

INTERVIEW WITH  
Colonel Clifton L. Mears

by

Dr. Maclyn P. Burg  
Oral Historian

on

May 9, 1974

for

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

Gift of Personal Statement

CLIFTON L. MEARS

to the

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

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This is an interview being conducted with Col. C.L. Mears in the Eisenhower Library on May 9, 1974. Present for the interview Dr. Burg of the Eisenhower Library staff and Col. Mears.

DR. BURG: Colonel, let's start at the beginning and ask you when and where you were born?

COL. MEARS: I was born near Gilbert, Arkansas, April 28, 1907.

DR. BURG: And you were educated in the state of Arkansas?

COL. MEARS: I had a grammar school education there and left the state when I was fifteen years old.

DR. BURG: Where did the family move?

COL. MEARS: They moved to Wichita, Kansas. However, I went to California and then back to the East Coast, and when I was sixteen years old I entered the military service.

DR. BURG: Oh, you did! At age sixteen?

COL. MEARS: Yes, at age sixteen. I stretched my age a couple of years.

DR. BURG: Good Lord! Did you enlist then?

COL. MEARS: I enlisted. I went in as an enlisted man.

BURG: In what branch?

MEARS: In the Army and of course the Air Corps was a part of the army in those days, you know. In fact, it was Army Air Service and in 1926 it became Army Air Corps. I entered in 1923.

BURG: Well, what kind of work were you doing when you entered? Were you in the air service at that time as a ground--

MEARS: I first entered the coast artillery and then transferred later to the air corps. I did some administrative work and later got into the mechanical field and went on to the engineering field as years went on. I completed high school through special service schools, and correspondence courses, and attended night classes at adjacent high schools and so forth, and got my high school education that way. Then I did college work by going to night school at New York University when I was stationed at Mitchel Field, New York, for instance in later years. It was a long process but that's how I got my education and I attended various and sundry special service schools in the military.

BURG: Now when were you commissioned, Colonel?

MEARS: I was commissioned in 1942. I went up through the enlisted ranks to the grade of master sergeant and then I was appointed a warrant officer in the regular service. Then I was commissioned as 2nd lieutenant in 1942.

BURG: Now prior to the Second World War, as you came up through the enlisted ranks, first in the air service and then in the air corps, were you ever on flight status?

MEARS: Oh, yes, yes, I flew, I was a mechanic; they called us aerial engineers.

BURG: I see. On what kinds of aircraft?

MEARS: Well, I worked on everything from the old Jennies, JN-4s, and DHs and, on down through the years, the Curtiss Falcons and some of our early transport planes such as the Fokker C-4A, I believe, or C-7A was the designation. And Martin B-10s and the Douglass B-18s, etc.

BURG: You saw the whole range of aircraft.

MEARS: Oh, yes, I saw it grow from a small beginning because

when I entered service, actually all we had were the leftovers from World War I. I entered in 1923 so we didn't get many new aircraft until the late '20s you know, and we were still using the old World War I aircraft.

BURG: Now am I correct in my recollection that you were one of the last people to fly with Wilbur Wright?

MEARS: It was Orville Wright. Wilbur died in 1912. Yes. I've been told that I made perhaps the last flight, I haven't verified that, but I was told that I was on a flight which I understand was the last flight that he made.

BURG: Do you remember what year that was?

MEARS: 1939, I believe. It was in a Douglass DC-4 airplane, the first one that was built, and it was at Wright Field in Dayton, Ohio.

BURG: And Mr. Wright actually handled the controls on that?

MEARS: No, he didn't handle the controls, but he was a passenger on the flight. And I was told that he never flew again; I can't be sure that statement is correct, but I understand that it was his last flight.

BURG: Did you have a chance to converse with him at all, Colonel?

MEARS: Oh, shook hands with him and you know, just small talk and chit-chat.

BURG: How did he strike you as a man? Was he affable?

MEARS: Yes, he was. He was a bit reserved but a very interesting person, and he was interested in the new aircraft and the gadgets on the larger airplanes and so forth.

BURG: I'll bet he was.

MEARS: Oh, yes.

BURG: Did he seem to enjoy that flight?

MEARS: Oh, yes, he did, yes. We had been told that he had made the statement that he was not going to fly again, that he hadn't flown for some time prior to this, that he didn't intend to make another flight but we invited him to come out, "twisted his arm" a little and got him to go up in this big airplane.



BURG: That's interesting. How long was the flight, an hour or so?

MEARS: Yes.

BURG: Sort of stooging around the Wright Field area?

MEARS: Yes, as I recall, and we took off and went down around Cincinnati and up around by Columbus, and Indianapolis and around, you know, just a circle tour around the countryside.

BURG: Well, that was pretty interesting. Did he say anything when he got off the aircraft? Did he say anything about how he enjoyed it?

MEARS: Oh, he enjoyed it, you know. I don't recall his exact words, but it was just general conversation.

BURG: Was his health still good, Colonel?

MEARS: Yes, he was very spry and very active at that time, very straight and with a quick step, you know, very active.

BURG: Yes. Now it occurs to me that flying as you did at that particular time, you may have run into some of the men

who at the time were piling up some of the aviation records that still stand in some cases, or men who later on became some of the key figures in World War II?

MEARS: Well, yes, I remember those. I was down in the Langley Field, Virginia, area when Billy Mitchell was doing his demonstrations on what could be done by dropping bombs on battleships and one thing and another.

BURG: You didn't take part in any of the flights to bomb--

MEARS: No, no, I didn't take part.

BURG: --but you were there when that was going on.

MEARS: And I witnessed that. And of course, I remember being present when Jimmy Doolittle set some speed records flying around pylons in Hampton Roads, Virginia, back in, oh, 1923 or '24, somewhere along in there in the early days. He was, I think, a 1st lieutenant at that time. Of course, as you know, he became famous later including the flight to Japan and so forth. I knew a lot of the people who in later years made history, so to speak.

BURG: Any of those men particularly stand out in your mind today?

MEARS: Well, I remember serving with, oh, back in the early thirties, a 2nd lieutenant, Leon W. Johnson, who led the raid on the Ploesti oil fields in Rumania during World War II, and of course was decorated with the Congressional Medal of Honor and retired as a four-star general in the air force.

BURG: When you heard that news about his exploits, did it surprise you? Or did he strike you early on as being that kind of a man?

MEARS: No, I wouldn't say I was surprised exactly, but in the early days Leon W. Johnson was just another nice, easygoing officer--no one thought that he'd set the world on fire, but on the other hand, I wasn't surprised that he did--it was just one of those things that you don't know who is going to be the outstanding one until the chips are down, you know.

BURG: Now it sounds to me like a lot of your work in the air corps, prior to the war, was connected with either attack squadrons or bombardment squadrons?

MEARS: We had observations squadrons also. I was in an observation group, the old Ninth Observation Group, which was changed to the Ninth Bombardment Group around 1935, somewhere along in there, and served in both the observation and the bombardment in the same organization, really. It was just a change in the status when the General Headquarters Air Force was formed. Of course I got acquainted, in the early days, with Ira C. Eaker, who was at that time a 1st lieutenant. He would oftentimes fly General Hurley, Patrick J. Hurley, then Secretary of War in the Hoover cabinet, as the pilot, you know. Later, General Eaker became chief of staff to General [Henry H. "Hap"] Arnold of the Army Air Forces and retired as a lieutenant general.

