come back the next morning almost indecipherable because he'd go around . . .

Q: Around the whole page.

MRS. WHITMAN: It would take you hours to figure out what he really meant. Unlike this girl in the Pentagon, I wished I'd saved many more, but I didn't.

Q: But you did retrieve several things from the wastebasket?

MRS. WHITMAN: I wish I'd saved the drafts of the last speech.

Q: The military-industrial complex speech?

MRS. WHITMAN: Yes. What do you think about the Military-Industrial-Complex speech? Who do you think coined the phrase?

Q: Well, we have an interview with Captain Ralph Williams . . .

MRS. WHITMAN: Who was he?

Q: He was in the speech writers office. I think the consensus is that Malcolm Moos wrote the phrase. Why? What do you think?

MRS. WHITMAN: I have a suspicion that the president's brother had a hand in it.

Q: What makes you think so?

MRS. WHITMAN: Nothing definite or tangible. The phrase just is fitting with his philosophy.

Q: Would he have come to the White House to work on it?

MRS. WHITMAN: We sometimes sent things to the university and sometimes he came over.

Q: Did he write most of those himself?

MRS. WHITMAN: No. He took a draft and went over it. He changed it enormously.

Q: Well, you probably got to know his style so well that, did you do some editing yourself before things went in to him?

MRS. WHITMAN: Sure.

Q: Memo, or drafts, would come to you and then you could pretty well re-do them?

[Interruption]

MRS. WHITMAN: . . . asked her [Mary Stephens] to polish it up.

Q: So Mary was . . .

MRS. WHITMAN: What I couldn't figure out--when he'd bring home something and it was all over the pages.

Q: Deciphering. Was Hagerty's writing any better?

MRS. WHITMAN: No.

Q: So you were able just to tell him what was on your mind. Did he always appreciate that?

MRS. WHITMAN: He argued with me, sometimes. We argued mostly about civil rights. I think we argued about the squirrels too.

Q: The squirrels? I haven't heard that one. Eating up his golf course or something?

MRS. WHITMAN: No, squirrels on the front lawn. And he had them, one night he had them all taken and put in the . . .

Q: Rock Creek Park or something? And you didn't think that was appropriate?

MRS. WHITMAN: No.

Q: Why did he have that done?

MRS. WHITMAN: Because they got in the way of his golf shots.

Q: And so what was your argument with him about that?

MRS. WHITMAN: They had a perfect right to be there. [Laughter]

Q: Did he ever get angry with you when you were arguing with him?

MRS. WHITMAN: Never.