BURG: So you knew him too, and served in units with him?

MEARS: Oh, yes. I served under him overseas during World War II in England.

BURG: Now let me ask you, in December of 1941, were you then a master sergeant air corps, or were you by then a warrant officer?

MEARS: At that time I was a master sergeant.

BURG: And where were you stationed, at Pearl Harbor?

MEARS: At Patterson Field, Dayton, Ohio, it's now part of Wright-Patterson.

BURG: Were you with the Ninth Bombardment--

MEARS: No, I was with an Air Depot Group at that time. We formed the first air depot group that the air corps ever had, it was known as the 4th Air Depot Group, and took it out during the maneuvers in 1941, in the South, to service test the idea of an air depot group. We were in Jackson, Mississippi and Macon, Georgia, actually in Macon, Georgia just a week before the attack on Pearl Harbor. We left there and came back to our station at Patterson Field, Dayton, Ohio, and the attack occurred, I think, the next day after we returned from our maneuvers in the South.

BURG: Now let me ask you what an air depot group was formulated to do? Was that to service aircraft in the field?

MEARS: Yes, we had a service squadron, we had a supply squadron and then, of course, the headquarters squadron. The depot

was set up to furnish both maintenance on aircraft, overhaul and maintenance, and also to furnish supplies, materiel. The idea was to have a group that would contain both these elements, personnel to handle maintenance and overhaul of aircraft, and other personnel in the supply squadrons to handle the supply of materiel.

BURG: Now, Colonel, was the idea that you would have an air depot group attached, let us say, to a heavy bombardment group, and you would have a similar group attached to a fighter unit, so that you didn't have problems then of trying to supply materiel for a wide range of aircraft types?

MEARS: No, a depot group might be assigned where they would service chiefly bombardment aircraft or they might be assigned where they would serve chiefly a fighter type of aircraft. They might be assigned to the big base depots, such as we had overseas, where they would handle all kinds of aircraft that might come in for repair and overhaul. Many of the aircraft that was shot up would get back and land, but couldn't take off again until they were completely overhauled and put back in service. And the air depot groups would operate these

big base depots; they called them base air depots.

BURG: Now, in 1941, this was a new idea for our air corps?

MEARS: Yes, the air depot group was new.

BURG: Do you happen to remember who originated that idea?

MEARS: Well, Gen. Henry J.F. Miller perhaps played a leading role in the establishment and testing of the air depot group idea.

BURG: How did it work out in the Louisiana maneuvers?

MEARS: Very well. It proved that the idea was sound and we went on from there. Of course, as I mentioned, we had the one group which we called the Fourth Air Depot Group stationed at Patterson Field, and I guess, within a week after Pearl Harbor, we received orders from Washington to organize eight more just like it. And it went on from there, you see.

BURG: Now after Pearl Harbor, you were then given a commission as a warrant officer, JG?

MEARS: Yes.

BURG: Seems to me there were two warrant officer ranks at that time.

MEARS: Yes. And then I was commissioned shortly after that. I passed this examination for warrant officer and had that established. That grade was held for me until after the war. Then I could come back and pick that grade up in permanent status or continue on. It turned out I was disabled, and I was retired as a warrant officer, regular air force, and then advanced to the highest grade held during the war, in commission status, you see. And so I actually never went back and did duty as a warrant officer again.

BURG: The war, for you, came along at just the right time to assist your career. Now when you pick up your warrant officer rank and then your commission as a 2nd lieutenant, what was the first assignment you had, let's say, as a 2nd lieutenant?

MEARS: I was sent to Duncan Field, San Antonio, Texas, and was sent down as an engineering officer. I had passed the examination in aviation engineering for the warrant status you see, and then when I was commissioned I was sent there, in that field. However, when I got there the commanding



officer said, "Well, I have engineering officers running out of my ears and," he said, "you're going to be my adjutant." He said, "I know you from years past, and I know you have some administrative ability."

BURG: Who was this?

MEARS: This was General Dunton, Colonel Dunton at that time, later became General Dunton. D-u-n-t-o-n.

BURG: He must have been, I suppose like so many officers in the air corps, suddenly the air corps is expanding something fierce and what he needed desperately were men he knew and could rely on, men who had served for a long time.

MEARS: That's true.

BURG: They must have worked you men to death, those of you had been in and knew what was going on.

MEARS: Well, we kept busy.

BURG: I'll bet you did.

MEARS: But I wasn't there too long, just about three months

I guess, and I was ordered back to Wright Field and to the headquarters of the air service command, and got finally into the management field. As you know, the air corps suddenly, almost overnight, became the largest industrial organization in the world. We had depots employing thousands and thousands of people and we'd had very little training actually in the management field, either in personnel management or industrial management and so forth. So William S. Knudsen, president of General Motors, was brought in and he was made a brigadier general. He was the authority in those days of production line systems and had made quite a name for himself in the automotive world, you see. And so anyway, we began to become interested, and we realized in order to operate efficiently, we had to learn something about management, and I got off into the management field. I was sent overseas to the European theater and based in England, again working with these base air depots, trying to set up improved systems and methods whereby we could turn out aircraft faster than before. In fact, in the early part of the war, as you probably recall, we'd send two or three hundred airplanes over Berlin at night, and we were getting a lot of them shot down. After we were

able to revamp some of these methods and techniques for getting aircraft back into the air, these battle-damaged aircraft was our greater source, really, rather than new aircraft being sent over from the United States. And after putting into practice some of these things that we had learned in the management field, we were able to start sending a thousand planes over Berlin at night.

BURG: And doing it night after night?

MEARS: And we started winning the war, you know.

BURG: Now when did you go over then, what month and year, do you remember?

MEARS: August of 1943.

BURG: And when you went over, what rank did you have?

MEARS: I was a captain; I was promoted to a major while I was overseas.

BURG: Where did you go in England? Where was your first duty assignment, physically in England?

MEARS: I went to a place called Burtonwood, which is outside the city of Warrington. That was the base name, Burtonwood. As I say, it was dispersed around the city; we had seven different sites dispersed around the city of Warrington which was a city of about three hundred thousand as I understand at that time.

BURG: In the county of Lancashire?

MEARS: Yes. And then later we moved our base depot headquarters to Southport and it became known as the Base Depot Area headquarters. We had three depots, two in England and one in Ireland, and our headquarters was over all three, we called it the Base Air Depot Area headquarters, you see. And I was concerned, as I say, with trying to improve the methods and techniques for delivering more of these battle-damaged aircraft to the using organizations of all the fighter commands and bomber commands and so forth.

BURG: So that was one specialization within this area depot headquarters?

MEARS: Oh, yes.

BURG: Were you in command of that section?

MEARS: My title was chief of operations. And of course the base air depot area commander at that time, when we first went over, was Colonel Morris, who later became General Joseph T. Morris.

BURG: You were on his staff?

MEARS: Yes, I was on his staff.

BURG: When we talk about returning battle-damaged aircraft to service, was your unit, that is the work that you were doing, was that in connection with bombers, strictly with bombers?

MEARS: No, no, we were concerned with all the aircraft, fighters and bombers, you know, both. And of course, as I mentioned, I was in the base air depot area headquarters; I was not out in one of the actual depots; we had three depots under the area headquarters. And our job was to coordinate the activities of all three and what aircraft went where and so forth. What I was, as an individual, chiefly concerned with were the methods and techniques for actually getting this work done in a better manner and faster, get the aircraft out.

We had to improve our job methods and adopt production line methods and so forth, you see. And when we were able to do that; we really made rapid strides then.

BURG: Now did that mean, Colonel, that you had to visit the other two air depot bases?

MEARS: Three. We had three.

BURG: Well, I was counting the one where you were.

MEARS: Well, we later moved our headquarters away from either depot and we located at Southport, England--

BURG: So you were separate.

MEARS: --and the headquarters was in a big hotel there. But we had the three depots, one at Burtonwood and one north of Southport, at the little town of Wharton, and then our other one was in Ireland.

BURG: So your work took you to all three. Presumably one of the things you would have to do would be to train or see to it that the men who did this repair work were trained; were they brought to your headquarters for training or were courses given to them?

MEARS: Well, these men--we had, oh, some twenty thousand men at some of the depots you know--were already trained. We had men trained of course in airplane mechanics and air frames and engines; we had parachute riggers; we had communications specialists that could repair damaged radio sets and so forth, and welders and propellor mechanics. These men had already been trained before they came overseas, you see. But some of our production systems were such that they just couldn't get the work out as fast as we could, after we adopted the newer techniques. For instance, there would be work on a piece of equipment in this corner of the hangar, and they would have to take it all the way across the hangar for the next step, and then bring it back over here for the third step. We rearranged machinery and whatnot and got this stuff so it could be done in a production line operation. And a lot of these airplanes would limp back over the channel and land in the English countryside, and we'd have to go out and pick them up with lowboy trailers and haul them in, you know. Some of them didn't even land back at the depots.

BURG: All right, let me give you a set on instance. Now let's suppose that I have a job similar to yours in a heavy

bombardment squadron and we're using B-17s. One of my aircraft comes back and it's got a cannon shell hole through the vertical fin and it's about a foot in diameter--now do I handle that in my squadron? Is that the kind of battle damage that I can take care of?

MEARS: You see our bombers and fighters were based at various and sundry local bases around England. We had sub-depots, what we called sub-depots, at some of these locations where if the damage was a little more than a squadron mechanic could take care of, or a base mechanic could take care of, then the sub-depot people might be able to do it. But if it was extensive enough that it couldn't be done there, then it had to go into what we called the base depot or the general depot, the big depot of which there were only three, two in England and one in Ireland.

BURG: Now, supposing that this hole in the vertical stabilizer is too big for my squadron people to take care of, would the sub-depot send a team to make a repair on my field?

MEARS: Right, if it was of a nature that could be done locally and it wasn't necessary to maybe disassemble the



whole aircraft and haul it across the countryside to the nearest base depot. Some of it could be done locally, it would depend on the nature and the extent of the damage of course as to whether it could be repaired locally and by what echelon, whether it was the local squadron mechanics or whether it was the sub-depot, if there was a sub-depot at this particular base or nearby. Or if the damage was so extensive that it couldn't be done by them, then it would have to be taken to the nearest base depot, the large depot.

BURG: Now, presumably, Colonel, I've seen photographs--I know many people have seen photographs--where a flying fortress, let us say again, takes a flak burst square in the nose and, in effect, she loses the nose, loses the bombardier, maybe a navigator, all of the bow equipment is gone. Now clearly that aircraft cannot be flown to one of the major depots; clearly the damage is probably too great for a sub-depot to handle it, so that would mean you would have to ship by ground?

MEARS: It would have to be disassembled if it was not damaged to the extent that it was beyond repair. Sometimes some of them, you know, couldn't be repaired; it wouldn't have been

economically feasible or practical to repair certain extensive damages. But if it was of a nature that we could repair it, then the airplane might have to be disassembled, the wings taken off and the landing gears taken off and hauled across the countryside on lowboy trailers or something to the nearest base depot.

BURG: So on top of everything else, part of your responsibility would be seeing how you could get something like that transported on a English road network that's already strained to the breaking point.

MEARS: That's right.

BURG: Who would make the decision--standing there taking a look at a B-17 with its wings blown off--whether it was economically feasible to repair that particular aircraft?

MEARS: Well, of course we had engineering officers, each squadron would have an engineering officer and a base would have an engineering officer. Oftentimes, the local people could make the decisions as to whether, and if there was a question that couldn't be determined, why then possibly an

engineering officer from the big base depot would be called in to make the determination.

BURG: I'm thinking now of an aircraft--and I'm sure that you've seen this photograph--a B-17 coming back from Europe, and I believe that either a Messerschmidt or a Folke-Wulf came along and almost sliced her in half at the waist gun positions, left a huge, diagonal slash in her, so that the whole tail assembly appears to be just hanging onto the aircraft by a thread.

[Interruption]

BURG: That aircraft might have been surveyed as being non-repairable; do we then use that aircraft and cannibalize it for parts, was that the policy?

MEARS: Yes, in many cases there would be parts on an aircraft that was damaged beyond repair as a unit again, but there would be many parts on it that could be used in repair of other aircraft. There was that possibility oftentimes.

BURG: Now let me ask you a further question, perhaps you have an answer to this, perhaps you do not. You yourself had been on flying status, was there ever anything said by the pilots and

crew who received a battle-damaged repaired aircraft as their issue aircraft? Did they ever express any doubts about how well the job had been done?

MEARS: I don't think so, because I don't recall ever hearing anyone raise any doubts about the fact that a repaired aircraft wouldn't perform as well as a new one.

BURG: Is it possible, Colonel, that you didn't hear because if it failed, they didn't come back to report it? An unkind thing to say, I'm sure.

[Laughter]

MEARS: No, I don't think we ever ran into those problems, though I suppose there could be a possibility that a loose nut was left out sometime. But I'm sure that would have been a rare occasion, because these things were thoroughly inspected and thoroughly tested by test pilots before they were turned over to the service organizations to use.

BURG: Yes, I assumed they were, and that was what I was going to get to, that I was quite sure that the work had been professionally done. Now one more thing that I'd like to get

clarified--assuming now that an aircraft has been brought back to the main depot to one of the ones where you were associated with them--if I understand the techniques employed, that B-17 might come in at the end of one hangar on its lowboy with battle damage that was extensive. So we could say it would have air frame damage; its hydraulic system might have severe damage; the control systems would be damaged, let us say that its radio and oxygen equipment were damaged, and that some of its guns, its machine guns, also had received battle damage. Now you had it set up then, all of you had it set up, so that that aircraft in a sense started through a process whereby ordnance teams began to work on the guns, hydraulic specialists began doing that work.

MEARS: That's right, it was strictly a specialized operation. Of course, first it would be determined the extent of the damage and if the damage was as extensive as you pointed out, why we might not even try to repair that particular one. They would determine the amount of damage, and then of course the plane would be disassembled. The armament equipment, of course, would be worked on by the armament specialist, the propellers

would be worked on by the propeller specialist, or the communications equipment by the communications specialist and so on, and the air frame, the fuselage, and the wings and tail sections and so forth by the air frame specialist and so on.

BURG: Yes, the main thing was to get some kind of efficient pattern for handling that aircraft so it could be moved through the process rapidly.

MEARS: That's right. And then it would come back together and be assembled in an orderly manner, and pushed out the other end of the hangar so to speak, ready for test flight.

BURG: You had pilots then assigned to you to carry out tests on aircraft?

MEARS: Oh, yes, the depots have test pilots to test fly the aircraft before they were turned over to the using organizations.

BURG: The size of the depots surprised me somewhat, you said in the nature of twenty thousand men.

MEARS: We had twenty thousand men assigned to the depot at Burtonwood.

BURG: And these were all Americans, no English civilians also worked on the depots.

MEARS: We had American civilians at the depot in Northern Ireland. I can't recall exactly the numbers; it was a large depot, but I don't think it had twenty thousand, it was a smaller depot. And it was operated on a contract basis with civilian employees.

BURG: Rather than military personnel, because of the fact that it was in Northern Ireland, I suppose.

MEARS: And so we had large numbers of people. I might point out that at this one depot in Burtonwood, under the old system, we were losing about twenty-five thousand man hours per day just shuffling these people back and forth across town to these seven different sites. See, the depot was dispersed around the city in seven different sites. In case of a bombing attack, the whole depot wouldn't be blown off in one hit, you see. And we would have all kinds of mechanics based at all the different sites, so one of the things that we did, we did away with the old organization tables and set up manning

tables where we could put all the propeller mechanics in squadrons over where the propeller shops were located. We put all the parachute riggers over at the base where the parachutes were repacked and repaired and so forth. By doing this, we eliminated truck company after truck company that was hauling these people back and forth to get them back and forth to work, you know, and saved a loss of about twenty-five thousand man hours a day on twenty thousand men, better than an hour per man loss just hauling them back and forth and we eliminated that. Well of course, just that one item was a big factor in increasing our productive capacity.

BURG: I assume that the aircraft being repaired basically that was done at one site, whereas you might take say a Hamilton-Beach propeller to the propeller shops, that would be easily handled. But the aircraft, the basic air frame and everything, that was all done at one site.

MEARS: Right.

BURG: When we got on to the European continent after June of '44, did your life change in any way? Did you go over to the continent?



MEARS: No, I was hospitalized and sent back before the invasion in '44. I came back as a patient on a hospital ship, and I was told that I probably worked too many hours and so forth, and had a sort of a breakdown.

BURG: I see. You had driven yourself too hard.

MEARS: I didn't think so, but some people did.

BURG: Well, anyone hearing this and realizing the kind of the job and the nature of the job, and also hearing your enthusiasm for what had been accomplished, could probably guess that you pushed yourself too hard--sounds to me as though you enjoyed pushing yourself too hard.

MEARS: Put in sixteen to eighteen hour days.

BURG: Right, right. You took that job very seriously.

MEARS: Well, I of course came from the old school, so to speak, and we believed in what we were doing in those days. We didn't believe for settling for anything less than the best that we could give.

BURG: Precisely, precisely. So then you came back here to

the states in 1944 and to where, did you come back to the Washington, D.C. area?

MEARS: The hospital ship landed in New York and I was taken to a hospital on Staten Island, New York, and shortly was sent to a military hospital in Martinsburg, West Virginia. I was there for a while and then I was sent further to Fitzsimmons General Hospital in Denver, Colorado. I was there about three or four months and then was sent back to a rehabilitation center we had in Atlantic City, New Jersey. From there I was ordered into the Pentagon Building in Washington, D.C.

BURG: They thought that would be a rest for you. What kind of assignment did you have there? When did that happen by the way?

MEARS: This was in the summer of 1944. I remember being told when I reported to the Pentagon Building, that they had set aside a desk and a chair in a certain room upstairs, and they wanted me to go up and put my feet on it for about two weeks and see if we couldn't come up with a plan of getting

across to the entire air forces, throughout the world, some of the ideas that we had used over there in this maintenance management.

BURG: Who gave you that assignment, Colonel?

MEARS: Well, I think General Eaker was probably at the bottom of it. He was my top commander in Europe and knew what was accomplished over there. When he came back and was assigned to Air Force Headquarters as General Arnold's chief of staff, I understand he was the instigator.

BURG: Right. You did not work directly under him though, he was up the line.

MEARS: Oh, yes, he was the chief of staff. Nowadays, you know, they refer to the chief of staff as being the top commander. But at that time, we called him the commanding general of the Army Air Forces and then he had a chief of staff, you see, and General Eaker was General Arnold's chief of staff. But anyway I was under General Frederick L. Anderson, he was a major-general at that time and I worked under him in this management field, setting up the management program for the air forces. We set up schools and methods for teaching at

the bases. During war time, you know, you can't send everybody off to school for weeks and months and we set up methods for teaching the personnel locally. We had a rule of thumb that the policy would be anyone who supervised five or more people needed some management training, you see. And so we had them take this training at the local bases for a few hours a week, in addition to their regular duties. We set up certain courses in the management field at some of the staff schools. I guess it's carried on until today I think probably at the Air University, carried on teaching management.

BURG: Now you continued on this assignment at the Pentagon until the end of the war?

MEARS: Yes, I left the Pentagon in 1946.

BURG: Always from '44 to '46 doing this particular kind of specialized work. When the war ended were you a major?

MEARS: Lieutenant colonel.

BURG: You were a lieutenant colonel. When the war ended, or in '46, when you left that assignment, what was the next

thing for you? Was that when, as you told me, you were in effect, invalidated out?

MEARS: Yes, I left the Pentagon Building and went out to Santa Fe, New Mexico, to a hospital there, and I was there about a year. And the hospital was closed at the end of 1946 and I was transferred as a patient down to William Beaumont General Hospital in El Paso, Texas, and spent several more months there and was eventually retired for disability.

BURG: The Air Corps I think you said had in effect given you about two years--

MEARS: Of hospitalization. And thought it would take that long, so I was retired for disability and that ended my military career.

BURG: Yes, at the rank of colonel.

MEARS: Lieutenant colonel.

BURG: Now how many years of service did you have when you left service?

MEARS: I entered in 1923 and I was retired in 1947, and I

had about twenty-four years service. And then I was called back and re-retired under this deal, they discovered that I was eligible for this warrant officer grade in the regular air force and I was called back in 1948 and I was re-retired again in December 31, 1948.

BURG: With the permanent rank of warrant officer in the air force, but retired at the highest rank you had held.

MEARS: Yes.

BURG: Now you said that about that time, 1946, I think you said, Patrick J. Hurley got in touch with you, actually before you were out.

MEARS: Yes, I went into the hospital in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and we renewed acquaintances there. He came out to the hospital to see me.

BURG: Now you had known him actually when he was secretary of war under Herbert Hoover. You had flown in the same aircraft with him as he was being flown to various places that he had to visit. Yet all these years later, he recognized your name and came to see you.

MEARS: Yes.

BURG: That's a very, very nice thing for him to have done.

MEARS: I felt quite flattered that he remembered through all those years, you know. We renewed our acquaintances and kept in touch, seeing each other occasionally, like every three or four years.

BURG: How did you view him as a man, Colonel? Can you characterize Mr. Hurley for me as to the kind of man he was, the strengths and weaknesses as you might have seen them?

MEARS: Would you like to really know how I felt about Patrick J. Hurley?

BURG: Surely.

MEARS: I have a piece of paper here about one page long of an introduction I gave for this man when I was called on to introduce him to a group. He was speaking in behalf of Dwight D. Eisenhower's candidacy. Would you like me to read it?

BURG: Yes, go ahead.

MEARS: I said: "Mr. President, distinguished guests, ladies

and gentlemen, it has been my pleasure on a number of previous occasions to introduce the speaker of the evening. Never before however, has it been my privilege to introduce to you such a distinguished person as we have with us this evening. Tonight I have the honor to present to you a truly outstanding citizen and great American. One who has distinguished himself in many fields, one who has held some of the highest and most important offices in our country. An outstanding citizen, an eminent statesman and a distinguished soldier. I know that every member of this club and each of our guests is happy to have the opportunity of meeting and hearing a person of such national prominence and world renown. An introduction of our speaker is really unnecessary, all of you know him and I know you're eagerly waiting to hear him speak. I would however like to say a few words in order that you may better know this great man. Each time we meet in this hall, we salute our country and the ideals which it represents by singing, 'America,' and pledging allegiance to the symbol of our country, the flag. One of the precepts of this organization is to serve and honor our country and to preserve the many blessings that it holds for all mankind. It is fitting indeed



that tonight we have with us a man who has devoted his life helping to build, preserve and safeguard the blessings of liberty that are ours. The ideals of which we hold so dear will endure, as long as we have citizens with the loyalty and devotion, the courage and the zeal, the guts to stand up and fight, as does our speaker. He knows the American way of life because he has lived it, helped to build it and fought to preserve it. He came from humble surroundings; he worked as a coal miner; he punched cattle, and performed other labors that give one the deep and sincere appreciation of the blessings that can only be fully enjoyed when they are earned by the sweat of the brow. He has marched with the soldiers, as one of them, in some of the great conflicts in which this nation has been engaged. He rose to the rank of major-general as a soldier; he served as secretary of war in the cabinet of one president and he represented this country in a diplomatic field in the administration of yet another president. He rendered great service to our country as ambassador to China. It was the late President Roosevelt who said, 'Of all the people representing the United States in high places throughout the world, the one I can trust without reservation

is Pat Hurley. His loyalty and devotion to the best interests of his country transcend all political considerations or other intrigue.' It is now my pleasure to present to you this great American, Patrick J. Hurley."

BURG: So that's how you felt about Mr. Hurley?

MEARS: That was my sincere feelings about Patrick J. Hurley. He was truly a devoted American.

BURG: Now he is the man who asked you to come into politics to assist--would it have been in 1952?

MEARS: Yes, in 1952.

BURG: Do you remember about when he got in touch with you; would it have been as early as the summer of '52?

MEARS: It was in the spring of '52. It was prior to the Republican National Convention. He called me and he said, "I know you have some time, you're retired now, and," he said, "I think Ike Eisenhower could use our help."

BURG: What were you doing at that time, by the way, were you doing anything to keep yourself busy--running a business or anything of this sort?

MEARS: No, I had been retired a few years and wasn't doing anything in particular.

BURG: Just enjoying life. And Mr. Hurley, an old acquaintance, then suddenly is there tapping on your door.

MEARS: He called me and asked me if I'd come up and see if we couldn't put our shoulders to the wheel, so to speak. Of course my reaction was that I didn't feel that I could be of much help, I said, "As you know I'm a career military man, I don't know anything about politics and I am registered as an independent. I have never really aligned myself with either political party. Of course naturally I have a great admiration for Dwight D. Eisenhower but I wonder whether I could be of any help."

And General Hurley's reaction was, "Well, we're not looking for professional politicians, we want people that can help get these campaigns organized and so on."

BURG: Now were you then living in Albuquerque?

MEARS: Yes, I was living in Albuquerque.

BURG: And where was General Hurley?

MEARS: General Hurley was living in Santa Fe, that was his home, in Santa Fe.

BURG: I see. Now did General Hurley have any position in the Republican Party in New Mexico at that time?

MEARS: He was a candidate in 1952 for the senate, but he didn't have any position. I believe he was a delegate, of course he was a delegate to the national convention later.

BURG: Right. But he was not Republican committeeman from New Mexico or anything like that?

MEARS: No, no.

BURG: So this was just sort of General Hurley and perhaps others were interested in the Eisenhower candidacy?

MEARS: Eisenhower's candidacy, that's correct. And of course Senator Taft, Robert A. Taft, was very popular among many of the Republicans in New Mexico. Our then governor, Edwin L. Mechem, was an admirer of Taft and perhaps had known him better than he knew Eisenhower. And General Hurley was the prime mover of support in New Mexico for Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Of course after the convention, after Eisenhower was the nominee, why of course Edwin L. Mecham gave full and complete support. And they later became friends and of course Mechem was a great admirer of Eisenhower.

BURG: Let's go back then a minute. Hurley has called you, in the spring of 1952, and what he is putting together would appear then to be an informal Eisenhower for President movement in New Mexico which you told me was a Democratic state.

MEARS: We were outnumbered registration-wise.

BURG: And this movement would seem to be, to me, outside the regular Republican organization in New Mexico, is that correct? At least in its beginnings?

MEARS: Well, in the beginning, yes. Of course, the regular Republican organization tried not to take sides with either candidate, you know, and the party officials more or less maintained neutrality prior to the national convention, you see.

BURG: Now let me ask you, what position did Mr. Hurley assign to you? What was your job as you started out?

MEARS: Well, it was more or less a campaign organizer.

BURG: Lining up support in the precincts?

MEARS: Right.

BURG: Does New Mexico have a nominating convention? Does it start at county level and then go to state level?

MEARS: Yes, at that time they did have. They had the county conventions and the state conventions and so on.

BURG: Where is the state's voter support--does it cluster pretty much in Albuquerque, Santa Fe?

MEARS: Yes, Albuquerque, of course is by far the largest city in the state. And the county in which Albuquerque is located, Bernalillo County, is by far the largest.

BURG: And how about Santa Fe?

MEARS: Santa Fe is in Santa Fe County, that's the second largest county.

BURG: So these are the two big population centers in New Mexico.

MEARS: Well, we have cities like Roswell and Las Cruces that are close behind Santa Fe. Albuquerque is the one that stands out by itself as the largest city in New Mexico.

BURG: Colonel, could you be fairly well assured that if you could carry Albuquerque, you stood a half way decent chance of carrying the state convention for Eisenhower?

MEARS: Yes, we felt that we must carry Albuquerque, if we did not carry Albuquerque, we probably couldn't do it.

BURG: All right before we talk about that, how did things look for you in Roswell and Las Cruces and Santa Fe and some of the other areas? Did you think you had a fairly good chance there?

MEARS: Yes, we felt that Eisenhower's strength was very good in Roswell, Las Cruces and some of the others. Taft was a little stronger I think perhaps in Santa Fe and but there were Eisenhower supporters in Santa Fe also.

BURG: Was there any infighting of the sort that I have found in the state of Washington and the state of Texas, where there seems to have been in both places pretty strong Taft

support among the regular Republican organization and the Eisenhower people, actually to the surprise of the Taft people, took the precinct conventions away from the Taft people. They simply showed up in such numbers that the Taft Republicans found themselves standing out on the street corners with the precinct meetings in the hands of these interlopers. Now did that happen in New Mexico?

MEARS: Well, perhaps to some extent. There were devoted people in both camps I'll say that. However, after the national convention, after Eisenhower was the nominee, we closed ranks very well. And the way this selection of delegates to the national convention worked, there were certain ones for Taft and certain ones for Eisenhower, you see. In other words the whole delegation wasn't selected to represent either candidate.

BURG: This was all ironed out in the state convention, I assume.

MEARS: Right, right.

BURG: Where was that held by the way?



MEARS: State convention in '52, I believe it was Albuquerque, I should remember, either Albuquerque or Santa Fe.

BURG: And at that convention then, it was decided how much of the state's delegation of the Republican convention would be Eisenhower support, how much would be Taft. Do you remember how it broke down, ultimately?

MEARS: I believe Taft had a few more delegates than Eisenhower.

BURG: I see. Let me ask you, what kinds of people seemed to be drawn to that Eisenhower campaign in New Mexico? Did you find that your support ran the full gamut from the older people down to the very young people?

MEARS: Yes, it did. It wasn't confined to any particular age group, I don't believe. Of course the conservatives supported Taft a little more, I mean they kind of thought of Eisenhower as a conservative too but Taft was "Mr. Conservative," you know.

BURG: Now did these tend to be, these conservatives of whom you speak, did they tend to be older people and the well-to-do in New Mexico?

MEARS: I would say yes, that they would fall more in that category.

BURG: Now let me ask you this, too, did they fall into a particular occupation--what I'm saying is, would we find in their number, for example, many of the leading cattlemen and stockmen?

MEARS: No, I don't think so. I think that in those categories that politics were pretty evenly divided between parties and between candidates within the parties. I couldn't say that the cattlemen were behind any particular candidate, really, or other groups.

BURG: Did you encounter any particular problems in your organizing work?

MEARS: No problems, exactly, I found out that very little organizing had ever been done by either party, real organizing in that state and I found it rather easy.

BURG: I see. Is it safe to speculate that some of your management techniques that you had learned during World War II were brought into use?

MEARS: I'm sure it was. I don't think an organization chart had ever been prepared before until I did it--you might find this one interesting.

BURG: Is this from the 1952 campaign?

MEARS: I think this particular one was made up for the '56 campaign, but what was portrayed here was actually one of our '52 organizations.

BURG: I see. By the way, will we be able to keep this so a scholar can find this organization chart in the papers?

MEARS: Oh, yes.

[Interruption]

MEARS: I was just going to say this was probably one of the first organization charts that was ever made up in a political campaign in New Mexico, so one could just visualize where they fit into the picture and, what have you. Of course we used the old management techniques here of having everyone know to whom they were responsible, and for whom they were responsible, and for what they were responsible. We even

spelled out on the back here a little bit of what a precinct organization is and how to build it, in simple terms.

BURG: Did the Democrats in New Mexico have anything like this, as far as you know?

MEARS: They weren't as well organized as we were; I'll say that.

BURG: I find this very interesting. You are now the third man and the third state in which I find this sudden blossoming of organization in the Republican ranks, it occurs in 1952. Now this one that we have here in front of us, I see is for precinct seventeen, Bernalillo County, New Mexico.

MEARS: Right, that was one of the Albuquerque precincts.

BURG: Now did you people do something like this for every precinct in the state?

MEARS: Well, I won't say every precinct, we went into every county and we held schools, conducted schools, at which we would get the county chairman, chairwoman, the precinct chairman and so forth to attend and their block captains and

workers and so on. And we had these things blown up on big charts to hang on the wall and explain to them how the thing was set up, you know. You'd have the county chairman and chairwoman and under them would be your precinct chairman and chairwoman, and then divisions, some of the precincts you see here--this one had four divisions--and a chairman and oftentimes the chairman was a lady you know. We used the word regardless, didn't denote sex you know.

BURG: Oh, I see four precinct divisions and in each case a woman heads it.

MEARS: Yes. And here the precinct chairman was a lady and the vice-chairman was a man. The ladies were the ardent workers in many cases. Then we had under the division chairman, the block captains, you see, and we would indicate what blocks they covered, so they knew for what section they were responsible. Then we told them what to do, how to carry out their responsibilities, how to go ring doorbells. We'd take them out and go through the neighborhood and show them how to ring a doorbell, what to say when the lady or the man came to the door. Then they'd watch us do it a while and then

we'd let them do it you see, so they'd get their "feet wet."  
A lot of people would shy away, they didn't know what to say.  
And sometimes we'd find a good devoted worker and we'd say,  
"Well, we'd like to have you accept the position of block  
captain."

"Well, now I'll be happy to do the work, but I don't  
think I want to be a captain." But after we convinced them  
what they were, that they were the leaders, you see, they  
accepted.

BURG: Now you were doing this in the spring of '52, prior to  
the state convention?

MEARS: No, no, most of this kind of work was done after we  
had the candidate selected, all candidates, Eisenhower for  
President and Mechem for governor, etc.

BURG: So this is actually the '52 campaign, this document  
refers to the campaign.

MEARS: Yes. But the work that General Hurley and I were doing  
prior to the convention was just getting around and "buttonholing"  
and talking to as many people as we could, and lining them up and  
convincing them that they should be for Eisenhower.

BURG: So it was not as formally organized at that stage?

MEARS: No, no, we didn't have as much time. After the convention in the summer, then we had all the rest of the summer and fall to put this thing together and get out and really get the people educated. And convince them that with organization, we could get the job done. And we said, "Forget the odds, how badly we're outnumbered, if we'll organize and put our shoulders to the wheel we'll get this job done," because we had been convinced in our previous years in the management field, that it didn't make any difference whether you were selling soap or running a military organization or a political campaign, the same principles apply and we proved it. I think not only did we carry the state for Eisenhower but we carried it for a Republican governor and certain other Republican candidates in a state that was overwhelmingly registered Democratic.

BURG: Right. The people who helped you, can you recollect now for me the names of--or do you have it there?

MEARS: No, not names. I just wanted to show you, this is a clipping from Time magazine in 1956, this was you know, and

it went on to say about New Mexico's Mechem that well, here, "well known and well organized".

BURG: I see. But do you recollect the names of any of the key people who worked with you and General Hurley in that period up to the convention in Chicago, in that early period when you were getting things organized?

MEARS: Oh, I've got some names here, but I'll try and remember, I'll probably forget some of them. I remember Mr. Claude Mann, he was an ardent supporter. I can't just put my finger on that list. And there was Mrs. Waldo Rogers.

BURG: Are these people Albuquerque people?

MEARS: Yes. And Bob Nordhaus and there was Mrs. Dora Snapp, I think was her name, she was very active.

BURG: Also an Albuquerque woman?

MEARS: Yes.

BURG: Are all these people that you--

MEARS: Colonel Golightly was a very ardent supporter.



BURG: Also an Albuquerque man?

MEARS: Yes.

BURG: These people were all working at the state level though, that is their activities extended over New Mexico completely?

MEARS: Yes.

BURG: Are all of these people still alive, Colonel?

MEARS: No, many of them are not. The names that I mentioned, they were people, most of them older than I, and I was in my late forties then. And there were probably others that I just can't remember off hand, but prior to the convention, we didn't have too extensive an organization. We just had certain individuals that we were contacting and getting them to contact their friends and so forth, who would be influential in selecting delegates. The precinct committee people and so forth who would vote for the state delegates in the state convention. Then we'd "buttonhole" the delegates at the state convention to sell them on the idea as to why we felt they should support Eisenhower at the national convention.

BURG: Now at that time, that is prior or during the period of time when the precinct conventions and state convention are going to be held, was your group in contact with the national Eisenhower movement?

MEARS: Oh, yes, General Hurley was more or less the liaison between the national organization and our group.

BURG: Now did the national organization send anyone to New Mexico to help or advise?

MEARS: Oh, yes, there would be--I don't recall names--but there would be people that would drop in. We later got a Citizens for Eisenhower group working also. The Citizens for Eisenhower, that included many Democrats as well as Republicans. But of course the work I was doing--and also General Hurley since he was a candidate--we were working through the regular Republican organization rather than outside the organization you see. But we cooperated fully with the Citizens for Eisenhower group also, but they were chiefly Democrats really, the Citizens for Eisenhower.

BURG: In New Mexico?

MEARS: Yes. There were some Republicans mixed in to give them guidance and direction and so forth. But that was the place where the Democrats--and we had many of them that were for Eisenhower--could work effectively, through the Citizens for Eisenhower organization.

BURG: Do you recall who led the Citizens for Eisenhower movement in New Mexico?

MEARS: I probably have it indicated here somewhere. Bob Nordhaus was, he and a lady, I can't recall her name, but they were the co-chairmen.

BURG: Now is Mr. Nordhaus still alive, or is he one of those who has died since?

MEARS: I'm not sure, I'm not sure whether Bob Nordhaus is still alive. He might be.

BURG: But he would be the starting point if one wants to find out about the activities of the Citizens for Eisenhower in New Mexico. Nordhaus or his co-chairman would be the one to contact.

MEARS: Yes, the lady, she was the wife of a retired army colonel, whom I didn't have the pleasure of knowing prior to this time, and I just can't recall their name at the present.

BURG: Now obviously from the data sheets that you have shown me here that relate to the campaign itself, that is that come after Chicago, in 1952, these things represent the expenditure of money. Where did that money come from?

MEARS: Well, it was contributed by mostly small contributors you know to the Republican organization. I presume there was possibly some money that came in from the national headquarters. I'm assuming, I don't know, but I would assume that the senatorial campaign committee and the congressional campaign committees probably furnished some money on behalf of their candidates. We had finance chairmen that raised money locally, that is in New Mexico, you know. And most of it, I happen to know, was small contributions, we had very few big donors of money. I dare say there wasn't a half a dozen thousand dollar contributions. And many of them were in small amounts. Here I can show you where ten dollars, twenty-five dollars, fifty dollars, contributions of that type, you know, were made.

BURG: Right, I see. But the campaign finances were in the hands of some particular individual.

MEARS: Yes, they were in the hands of the state finance committee, the Republican state finance committee.

BURG: So we could find out the names, we could check it down and possibly come into contact with whoever had handled that work or someone who was doing that work.

MEARS: I was so deeply concerned with this organization, getting the organization set up and getting the people educated as to how to turn out the voters, that I gave little thought to the fund raising and so forth.

BURG: Yes, you didn't have to take care of that.

MEARS: That was not part of my responsibility, and so I'm a little hazy on just who did it and so forth. But I do know that we often talked about the fact that we had no angels in New Mexico, they couldn't make large contributions, very few. And we thought that was a healthy situation really, that people would send in a dollar or ten dollars or five dollars because they believed in Eisenhower and what he represented. Also our Governor Mechem, he was a popular man out there.

BURG: Now did you go to the convention in Chicago as a delegate?

MEARS: No, no. I stayed home and did spade work.

BURG: Now did the Eisenhowers, on any of their campaign tours, come into New Mexico?

MEARS: Yes, yes, we put on a rally in Albuquerque, late in the campaign, just a few weeks before the election. Actually Ike wasn't scheduled to appear in New Mexico, and General Hurley finally worked it out to get him to stop between an appearance, I believe in Phoenix and Denver. He stopped in Albuquerque; we had him for one hour. Again, through a little organization, we were able to get him from the airport down to the football stadium, and he spoke for half an hour, and we got him back and he wasn't delayed, we got him off on time. I think that was the first time in history that that had happened. They had got him out on such a tight schedule; they would promise you know, but something would go wrong. But we got him off on time, and he was very pleased.

BURG: Now did you meet him on that occasion, Colonel?

MEARS: Oh, yes, I have a picture out in the motor home there somewhere, meeting him at the airport, General Hurley and I, and they wrote nice thank-you letters from him, thanking me for the manner in which we handled his visit and so forth.

BURG: All right, now on the completion of the campaign, the successful completion, with the election of General Eisenhower, was anything forthcoming for you, or were you interested in anything, as a result of the kind of work that you had put out to get this man elected?

MEARS: I could have had assignments, but I wasn't interested. I didn't want to serve in any capacity in government service. I was retired and was disabled, although I was fairly active, but I felt that I didn't want to take on any jobs as such and so I didn't, I declined.

BURG: Now Mr. Hurley was defeated in that campaign?

MEARS: Yes.

BURG: Although Governor Mechem did go in.

MEARS: Governor Mechem was elected, yes. Governor Mechem tried to get me to serve in his administration after the '52 election.

Now I did put on the Presidential inaugural ball thing, we had the local inaugural ball held locally for the people that couldn't go to Washington. I organized that for them, and booked Xavier Cugat and his band and things of that nature, and did the spade work and put that thing together, raising the money to put it on and that sort of thing. But as far as taking a job in government service, I was invited, but I declined. However, I will say this, that after the 1956 election, Governor Mechem came back in as governor, and he just insisted that I was going to have to go to Santa Fe to the state capital and give him a hand in the state administration. So I was appointed his state purchasing agent, which handled all the expenditure of all the funds for the purchase of materials, supplies and so forth, for the state of New Mexico. And I felt rather flattered that he had that kind of confidence in me because I was the man that was handling the money that was spent for the state. And during that, and a later administration of his, I served in various and sundry capacities in the state government in New Mexico.

BURG: So you actually did then finally--

MEARS: Finally after 1956.



BURG: Yes. Now in the intervening period between the election of '52 and the campaign of '56, did you remain active politically at a local level?

MEARS: No, no, I didn't do too much, except, you know, encourage people that they didn't let the organization that we set up, fall apart, you know. And in '54, we had a congressional campaign and I did give them a hand in that, in 1954. And there again to try to keep the organization together and so forth as well.

BURG: Were you at that time, in '54, a part of the Republican apparatus in the state of New Mexico, or did you stay outside the party structure?

MEARS: More or less outside. And then in 1956, I came back right in the Republican state headquarters; I was the campaign organizer for Eisenhower and Mechem and others.

BURG: Was General Hurley associated with the operations in 1956?

MEARS: Not as actively as he was in '52. He was not a candidate,

he didn't participate as a candidate. Of course he naturally was an Eisenhower supporter, but he didn't have a title in the Republican organization headquarters, that is, he wasn't one of the committee people or anything like that.

BURG: In '56, did you find that you were seeing pretty much the same faces you had seen in 1952, were the same band of people--

MEARS: No, we saw a lot of the same ones, but we had a lot of new people that came in. I mean after four years of Eisenhower, when he got that Korean War settled and one thing and another, we had this period of peace and prosperity there. A lot of people, you know, began to support Eisenhower that possibly didn't in '52.

BURG: Did he carry the state of New Mexico with a better margin in '56 that he had in '52? Do you recollect?

MEARS: I can't recall the exact figures; I think he did. I think it was a wider margin in '52 than in '56.

BURG: You think the margin was wider in '52?

MEARS: No, in '56.

BURG: In '56 over '52?

MEARS: Right, yes, as I recall.

BURG: So your recollection is that, at least in New Mexico, the first four years of the Presidency had actually attracted more people to Eisenhower?

MEARS: Oh, yes.

BURG: You saw some of these same old faces but you also saw new people--do you recollect, looking back on it now, any incidents where you ran into people that you had used in '52 who said in '56, "No."

MEARS: No.

BURG: No case of that comes to your mind?

MEARS: I don't recall one incidence of anyone that was disappointed in the Eisenhower Administration or the Mechem Administration. Of course Mechem you understand served as Governor from '50 to '52--we had a two-year term for governor--and then from '52 to '54. Then he had to step down for two years, the governor

could not succeed himself more than two terms you see, and so he stayed out two years. Then in '56 he came back, I might say with much arm twisting, he was a reluctant candidate, but we finally prevailed on him to run again in '56. Of course Eisenhower was running for his re-election that year.

[Interruption]

BURG: The colonel and I have just been discussing the form which we referred to a little earlier, the one for the seventeenth precinct, copies which we now will have in the Eisenhower Library collections. We looked at the last page of the brochure, the one that speaks of the precinct manual, and Colonel Mears has told me that he wrote that manual, keeping it pretty straightforward and short, so that it wasn't a burden for anyone to read it. And he tells me also that the manual was printed both in English and in Spanish. Now that leads me to a question that I overlooked earlier. Can you tell me to what extent did you seek the Spanish-American or as we would now say, the Chicano vote, in New Mexico.

MEARS: Well, to what extent did we seek it? To a great extent.

Many counties in New Mexico, our northern counties, there were more voters with Spanish names than otherwise. And we had, among them, many supporters of Eisenhower and Mechem and other Republicans, you know.

BURG: So if we were to look at brochures for precincts other than the seventeenth, we might well find brochures of that sort where the names of the precinct committeemen and the various leaders would all be Spanish names or many, many Spanish names.

MEARS: Oh, yes, you'd find many of them with Spanish names. There's Mrs. Tony Apadocca and Mrs. Armijo and Mrs. Maranetti and, oh, many others that would appear, you know.

BURG: So it was just part and parcel of your organizational tactics to see to it that those people were contacted and used.

MEARS: Oh, absolutely, absolutely.

BURG: Did the Democrats follow a similar pattern?

MEARS: Oh, yes, the Democrats actually had more followers

among Spanish-speaking people than the Republicans, we knew that. But we also knew that there were many of them that would support us. In fact years before in New Mexico--back in the Bronson Cutting days you know, Senator Bronson [M.] Cutting from New Mexico, back in those days--there were perhaps more Spanish-speaking people who voted Republican. But came the New Deal and Dennis Chavez, Senator Dennis Chavez, and so on and the depression years and what have you, and many of those former Republican voting Spanish-Americans switched over to voting Democratic you see. So we were able to reconvert, so to speak, some of those people.

BURG: I see. Was there a significant black population in New Mexico?

MEARS: No, at that time there were very few. I doubt if we had a dozen black people in Albuquerque in '52.

BURG: Is it safe for me to say then that as far as "minority" groups in New Mexico were concerned, the Spanish-Americans would be the group, and from what you're telling me, not even minority, but rather a large group, that was simply a part of your total election plans and they handled their precincts.

MEARS: Oh, yes, especially in our northern counties, we didn't regard them as minority groups, you know, they were in great numbers.

BURG: Right, right.

MEARS: And the southern counties, there were more Anglo people.

BURG: Now as far as your own career is concerned, you spent some time then in the state government following the 1956 campaign. You stayed in I suppose, as long as Governor Mechem was in office.

MEARS: Yes, and I was invited by Mechem's successor, who was a Democrat, to continue on in his administration.

BURG: That's quite a compliment to you.

MEARS: In fact the governor-elect was Governor [Jack M.] Campbell. At that time, the superintendent of a boys' school, a correctional institution, for the state, apparently, had had some difficulty down through the years. The governor, Governor Mechem, thought maybe I could do it some good. He sent me up

there and I stayed there for a couple of years, and was able to make some improvements that people seemed to like. When Campbell was elected, as governor, he came up and brought the chairmen of the appropriation committees with him and asked me to stay on. I had already made plans to leave; I just assumed that that would be the practice. He came up and said, "Colonel, we're here to ask you to stay," he said, "the only criticism I've seen of you is some of your Republican friends criticized you for hiring a Democrat in a top job once in a while."

And I said, "Well, I was trying to get the job done and not play any politics, and I tried to hire the best people I could find, regardless of their politics." As a matter of fact we just took politics out of that school and he liked that.

He said, "Well, that's why I'm here to ask you to stay."

And I told him, I said, " I made plans to leave, but I sure won't cut you adrift; I'll stay on for six months or a year till you have time to find someone." And I did, I stayed on for a year under Campbell and probably could have been there to this day, if I'd have stayed, but I had other



plans. But he and I became very close friends and he gave me full and complete support, I can say that. So I did, I felt flattered that he had that confidence.

BURG: Now did you remain active after you left the correctional school, or did you move back into retirement and a life of ease?

MEARS: No, I did try to help Mechem, in 1964, in his bid for re-election to the senate. He was appointed to the senate on the death of Dennis Chavez. And so in '64, he went down in the [Sen. Lyndon B.] Johnson landslide.

(Interruption)

MEARS: At the beginning of 1965 we left New Mexico and went to Arizona, moved to Arizona. News seemed to travel, I can recall being acquainted with [Sen.] Barry M. Goldwater. In New Mexico he used to come over and help us in our campaigns over there. And so I was invited to become active in Arizona. I did do some work; I was a member of the state central committee there and I was chairman of a precinct organization in our little town of Sedona, which is about thirty miles

south of Flagstaff. I was quite active in the '68 campaign, but since that time I have taken very little active part in campaign races in Arizona.

BURG: What has been your estimation of Mr. Goldwater?

MEARS: I'm a great admirer of Barry Goldwater. I think that it was unfortunate that he wasn't our President in 1964. I really feel that he had a lot to offer. I think that the course of history would have been better served had he been our President.

BURG: Do you feel as strongly about him as you did about General Eisenhower in 1952? A tough question to ask but--

MEARS: Well, I probably don't feel as strongly about him as I did about Eisenhower, however, I have great admiration for Barry Goldwater. I think he's a man that can be trusted, and I think he's a man of his word, and I think he's a man of ability. He's misunderstood by a lot of people.

BURG: Think people feel he's too conservative perhaps?

MEARS: Well, I suppose some people do. But he's been tagged

with a lot of these things by the media, you know, that's really untrue and it's unfortunate, I think. But I've sat around in private company of Senator Goldwater, hotel rooms and whatnot, where we let our hair down and talked man-to-man. I have great confidence in that man, in his honesty and his integrity, and ability, and so forth. I really do.

BURG: So you've had a chance to see him then under informal circumstances.

MEARS: Oh, yes. And of course as you know he's a major-general in the Air Force Reserves, so we have another common ground there you know. And we, I think got to know each other a little better otherwise, I would say informally. And you get to know people better that way sometimes.

BURG: It would seem that as a man then, he has remained high in your estimation--

MEARS: Very definitely.

BURG: --even though you have seen him as you say with the hair let down and under informal circumstances. Well, that's

interesting to know. Well, Colonel, thank you so much for this session. We appreciate it very much.

MEARS: Well, it has certainly been a pleasure to be here.

BURG: Thank you.